

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**REPRESENTATIONS OF 'HOME' AND 'EXILE' IN BREYTEN
BREYTENBACH'S *MEMORY OF SNOW AND OF DUST***

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Submitted in partial fulfilment (50%) of the academic requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts (coursework and short dissertation)

In English Studies

Faculty of Humanities

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Howard College Campus

April 2010

ABSTRACT

This mini-dissertation aims to examine the way in which Breyten Breytenbach explores the concepts of home and exile in his novel *Memory of Snow and of Dust*. The author captures and conveys the experience of exile, and envisages through the exile's double vision a more complicated conception of home. Through the novel one is able to observe the exilic condition and gain access to new insights. The narrative structure comprises of various discourses and illustrates the restless nature of an unsettling and unstable existence. In the Introduction the theoretical framework for this study is outlined: recent developments in postcolonial and postmodern theories, Breytenbach's oeuvre and literary criticism devoted to his work are discussed. Chapter One examines the distressing journey into a new awareness of what constitutes home. Chapter Two inspects the restless, yet regenerative condition of exile. Chapter Three considers a more fluid response to spatiality and the concept of home through an exploration of fresh perspectives that may emerge from extreme mental suffering. This study concludes with an affirmation of the relevance of *Memory of Snow and of Dust*, in times in which the overlapping boundaries of home and exile are becoming a global condition.

DECLARATION

This study represents original work by the author and has not been submitted in any form to another university. Where use has been made of the work of others, this has been duly acknowledged in the text.

TANYA JANSEN

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank my supervisor, Prof. Ileana Dimitriu, for her guidance in this dissertation.

I would also like to express my appreciation to the National Research Foundation for financial assistance towards this research. Opinions expressed in this dissertation are my own and are not to be attributed to the National Research Foundation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Breytenbach as Dissident Writer	2
Developments in Postcolonial and Postmodern Theories	5
i) Postcolonial Theory	5
ii) Postmodern Theory	7
iii) Intersections between Postcolonial and Postmodern Theories	8
The Age of Migration and ‘Double Vision’	11
Survey of Works in Breyten Breytenbach’s Oeuvre	15
Survey of Literary Criticism devoted to Breyten Breytenbach’s Oeuvre	18
Survey of Literary Criticism on <i>Memory of Snow and of Dust</i>	20
Survey of Theses on Breyten Breytenbach’s Oeuvre	24
The Structure of my Mini-dissertation	25
1. Chapter One: Home	29
1.1 Introduction	29
1.2 Home and Belonging in a Postcolonial World	30
1.3 Home in Europe	32
1.4 Home in Africa	34
1.5 Home and Memory	38
1.6 Homelessness and (an in-between) Identity	41
1.7 The Novel as a Book without a ‘Home’	44
1.8 The Painful Initiation into an Alternative Conception of Home	46

2. Chapter Two: Exile	50
2.1 Introduction	50
2.2 Reflections on Migrancy and Exile in Postcolonial Theory	50
2.3 The Dislocation and Alienation of Exile	52
2.4 The 'Double Vision' of the Exile	56
2.5 The Difficulty of Adapting to a New Way of Life: a Liminal Existence	58
2.6 Exile, Movement, and Creation	61
2.7 Transcending the 'Prison' of Exile	65
3. Chapter Three: 'The Paradox of Wonder': the Transformation of Homelessness into Home	69
3.1 Introduction	69
3.2 The 'Spiritual Turn' in Postcolonial Theory	72
3.3 "On The Noble Art of Walking in No Man's Land"	77
3.4 A Spiritual Home: 'Home' within 'Homelessness'	82
3.5 Transforming the Self into 'a Point of Passage': The Writer and Memory	90
i) A Metamorphosis of Self	91
ii) The Role of the Writer	94
iii) The Role of Memory	98
Conclusion	102
Bibliography	105

INTRODUCTION

The aim of my study is to examine the representation of 'home' and 'exile' in Breyten Breytenbach's novel, *Memory of Snow and of Dust* (1989). My study of Breytenbach's novel concentrates on the experience of the migrant, and considers the meaning that the terms home and exile carry in the novel, and in contemporary society. I intend to relocate the novel to the 2000s and to reconsider Breytenbach as not only a dissident writer of Afrikaner descent, but also as a migrant: a writer emblematic of the age of migration in which we live. My study is concerned with issues of identity and belonging as expressed through the themes of home and exile in the novel. Debates by various critics on such issues have led since the late 1980s to significant developments in postcolonial theories. By placing *Memory of Snow and of Dust* in a postcolonial literary field (i.e. beyond its time of publication¹) I shall explore the conceptual question of what may be considered home, and what exile, as these concepts impinge on our understanding today. My study will also consider current debates on the condition of 'double vision' that is inherent to the experience of the migrant in relation to Breytenbach's fiction. I shall argue that Breytenbach's novel supports the view that the categories of home and exile are not binary categories that can be explored in an either/or fashion, but rather that the writer explodes these categories, while envisaging through his portrayal of home and exile a more complex alternative: an interaction of both the local and the global; that is, habitation that is conditioned by his double vision.

Related to an approach that regards the categories of home and exile as mutually reinforcing categories, my study considers the novel against the intersection of postmodern and postcolonial theories. One could also argue that Breytenbach's use of both postcolonial and postmodern devices

¹ Although the time of publication of the novel was already postcolonial, the reception of the novel in South Africa was influenced by the political concerns of the day rather than by postcolonial theories.

to depict 'home and exile' is a manifestation of the condition of double vision as experienced by the migrant/émigré. Furthermore, that this difficulty has consequences for the conventions of representation in his fictional response.

Breytenbach's novel, I shall argue, has pertinence beyond its original reception within the context of apartheid. The continuing relevance of the themes of home and exile in post-apartheid times merits further exploration; my study suggests that the novel needs to be resuscitated in a transformed, international literary scene. First, we may sketch Breytenbach's background.

Breytenbach as Dissident Writer

Breytenbach became known as a dissident writer during the 1960s and 70s when South Africa was under the rule of the apartheid government. During this time South Africa was experiencing increasing internal turmoil. After the Sharpeville massacre of 1960 was exposed to international audiences, pressure on South Africa's apartheid government mounted. During the 60s South Africa experienced increasing isolation from the international community. South Africa was expelled, or banned, from participating in most international organisations and sporting bodies. In addition, internal opposition was also mounting. In 1976 the Soweto riots once again brought South Africa to the forefront of international affairs and set off a renewed wave of opposition from overseas. As a result, South Africa became more and more isolated.

Though isolated from the international scene, the local Afrikaans literary scene was experiencing a renewal. A group of Afrikaans writers, known as the 'Sestigers' (an Afrikaans name given to a particular group of experimental Afrikaans writers during the 60s), heralded a new era in Afrikaans fiction. Kannemeyer states that, "Through the range, variousness and difference of their style, and through innovative structure and experimentation, the 'Sestigers' reacted against the restrictedness

of Afrikaans fiction before them” (1993:90). Breytenbach established himself as one of the ‘Sestigers’ and became an acclaimed poet in Afrikaans literary circles. Even though elements of dissent were already present in his first two publications, *Die ysterkoei moet sweet* (1964) and *Katastrofes* (1964), both publications were awarded literary prizes. Cope comments that “the drift [towards dissent] of his writing was plain – the most far-reaching dissent against the national mores yet to appear” (1982:169). During this time Breytenbach wrote solely in Afrikaans and became known as “the most militant dissenter of all the young writers of the ‘sixties’” (Cope 1982:176).

Breytenbach left South Africa at the age of 21 on board a ship sailing for France, where he became increasingly involved in “public activities in the international front against apartheid” (Cope 1982:176). Due to the “overtly ‘political’” (Cope 1982:175) nature of the poems in a collection called *Skryt* (1972), Breytenbach was unable to find a publisher until a publishing house in Holland agreed to print the collection (Cope 1982:175). The collection was accompanied by a dedication, stating that the poems were “in honour of...the people of South Africa who are denied citizenship in the land of their birth” (Kannemeyer 1993:144).

Breytenbach became more and more convinced that he needed to become actively involved in the struggle against the apartheid government. André Brink notes that while living together in Paris, he and Breytenbach used to have long discussions about the role of the poet/writer in the struggle. Brink describes the “unbearable heightening for Breyten of his inner contradictions” (in Cope 1982:173) and “a further anxiety that the act of creation was not enough and was merely an escape from the necessity of action” (1982:173). In 1975 Breytenbach returned to South Africa using a fake French passport and recruiting for Okhela, an “underground white revolutionary group” (1982:178). His disguise barely concealed his true identity and he was arrested on the 19th of August on charges under the anti-terrorism law and sentenced to nine years’ imprisonment (1982:178-179).

Breytenbach was released after serving seven years of his term. His prison experience has had a major impact on his writing and he has produced many texts that are fictional accounts of his period of incarceration. Both *Mouir* (1983) and *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1984) recount his prison experience and describe the effect that the prison environment had on him psychologically. A large section of *Memory of Snow and of Dust* is a fictional reflection on the carceral experience and the subsequent alienation; a reflection that draws heavily on his own experience of imprisonment during the apartheid era. As a result of Breytenbach's political activities – his public opposition to the apartheid government – and his imprisonment, *Memory of Snow and of Dust* was largely received as a novel of dissent within the South African literary community.

Memory of Snow and of Dust was received against the local political concerns of the time. Reviews by, among others, Gouws (1989)², Hope (1989)³, Olivier (1989)⁴, Roos (1989)⁵, Tomlins (1989)⁶, and Pakendorf (1990)⁷ imply that the novel offers a reflection on the socio-political dynamics of the day. Pakendorf (1990), in his review, indicates that the novel draws a parallel between the exiled characters and the citizens of South Africa. He suggests that the focus on the experience of exile in the novel is an indirect reference to the local political climate in which, under apartheid, the citizens of South Africa are 'exiles' in their own country. Furthermore, various reviewers comment on the similarities between Breytenbach's own life and that of the character Barnum (Hattingh 1989⁸, Hope 1989, Jansen 1989⁹, Olivier 1989, Roos 1989, Tomlins 1989, Ferreira 1990¹⁰, and Pakendorf 1990). These reviewers observe that Breytenbach bases much of the novel on his own political activities, his visit to South Africa, and his period of imprisonment. Olivier (1989) comments that "Breytenbach

² "Breytenbach: Kyk, hy is skadulos!" *Insig*.

³ "Chewing the bitter bread of exile". *The Cape Times*.

⁴ "No easy slogans in this complex new Breyten". *Weekly Mail*.

⁵ "Breyten-roman kompleks, groot". *Rapport*.

⁶ "New book mirrors unhappy exiled poet 'Desperate' Breyten". *The Star*.

⁷ "'n Ryk geskakeerde teks oor ballingskap". *Die Burger*.

⁸ "Breyten: die verkleurmannetjie op 'n verhoog vol spieëls". *Vryeweekblad*.

⁹ "Breyten weef 'n spiraal van eindelose dubbelsinnigheid". *Die Suid-Afrikaan*.

¹⁰ "Waarheid as fiksie". *De Kat*.

goes to a great deal of trouble to create a distance between himself and the characters in this novel, but the autobiographical slip keeps showing delightfully.” As a result of Breytenbach’s image as a dissenter against the apartheid regime, the reviews that I have consulted tend to examine the novel within the boundaries of the prevailing political concerns of the time, and not in the light of postcolonial issues. My study goes one step further and wishes to re-examine Breytenbach’s novel in a society that has progressed beyond apartheid to an era characterised by globalised conditions.

As South Africa became part of the global community once again in 1990, negotiations for a new, democratic government were initiated. The country opened up to the world, and cultural theories that had been developed in the interim years, such as various postcolonial theories, entered into local circulation. To reiterate, at the time that *Memory of Snow and of Dust* was published, Breytenbach was received as a dissident writer; however, my mini-dissertation aims to show the need to reconsider Breytenbach as not only a local dissenter, but also as a postcolonial writer in a larger sense.

Developments in Postcolonial and Postmodern Theories

In order to understand Breytenbach as a postcolonial writer, it is necessary to look at recent developments in postcolonial theories. Based on current debates, this study will suggest that the novel *Memory of Snow and of Dust* be re-examined at the intersection of postcolonial and postmodern models of interpretation.

i) Postcolonial Theory

Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin initiated discussions on postcolonial theory with the publication, in 1989, of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (this, incidentally, was the same year that *Memory of Snow and of Dust* was published). *The Empire Writes Back* – seen

in retrospect as a 'landmark' book – considers the “experience of [British] colonialism” and “its general influence on the perceptual frameworks of contemporary peoples” (1989:1). Furthermore, postcolonial literatures are defined as texts that “emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonisation and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasising their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre” (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989:2). In discussing postcolonial theory, the authors point out how cultures are affected by colonisation and how the power relationship between coloniser and colonised determines every aspect of the interaction between the two cultures. Difference was emphasised by the colonisers when they established themselves as the superior power. Language was central to this process and the promotion of English Literary Studies in the colonies was used to fortify the superiority of British culture: “A ‘privileging norm’ was enthroned at the heart of the formation of English Studies as a template for the denial of the value of the ‘peripheral’, the ‘marginal’, the ‘uncanonised’” (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989:3). Postcolonial studies explores the struggle of the marginalised cultures of the colonised against the enforced dominance of the imperial centre.

Ultimately, the colonised cultures could not be suppressed indefinitely and increasingly the marginalised started asserting themselves against the colonial centre. Thus, the colonised managed to free themselves from “the implicit body of assumptions to which English was attached” (1989:10) and appropriated the English language into what Ashcroft *et al.* refer to as “english”, or “the various postcolonial englishes in use today” (1989:8). In this process postcolonial literatures emerged as subversive and unique discourses in which ‘the empire writes back’ (to quote the title phrase borrowed by the three authors from Salman Rushdie). Postcolonial studies focuses on the domination of the imperial centre over the margins (the colonies) and the subsequent emergence of a postcolonial literature. Furthermore, postcolonial studies examines the development of postcolonial literature as it undertakes the mission “to interrogate European discourse and

discursive strategies from its position within and *between two worlds*" (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989:196) [my emphasis].

My study is preoccupied with the postcolonial condition of being 'between two worlds'. In the novel, most characters oscillate between worlds – generally, between Africa and Europe. This is a situation with which Breytenbach and many other postcolonial writers are all too familiar (Rushdie, Ondaatje, Achebe, Kundera, to mention but a few). It is this in-between position, and the subsequent 'double vision' that stems from this experience, that provides fertile ground for reflection on the nature of both home and exile. My study will return to this point.

ii) Postmodern Theory

I shall also refer to aspects of postmodern theory, as Breytenbach makes use of various postmodern techniques of experimentation in *Memory of Snow and of Dust*. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1986) Lyotard defines the postmodern as,

that which, in the modern puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself; that which denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. (81)

In a deliberate attempt to undermine meta-narratives, postmodernist techniques contest the centralising impulse that has often characterised Western discourses. Postmodern approaches are concerned with representation, as well as the techniques used to display an alternative version of reality that distorts all unity and rationality. According to Quayson, "postmodernism can be typified as a vigorously anti-systemic mode of understanding, with pluralism, borders and multiple perspectives being highlighted as a means of disrupting the centralising impulse of any system" (2000:136). A playfulness, a focus on the "dissolution of boundaries" (Quayson 2000:138), and on "multiple and shifting subjectivities" (2000:141) are some of the aspects that characterise

postmodern narratives. My study will show how Breytenbach utilises both postmodern and postcolonial techniques in *Memory of Snow and of Dust*.

Such a re-examination – in 2010 – of *Memory of Snow and of Dust* is necessary as there have been massive global shifts in literary studies since the publication of the novel in 1989. As mentioned before, the novel's reception was influenced by the local concerns of the time, whereas my study proposes a renewed inquiry into the novel against current, worldwide concerns. For the purpose of my study, therefore, it is most relevant to consider the intersections of the two 'posts': postmodernism and postcolonialism, as identified in recent discussions on the changing nature of postcolonial studies by – *inter alia* – Boehmer 1995, Loomba 1998, Quayson 2000, Cornis-Pope 2004, Gaylard 2005, and Appiah 2006. Until recently, the two terms have been used largely as separate categories, but following the lead of the aforementioned literary critics I shall draw on both in my analysis of the representation of home and exile in the novel.

iii) Intersections between Postcolonial and Postmodern Theories

An overarching theme in the current debate on the intersection of postmodern and postcolonial theory is the continued relevance of both these theories in the contemporary world, not only as distinct conceptual entities, but also as profoundly intertwined. Discussions that circulate around the intertwined nature of these two theories point out how a more inclusive approach in postmodern, as well as postcolonial, studies contributes to an enhanced understanding of the world today. Quayson argues that “postmodernism can never fully explain the state of the contemporary world without first becoming postcolonial, and vice versa” (2000:154). He views both theories as “mutually reinforcing” (2000:133) when concerned with an understanding of issues of marginality in contemporary society. Loomba supports this view and points out the value for literary critics to negotiate the “fertile tensions” (1998:255) between different theoretical approaches. She refers to the image of the “stunt rider” and suggests that contemporary critics become stunt riders who learn

to ride both the postcolonial horse and the postmodern horse at the same time (1998:255-6). She asserts that “postcolonial studies demand theoretical flexibility and innovation. This is a tall order, but if postcolonial studies demands both a revision of the past, and an analysis of our fast-changing present, then we cannot work with closed paradigms” (1998:254). Loomba echoes this view in a subsequent publication, *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (Loomba et al. 2005), where she argues that postcolonialism needs to reinvent itself and broaden its area of engagement to remain an adequate theory in an increasingly changed (and ever-changing) global world (2005:34).

Another critic who is especially interested in the convergence of the two theories is Boehmer. Her literary criticism concentrates on the intersection of postmodern and postcolonial theories when brought to bear on how writers perceive “post-imperial realities” (1995:247). She comments that both postcolonial and postmodern criticisms are needed to account for everything that is contained in postcolonial literature. She refers specifically to the migrant writer whose writing is “‘not quite’ and ‘in between’” (1995:232): not quite postcolonial, not quite postmodern, but rather in-between. This is a reflection on the hybridity, fragmentedness, cultural intersection, and constructed nature of identity that makes up the contradictory nature of post-imperial reality. Gaylard, for his part, discusses the post-imperial reality in Africa and refers to the same “fragmented, hybrid, globalised, [and] decentred” elements that exist in contemporary African society (2005:33). He uses the term “Third World” postmodernism (2005:3) to refer to postmodern and postcolonial theories functioning together to help aid our understanding of contemporary life. He argues that the two theories have a complementary function: “postcolonialism not only found a tool to oppose socio-political orthodoxy in postmodernism, it also found a valuable inspiration for its own ideas of marginality, hybridity and eclecticism in postmodernism’s decentralising impulse” (2005:36).

Cornis-Pope – much like Gaylard – stretches definitions of postmodernism to discuss the emergence of a “postmodernism of resistance” (2004:45). He uses this term in the context of “the monolithic narrative of Communism” (2004:45) of Eastern Europe. Although Communism and

colonialism are different systems of oppression, they are both repressive forms of social engineering whereby one group of the population exercises unlimited power over the other (Communism as a form of ideologically based, rather than race-based, totalitarianism). Cornis-Pope points out that in Communist Eastern Europe, postmodernism became “more than an aesthetic idea” (2004:48) and that intellectuals and writers relied upon it as a form of resistance against the totalitarian Communist regime. Thus, the postmodern becomes inflected with various context-specific features of resistance, taking on a postcolonial role.

Although he does not specifically mention the two ‘posts’, Appiah identifies the increasing interest in the intersections between local and global concerns in our age as a “partial cosmopolitanism” (2006:xvii) – “universality plus difference” (2006:151) – in which both local and global values are present (2006:xxi). He stresses the importance of recognising that we are all fellow citizens in a world in which conversations across boundaries are inevitable. Also, inevitable – it could be argued – is the blurring of the boundaries between postmodernism and postcolonialism. Appiah argues that finding common ground is the essential ingredient of conversation; from there, “once we have found enough we share, there is the further possibility that we will enjoy discovering things we do not share. That is one of the payoffs of cosmopolitan curiosity. We can learn from one another; or we can simply be intrigued by alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and acting” (Appiah 2006:97).

The aforementioned critics have certainly found substantial common ground for fertile ‘conversations’ to take place between the two ‘posts’. A reading of *Memory of Snow and of Dust* that is situated between the two ‘posts’ allows for a reading that takes into account the migrant’s awareness of simultaneous dimensions: the double vision of home and exile.

The Age of Migration and 'Double Vision'

As I have briefly mentioned above, postcolonial theories have expanded in the last twenty years; there has been a paradigm shift in criticism since the late 1980s. I am particularly interested in recent developments in postcolonial theory that are concerned with a global order in which migrancy has become commonplace. Current postcolonial debates around issues of migration investigate the influence that these issues have on a new kind of postcolonial criticism: a criticism informed by the experience of dislocation, exile, and migration (Said 2001). This experience is a focus of Breytenbach's writing.

We live in an age in which boundaries are dissolving and a new global order is emerging. In the tellingly titled *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (2006) – to which I have already referred – Appiah discusses contemporary global society and our responsibility as 'global citizens'. He points out that the world is becoming a more inclusive community in which conversations are taking place across boundaries. He argues that there is great value in embracing, as Salman Rushdie puts it, "the great possibility that mass migration gives the world" (in Appiah 2006:112). Mass migration has become a definitive characteristic of the modern world, and as Smith (2004) suggests, migration is central to postcolonial studies. Smith agrees with Appiah, Said, Bhabha, Rushdie, and various other critics, that migration has been (and continues to be) a driving force in global change. He refers to a world that consists of "[a] new migratory and interlinked global order" (2004:242). Postcolonial studies has found continued relevance and value within this new global order of migrancy.

Rushdie comments on the emergence of the migrant writer on a transformed international scene in several of the essays contained in *Imaginary Homelands* (1991). He specifically comments on the value of the 'double perspective' that migrant writers experience as a result of being between cultures. He states that, "[migrant writers] are capable of writing from a kind of double perspective:

because they, we, are at one and the same time insiders and outsiders in this society. This stereoscopic vision is perhaps what we can offer in place of ‘whole sight’” (1991:19). Rushdie is not the only critic who sees value in what he calls the ‘double perspective’ of the migrant writer. Said, in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (2001), argues that a heightened awareness of both a past and a present environment has become central to the intellectual’s writing in an age in which migration and exile feature prominently. He states that,

[s]eeing ‘the entire world as foreign land’ makes possible originality of vision. Most people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is contrapuntal. (2001:186)

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1994a) Said refers to his own experience of living in-between two worlds: the West and the Arab/Muslim world. He argues that there is a positive benefit that results from this position of being between worlds; a unique perspective that provides fertile ground for reflection on contemporary society (1994a:332).

Boehmer agrees with Said and Rushdie regarding the privileged position that the exile holds. She states that in imperial times colonial writers were positioned between worlds, and that this position allowed them to borrow from several cultures simultaneously. She comments that “they [colonial writers] learnt to exploit the resources of their own half-and-half status” (1995:117). She suggests that a perpetual state of ‘double vision’ has been created as a result of colonialism. It is her assertion that postcolonial writers today use their own experience of migration and of living between worlds to bring a unique perspective to their writing. As a result of being positioned between different cultural worlds, migrant writers experience a “*split perception or double vision*” (Boehmer 1995:115). This double vision cultivates a valuable and insightful perspective on contemporary reality. It is indeed true that, as Gilroy says, ““what was initially felt to be a curse...the curse of

homelessness or the curse of enforced exile – gets repossessed as a privileged standpoint from which certain useful and critical perceptions of the world become more likely” (in Smith 2004:256).

The exile, via his/her privileged position between cultures, makes valuable insights into contemporary society possible, yet the double vision that is the gain of the peripheral existence experienced by the exile is a painful reminder that, as Said points out, “[y]ou cannot go back to some earlier and perhaps more stable condition of being at home; and, alas, you can never fully arrive, be at one with your new home or situation” (1994b:53). The state of perpetual dislocation that is inhabited by the exile becomes a new kind of ‘home’. Said finds it useful to draw a parallel between the exile and the intellectual in contemporary society. He argues that both occupy a position that involves “restlessness, movement, constantly being unsettled, and unsettling others” (1994b:53). He comments that although their position in society is a privileged one, it is also an unpleasant one, as it is the intellectual who provides a voice that challenges the fixed orthodoxies and dogmas of contemporary reality (1994b:11). It is the voice of the exile that unsettles, offering valuable new perspectives on reality by constantly challenging our existing perceptions and beliefs.

It is in the in-between spaces – occupied by migrants, exiles, and intellectuals – that, as Bhabha argues, new meanings and new identities are formed. He identifies the migrant voice that emerges from this in-between space as the possessor of a “transnational, ‘migrant’ knowledge of the world [that] is most urgently needed” (1994:214). Bhabha returns to this observation in a subsequent publication (2001), in which he considers the transfiguration of contemporary society concerning the intersection of the local and the global. He identifies value in what he refers to as the emerging border community, a “cosmopolitan community envisaged in a *marginality*” (2001:42). It is his assertion that the observations and reflections which emanate from these border communities are transforming the world as we know it; that it is in these border spaces that responses to conceptual questions such as what is local and what is global are being reconfigured (2001:48). It is this

statement that attracts my attention as I examine Breytenbach's representation, and reconfiguration, of home and exile.

Breytenbach equates his exilic condition with belonging (or un-belonging) to 'the Middle World', a term that he has developed in order to name the in-between space occupied by the exilic border community. His reflections on the exile's perpetual dislocation are also recorded in his recent publication *Notes from the Middle World* (2009). In an essay contained in this collection, "Mandela's Smile", he reflects on whether exile is not the preferred option for South Africans in a time in which the future of the country is uncertain. He suggests that "if you want to live your life to the fullest and with some satisfaction and usefulness, and if you can stand the loss, if you can amputate yourself, then go..." (2009a:29). Detached from the former homeland he now promotes an unsettled condition rather than a commitment to South Africa. A dislocated existence within 'the Middle World' – a transnational frontier space – is Breytenbach's choice and his advice for others.

Breytenbach (as well as the above-mentioned critics) points out the significance of the migrant writer, and the condition of double vision in contemporary postcolonial studies. To return to Quayson, however, double vision is also a feature of postmodern theory. Quayson explores the question of postcolonialism's continued relevance in the contemporary world in *Postcolonialism: Theory, Practice or Process* (2000). He suggests that postcolonial theories offer increasingly valuable insights into contemporary experience, especially when merged with postmodern theories. He argues that double vision is central to both postcolonial and postmodern theories, and allows for a valuable gaze into contemporary experience. He asserts that "one of the central problems which brings the two [theories] closer is...the question of the double vision that a peripheral existence in the world engenders" (2000:141). I am particularly interested in Quayson's work as it highlights the area of intersection between postcolonial theory and postmodern theory when brought to bear on the condition of double vision.

To reiterate, I intend to show that *Memory of Snow and of Dust*, a novel that was published two decades ago (and which is currently out of print), requires a reading that draws on debates in current circulation: debates that centre on migrant writers, and the double vision that is part of the migrant's experience. As Said observes, "exile, immigration, and the crossing of boundaries are experiences that can therefore provide us with new narrative forms or...with *other* ways of telling" (2001:315). I wish to reposition the novel by revisiting Breytenbach as a migrant writer in 'global' times. I intend to show that if *Memory of Snow and of Dust* is reconsidered in light of contemporary debates, it will yield new insights into the experience of dislocation that is characteristic of the age of migration in which we live. This is particularly pertinent as Breytenbach has from the outset revealed in his writing a condition of migrancy.

Survey of Works in Breyten Breytenbach's Oeuvre¹¹

A survey of Breyten Breytenbach's life and works reveals that he is a figure emblematic of the migrant writer. He continues to live in Paris in self-elected exile and yet, as he nears fifty years of 'exile' from the country of his birth, his involvement with South Africa and Africa has not diminished. (This is evident in one of his latest books, *A Veil of Footsteps* (2008).) Although Breytenbach has settled in Paris, he admits that "[e]xile has brought it home to me that I'm African. If I live in Europe most of the time, it is not as a participant but an observer" (1996:46-7). It is this peripheral position between two worlds from which Breytenbach draws much of his creative inspiration as he continues to seek new ways of creatively representing the experience of the exile/migrant/émigré.

In writing that is saturated with reflections on home and exile, Breytenbach laments the absence that he feels as a result of living outside of Africa; nevertheless, he cherishes the presence of this

¹¹ In this survey I shall discuss most of his significant works excluding *Memory of Snow and of Dust*. As the main focus of my mini-dissertation, this novel will be dealt with extensively in Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

absence as a prodding that constantly challenges the way in which he experiences reality. Various texts that include reflections on the experience of exile are: *Die ysterkoei moet sweet* (1964); *Kouevuur* (1969); *A Season in Paradise* (1976), *End Papers* (1986); *Soos die so* (1990); *Return to Paradise* (1992); *The Memory of Birds in Times of Revolution* (1996); *Dog Heart* (1998); and *A Veil of Footsteps* (2008).

The implicit spiritual pain that is associated with being 'between two worlds' is linked to his fixation on death and decay. Death and decay have been major themes in his creative work since his earliest poetry. Coullie notes that "Breytenbach fantasises, obsesses about his own death" (2004:189) in much of his writing. To some extent, the motif of death and decay is present in nearly all of his work. I have singled out the following texts in which he grapples with these themes: *Die ysterkoei moet sweet* (1964) *Die huis van die dowe* (1967), *Met ander woorde: vrugte van die droom van stilte* (1973), *Lewendood* (1985), *Nege landskappe van ons tye bemaak aan 'n beminde* (1993), *Dog Heart* (1998), and *Die windvanger* (2007). A number of these works incorporate Zen Buddhist beliefs about life and death being interchangeable, and death holding regenerative qualities.

Similarly, Zen Buddhist beliefs support the view in his writing that journeying and movement (both physically and psychologically) are the source of continuous renewal and regeneration, as in his many travel memoirs which engage with the theme of journeying (e.g. *'n Seisoen in die paradys*, 1976; *Return to Paradise*, 1992; and *Dog Heart*, 1998). These memoirs emphasise the importance of movement as a catalyst for continual re-invention and transformation. Several of his other works include references to travelling or journeying as a metaphor for the constant fluctuation of identity or as reference to the experience of exile. Breytenbach's obsession with rejecting fixed entities has produced several texts in which he uses a variety of discourses and generic forms. These texts (e.g. *A Season in Paradise*, 1976; *Return to Paradise*, 1992; *All One Horse: Fictions and Images*, 1990; *Dog Heart*, 1998; and *A Veil of Footsteps*, 2008) embrace an unstable, fragmentary, and multi-dimensional sense of reality, and 'migrate', as it were, across generic classification.

Identity as a fragmented, constructed entity is a theme that receives much attention in Breytenbach's poetry and prose (e.g. *Mouir*, 1983; *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*, 1984; *All One Horse: Fictions and Images*, 1990; *Return to Paradise*, 1992; *The Memory of Birds in Times of Revolution*, 1996; and *Dog Heart*, 1998). The unstable nature of identity is often explored through shifting forms of identity, through various characters who appear as pseudonyms for the author, and through a manifestation in the characters of the mutuality of self and other. In addition to the ambiguities of identity, the unreliable nature of memory features prominently in several works. In these works he interrogates the processes of remembering, and probes the depths of memory (his own or his characters') to reveal the complexities of memory and the act of remembering (e.g. *Return to Paradise*, 1992; *The Memory of Birds in Times of Revolution*, 1996; and *Dog Heart*, 1998).

The unreliable nature of memory is further confronted in Breytenbach's autobiographical texts in which he reflects not only on events and experiences, but also on the act of remembering these particular events and experiences. He interrogates his own memories as part of the process of narrating his past. The following texts have appeared as autobiographical texts: *Mouir* (1983), *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist* (1984), *End Papers* (1986), *The Memory of Birds in Times of Revolution* (1996), *Dog Heart* (1998) and *Woordwerk* (1999). Autobiographical elements, nonetheless, are present to various degrees in much of Breytenbach's other writing. As mentioned earlier, he draws heavily on his own period of incarceration to produce texts in which he examines the prison environment and explores the experience of incarceration (e.g. *Voetskrif*, 1976; ('Yk'), 1983; *Lewendood*, 1985; and – more directly related to his experience in prison than *Mouir*, 1983 – *The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist*, 1984).

Breytenbach does not only meditate on autobiographical elements in his work, he also produces texts that offer reflections on his craft: that of writing. In these texts he draws on his own creative experiences to produce reflections on the act of writing/creating (e.g. *Boek*, 1987; and *Soos die so*,

1990). Moreover, Breytenbach reflects on his role as an intellectual/writer/poet in several essays as well as in his prose and poetry. He draws attention to the responsibility of the writer and refers to the contribution that writers can make to the public sphere (e.g. *Voetskrif*, 1976; ('Yk'), 1983; *End Papers*, 1986; *Judas Eye*, 1988; *Dog Heart*, 1998; and the play, *Boklied*, 1998).

As far as the present study is concerned, the focus will be on Breytenbach's constant engagement with the themes of home and exile. Of all the above-mentioned themes in his work, it is the experience of exile that, for me, stands out as the most pervasive and significant feature in his writing. I shall apply the theoretical insights outlined earlier to the experience of the exile as specifically identified in *Memory of Snow and of Dust*. My readings are indebted, of course, to a body of critical response to Breytenbach's works. A brief survey follows.

Survey of Literary Criticism devoted to Breyten Breytenbach's Oeuvre

Breytenbach's work presents the critic with a rich variety of material to interrogate and analyse. Collections of poetry, fictional and non-fictional prose, plays, and paintings all form part of his oeuvre. He adopts a wide range of styles to expose his views on numerous themes, as referred to in the previous section. A recent collection of criticism on his work, *a.k.a. Breyten Breytenbach: Critical Approaches to his Writings and Paintings* (Coullie & Jacobs (eds) 2004), offers a comprehensive survey of the most noteworthy contributions of criticism on Breytenbach.

One such contribution focuses on his early poetry, for example, resulting in an exploration of the complex representation of the father figure in Breytenbach's poems (Viljoen 2004a). The father figure is shown as an ambiguous figure, the giver of both life and death to the poet. Another aspect that is dealt with in relation to Breytenbach's poetry is the problem of the instability of the sign and the representation of reality through literature and art (A. Coetzee 2004). The analysis highlights the poet's awareness of the limitations of artistic representation, as well as his use of inventive strategies as a response to this problem. Similarly, Breytenbach's use of various strategies of

representing himself as textual subject are examined (e.g. Smuts 2004, Reckwitz 2004, and A. Coetzee 2004). One such strategy is identified as Breytenbach's use of the mirror image, a motif that also dominates his prose works and autobiographical writing, especially his prison writing (as noted by – among others – Reckwitz 2004, Coullie 2004, and J.M. Coetzee 2004).

As referred to previously, Breytenbach has produced several pieces of writing that draw heavily on his period of incarceration. Various critics (e.g. Coullie 2004, Dimitriu 2004) explore the manner in which Breytenbach is able to transform the hostile space of his imprisonment into an environment in which he could find internal freedom. Furthermore, the above-mentioned authors refer to Breytenbach's use of Zen Buddhist principles, which are linked to acts of self-empowerment. In a recent discussion Breytenbach insists that the theme of incarceration has always been present in his work and that it underlies the awareness of another reality: "references to prisons and interrogators are metaphors, gateways and gatekeepers into and out of the respective stages of the one world of layered consciousness. Maybe they represent nothing more than the need for patternmaking" (Saayman 2009:203). Similarly, in Breytenbach's travel memoirs, journeying is seen as a self-empowering exercise in emancipation from the constraints of the socio-political context (Jones 2004).

The link between his writing and the socio-political context in South Africa is further explored in critical contributions focusing on aspects of Breytenbach's work that provide commentaries on South African politics – both on the apartheid government (J.M. Coetzee 2004), and the new dispensation (Jones 2004). Literary criticism on Breytenbach's plays, *Boklied* and *Die toneelstuk*, are based on a similar premise and concentrate on the portrayal of the role of the poet as social commentator, and the implications of the plays for contemporary South Africa (Viljoen 2004b).

South Africa, as well as Africa, is revisited in critical contributions that centre on Breytenbach's relationship with the continent. Some authors (e.g. Jacobs 2004, Coullie 2004) examine the way in

which Breytenbach conceives of himself in relation to Africa, and South Africa; another contribution (Jones 2004) focuses on the exile's problematic return to the homeland. Moreover, the link between identity and place, a recurring concern in Breytenbach's work, receives attention in a critical analysis that examines his painting and writing (Sienaert 2004b) and explores the various techniques used by the artist to represent the complexities of identity in his poetry, prose and paintings.

Finally, a recent publication of the *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* (Coetzee (ed) 2009) offers a wide range of contributions that focus on the most significant aspects of Breytenbach's work (as mentioned above). (This special issue is edited by Ampie Coetzee in honour of Breytenbach's 70th birthday.)

Survey of Literary Criticism on *Memory of Snow and of Dust*

While in the previous section I have referred to significant critical contributions that have been produced over the last twenty years, in this section I shall focus on recent articles that consider *Memory of Snow and of Dust* in the context of current literary debates. These articles examine themes of identity and belonging in the novel, and offer useful points of entry to issues that are of particular relevance for my study: the double vision of home and exile, and the intersection of postcolonial and postmodern theories. Of special relevance are the articles by Jacobs (2004), Reckwitz (1999), and Dimitriu (2008a, 2008b), discussed below.

In his article, "Writing Africa" (2004), Jacobs expands on a comment made by J.M. Coetzee and observes that it is Breytenbach's continuous struggle with what it means to be – at the same time – an Afrikaner, an African, and a South African that constitutes the strength of his poetry and prose (2004:151). The article considers various works by Breytenbach and investigates a recurring preoccupation in his work: the conviction that South Africa must be written back into Africa. The article also explores the link between place and identity that is central to Breytenbach's writing; Jacobs comments on the ties that bind Breytenbach to the continent of his birth, asserting that "over the years, Breytenbach's exile from both Afrikanerdom and Africa has served only to strengthen his

spiritual affiliation with Afrikaners and Africans alike” (2004:161). He highlights the fact that Breytenbach has experienced a sharpened awareness as a result of his exile, and that he has contributed to the process of writing Africa. It is Jacobs’s view that the “re-inscription of himself [Breytenbach] into South Africa and of South Africa into Africa” (2004:166) is at the heart of *Memory of Snow and of Dust*.

Jacobs’s view is of particular interest for my study, as I aim to show that a continued engagement with the themes of home and exile (for both author and characters) is the driving force behind Breytenbach’s novel. However, home and exile are not easily defined categories, and Jacobs reveals that complex issues surround these themes in the novel. For example, he refers to Meheret’s (the protagonist’s) inability to reconcile her conception of Africa with Mano’s (South) Africa (2004:167). The task of writing Africa is also problematised as the novel is seen as an attempt “by Breytenbach to ‘weave a map of words’ in order to bring both the continent of Africa and his native South Africa ‘to an intelligible surface of flesh and blood’ in relation to himself as writing and written subject” (2004:163). This conception of Africa in relation to himself and the characters in *Memory of Snow and of Dust* is one of the elements of the novel that – I suggest – requires further investigation in light of recent postcolonial developments.

A postmodern approach, therefore, is adopted by Jacobs in his reading of the novel. He draws attention to the fragmentary nature of the text and the play on surfaces through Breytenbach’s use of rhizomatic devices. This informs his view that the novel is a text that celebrates hybridity. Jacobs suggests that “*Memory of Snow and of Dust* requires a contrapuntal reading of its fictional subjects, of its structures and of its diverse discourses” (2004:165). It is the intention of my study to elaborate on this statement and to argue that such a contrapuntal reading is required precisely because the novel is a reflection of what Said describes as an “awareness of simultaneous dimensions” that is characteristic of the exile’s life (2001:186).

Another postmodernist reading of Breytenbach's *Memory of Snow and of Dust* has been offered by Reckwitz (1999). He refers to the "schizophrenic identity" (1999:94) of the exile and the role that memory plays in the exile's life. What is of particular interest for this study is that Reckwitz identifies "the memorising self" (1999:92) as something that constantly redoubles itself: a memory that is neither coherent nor reliable. This is another way of expressing the double vision characteristically experienced by the exile. In addition, Reckwitz draws attention to Breytenbach's use of anti-systemic postmodern devices in an attempt to illustrate the fragmented nature of the exile's existence. He notes that Breytenbach's use of "[various] pieces of discourse, which are syntagmatically incoherent" (1999:94) reflect the "ensuing sense of disorientation" (1999:94) that occurs as a result of the periphery position which the exile occupies between two cultures. This leads to a schizophrenic identity that cannot reconcile one culture with another (the past with the present). Whereas Reckwitz's study offers valuable insight into Breytenbach's representation of the experience of exile, imprisonment and problems of identity (1999:90) from a postmodern perspective, my study suggests that a reading of the novel requires a more in-depth investigation of the themes of home and exile, considered as postcolonial concerns.

As mentioned before, the condition of double vision is both a postmodern, and a postcolonial, concern. Thus, the fictional representation of the condition of double vision – symptomatic of the in-between position that the exile inhabits in society – requires a reading that takes into account both postmodern and postcolonial theories. Dimitriu, for example, investigates the double vision of Breytenbach's later travelogues. She points out that, "Migrants inevitably lose the insider's 'pure', locally-obsessed, view of their home country, their consciousness becoming 'contaminated' with the *double vision* that is the gain (but the loss as well) of those living in the contact zones between cultures" (2008a:98). In her criticism, Dimitriu considers both postmodern and postcolonial studies (as an approach) when dealing with an author such as Breytenbach. She points out that:

Such a complex writer and public intellectual should be approached in the spirit of Breytenbach's own thinking which, in his double vision, transgresses categories: Breytenbach as both postmodernist and postcolonial; Breytenbach as poet, essayist and novelist; a writer of Afrikaans, but also of English and French; an Afrikaner, but also an African and South African; a South African, but also a European; a 'citizen and un-citizen' everywhere, a travelling intellectual, 'unsettled and unsettling others'. (2008a:102)

The article considers the relevance of the debates on double vision with regard to *Memory of Snow and of Dust*. Dimitriu's examination of the novel is useful for my purposes in that it highlights the attempt by characters in the novel to negotiate their way through "the restless filtering of ideas" (2008a:93) that informs the urge to leave Europe and return to Africa; the growing realisation being that a "home-in-exile" (2008a:94) is the only true home that is left. This investigation is of particular significance in light of the focus of my study – representations of home and exile – as it recognises the need for a more comprehensive re-evaluation of Breytenbach's novel.

In a comparative article, titled "Postmodernism and/as Postcolonialism: On re-reading Milan Kundera and Breyten Breytenbach", Dimitriu (2008b) again highlights the need to revisit Breytenbach's novel from a more comprehensive perspective. She identifies "the 'double vision of home and exile', of belonging and migrancy" (2008b:35), as central elements in both novels, prompting a reading that is situated between the two 'posts'. She comments that "a 'double perspective' or 'double vision'...allows home (as conceptual locus) to be experienced from both inside and outside an exilic condition" (2008b:36). Subsequently, she takes the view that "*Memory of Snow and of Dust*...is written from the vantage point of the migrant's double vision that focuses on 'home and exile' not as fixed entities, but as processes in endless metamorphosis" (2008b:43). The article examines the main character, Mano, as the embodiment of nomadism brought about by a life in exile. Mano longs to return to South Africa, yet, when he does so, he is unable to reconnect to his origins. It is this condition of perpetual rootlessness as experienced by the characters (and

their author) in *Memory of Snow and of Dust* that – as my study suggests – merits further examination in the light of the abovementioned observations.

Survey of Theses on Breyten Breytenbach's Oeuvre

I have completed a thorough investigation of existing South African theses and have identified that no thesis has been written exclusively on *Memory of Snow and of Dust*. Nor has any South African thesis focussed on a primarily postcolonial reading of Breytenbach's work. The majority of theses focus on Breytenbach's poetry and have been completed within Afrikaans departments. Such theses deal with the following themes in Breytenbach's poetry: recurrent symbols, significant images, representation of self, the experiences of exile and imprisonment, paradox, deconstructivism, the relationship between time and space, the absence of boundaries, as well as religious influences – notably of Zen Buddhism, which is subtly linked to many of the aforementioned themes (e.g. Brink 1975, Ferreira 1982, Smuts 1995, and Huysamer 1997). In addition, some theses establish a link between postmodern art and poetry (e.g. Olivier 1972, Brink 1975) by linking the strong visual nature of Breytenbach's poetry to typical traits of postmodern art. One particular dissertation (Sienaert 1996) focuses on the interrelatedness of Breytenbach's art and poetry. Another undertakes a postmodern reading of some of Breytenbach's biographical poems and comments on their intertextual nature (Barnard 1991). A further field of interest in Afrikaans literary studies is the examination of Breytenbach's plays, *Boklied* and *Die toneelstuk*. One dissertation focuses on the alienation of the audience during the performance, and the proposed reason behind Breytenbach's deployment of this technique (Du Preez 2004).

As for Breytenbach's prose – written in English – the main areas of interest in recent studies have been his autobiographical prison writings and travelogues. Regarding his prison writing, most studies have focussed on the effects of the prison space on Breytenbach's creativity, on the experienced

alienation and the use of language as a mode of escape/transcendence from his surroundings, as well as on the principles of Zen Buddhism that influence Breytenbach's writing (e.g. Brink 1975, Conradie 1981, Ferreira 1988, Dimitriu 1992, and Sienaert 1996). There has also been a dissertation on Breytenbach's travelogues and the way in which he re-places himself in relation to South Africa and Africa (Squire 1995). The same study is also concerned with a postmodernist reading of the travelogues. Linked to his travel writing, other theses have explored the depiction of the nomadic subject in Breytenbach's work (Anker 2007) as well as his rejection of fixed entities in a wider sense, both in his painting and writing (Grobler 2002).

The Structure of my Mini-dissertation

Based on the above, I can say with reasonable certainty that a study that concentrates specifically on the representation of the concepts of home and exile in Breytenbach's oeuvre is yet to be concluded. A contemplation of the nature of the concepts of home and exile, and the related issues of identity and belonging have led me to examine how Breytenbach expresses the complexity of the constructs of home and exile in *Memory of Snow and of Dust*. The writer's engagement with such issues illustrates a preoccupation with important aspects of contemporary life and an attempt to understand the world in which we live. Breytenbach believes that the writer is in a position to give the general public added insight into contemporary experience. As a writer who has experienced exile, he points out that "in a century of Displaced Persons and exiles and those fleeing famine or torture, you [the writer] are in the position to share in and contribute to an historically important, and vital, human experience. (Not to say experiment)" (1986:212). My study aims to explore how, in *Memory of Snow and of Dust*, Breytenbach has contributed to our changing perceptions.

The novel is set in Europe, Africa, and South Africa, and depicts characters who, having left a previous home, are unable to belong in their new surroundings. The book consists of two parts. In

Part One, titled “Utérophia” – a mixture of “‘Europe’ and ‘Ethiopia’, ‘uterus’ and ‘utopia’” (Jacobs 2004:167) – we are introduced to Meheret, an Ethiopian journalist and aspiring writer, who is living in Paris. She becomes romantically involved with Mano, a ‘coloured’ South African actor, who is recruited on an undercover mission back to South Africa where he is arrested and sentenced to death. Part One consists mainly of Meheret’s recollections of the past, as she – now carrying Mano’s child – writes down her and Mano’s story, interrupted by descriptions of her Ethiopian family, in an attempt to preserve these memories for their child. Barnum, another exiled character, acts as a mentor to Meheret, instructing her in the writing process. Part Two, titled “On The Noble Art of Walking in No Man’s Land”, mostly comprises letters that Mano compiles while in Pollsmoor Prison, in which he reveals his insights into belonging and finally a place to call ‘Home’.

In my study of the novel I will explore the categories of home and exile in separate chapters: “Home” as Chapter One and “Exile” as Chapter Two. Although I have chosen, in my exploration of these two themes, to make a distinction between home and exile, this distinction is merely for the sake of structural clarity. In an age in which concepts are intersecting and becoming increasingly blurred, it is difficult to separate the two concepts from one another as, by their very nature, they intersect in the double vision that is experienced by the migrant. Ashcroft *et al.* (2000) give the following definition of exile: “The condition of exile involves the idea of a separation and distancing from either a literal homeland or from a cultural and ethnic origin” (92). If there is a loss of home, that implies exile; whereas exile implies the absence of an environment in which a sense of belonging is experienced – a home. The conventional separation of home and exile in my study is based on my understanding of home, as becoming a non-home in conditions of exile. Thus my concept of home is a negating one which implies the absence of a homely feeling; the loss of a familiar environment. This is the focus of the first chapter and, as it inevitably implies exile, it leads into the second chapter which is an examination of the experience of exile in which the awareness of no longer belonging anywhere is pervasive. In Chapter Three, titled “‘The Paradox of Wonder’: the

Transformation of Homelessness into Home”, I extend my exploration of the themes of home and exile in a study of Breytenbach’s sense of a multi-layered, alternative home. It is in this last chapter that the overlapping nature of home and exile receives a more focussed attention, as anticipated by discussions in both the first and second chapters.

Although (as indicated by the subsection on “The Age of Migration and ‘Double Vision’”) I am interested in the migrant’s double vision, I will not discuss this condition in Chapter One. Rather, Chapter One will focus on the difficulty of locating a home in either Europe, or Africa, while Chapter Two will consider the double vision of the migrant as part of the experience of exile. Chapter Two will, therefore, focus on the ‘in-between’ nature of the exile’s life that is the result of the double vision occurring when living between ‘homes’.

Furthermore, in Chapter Three I identify an alternative vision of home: a home-in-exile, exile-as-home. In this regard, my study recognises the new approach in recent literary debates that, in an age in which binary categories are increasingly called into question, we need to move beyond either/or distinctions. Moreover, I take into account the difficulty of applying binary categories to the work of exiled writers such as Breytenbach or Lewis Nkosi – for example. Chapman makes the following comment in an article in which he compares the work of Breytenbach and Nkosi. He argues that in a world in which local and global are increasingly becoming blurred, we need to approach both authors in a way that recognises conceptual overlapping in contemporary society. He points out that Breytenbach’s (and Nkosi’s) work offer an “ongoing exploration of home and exile, where inward belonging and global dispersion are set not in either/or contrast, but in the both/and of multiple encounters” (2006:354). It is this focus on a more inclusive approach that is particularly relevant to my study, as it takes cognisance of a world in which the boundaries of ‘home’ and ‘exile’ do not lend themselves to simple definitions.

In conclusion, my study argues that we need to reconsider *Memory of Snow and of Dust* in an age of migration: in which migrants experience a double vision, as well as an acute awareness of what constitutes home and what exile. The themes of home and exile emerge strongly in the novel, as the characters grapple with finding a sense of belonging in a world in which they are disowned, dislocated and alienated. This year signals 21 years since the publication of *Memory of Snow and of Dust* (1989) and I suggest that a new approach to the novel within current developments in postcolonial theory yields not only relevant, but new insights into the experience of migrancy.

CHAPTER ONE: HOME

Introduction

We live in a world in which it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between categories and to draw distinct lines between concepts. Moreover, single entities take on multiple meanings as global perceptions shift and concepts expand. For thousands of migrants moving across borders in a new global age, 'home' is no longer a clearly defined category. Instead, home becomes a contested site that is no longer exclusive, no longer one-dimensional – referring to both the home that is left behind, and the new home that is established in a foreign land. This knowledge of another, previous home, results in a double perspective for the migrant. The concept of home becomes a double concept including both the old and the new; the past and the present. This leads me to ask the following conceptual questions: Is it possible to exchange one home for another? Can the migrant ever feel at home in another country, as an 'other'? As important is the question of returning to the homeland. Once exposed to the double perspective that occurs as a result of experiencing another setting as a possible home, can the migrant return to the homeland? Will the migrant ever be able to reclaim the 'pure' vision of before? Or is the migrant now, having been exposed to the double vision of the exile, unable to return to an awareness of a single home, and a single culture? Is the migrant permanently exiled to a space between homes?

It is with these questions in mind that I undertake a study into Breytenbach's conception of home in *Memory of Snow and of Dust*. This chapter is concerned with a critical exploration of home in the novel: what constitutes home for Breytenbach's characters who live in Europe, but were born in Africa? Furthermore, how do their considerations of home reshape our conception of what constitutes home in an age of migration?

Home and Belonging in a Postcolonial World

Just as Breytenbach's novel reflects an engagement with the questions raised above, so have recent debates within the postcolonial field. Questions centred on issues of identity and belonging in a new global order have recently directed postcolonial studies into areas of interest that are of particular relevance in the twenty first century. Loomba points out that, "...new initiatives [in postcolonialism] ...not only [offer] fresh perspectives on the past, but [also] enabl[e] us to understand the continuing changes around the world" (1998:xiv). Recent literary debates around issues related to migration, and double vision, have indeed shown that postcolonial studies has continued relevance and value in a new global order. However, an exploration of what constitutes 'home' is not only a postcolonial concern, but also an overarching human concern, a concern that reflects a fundamental human need – the need to belong. For, as Weil states: "[t]o be rooted...is perhaps the most important and least recognised need of the human soul" (in Said 2001:183). In an age in which concepts are being reconfigured, there is a growing realisation that 'home' is being redefined by the migrant's experience.

Writing about his experience of having lived both in the Arab/Muslim world and in the West, Said comments that, "[t]his has enabled me in a sense to live on both sides" (1994a:xxiii). His critical essays reflect on the migrant's awareness of two settings, two homes, and two cultures (Said 2001:186). To which of these, therefore, does the migrant then belong? Said suggests that, ultimately, the migrant – having experienced two 'worlds' – belongs to neither, and that "homecoming is out of the question" (2001:179). Bhabha agrees with Said, and envisages an alternative construct of home. He suggests that a 'home' can be located within the "unhomeliness" (1994:9) that the migrant experiences. He argues that, "[t]o be unhomed is not to be homeless...[i]n that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is

disorientating” (1994:9). As concepts become blurred and start to overlap, an “‘in-between’ reality” (Bhabha 1994:13) presents itself as a new home for the ‘unhomed’.

Rushdie comments on the same dilemma: where does the migrant find a sense of home, a sense of belonging, in the twenty first century? He argues that as a result of being uprooted, migrants find it easier to locate a new home in “ideas”, rather than in a physical place. He talks about the dislocation that the migrant experiences in unfamiliar surroundings and the effect that this has on the migrant:

The effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radically new types of human being: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves – because they are so defined by other – by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves. The migrant suspects reality: having experienced several ways of being, he understands their illusory nature. To see things plainly, you have to cross a frontier. (1991:124-125)

Not being able fully to become a part of the foreign culture, and not being able to return to a time before they crossed over from one culture to another, migrants seek an alternative home which, in the end, is found in the creation of a psychological home, a homeland that – as Rushdie maintains – is located within the mind.

As the critical contributions above suggest, the question ‘what constitutes home?’ is a complex, and demanding one within the age in which we live. My study aims to show that an exploration of this question in relation to Breytenbach’s novel will yield valuable insights into the experience of the migrant in a world that, as indicated in recent postcolonial debates, requires alternative ways of thinking. Bhabha notes that “we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion” (1994:1). An examination of how Breytenbach chooses to represent home in the novel under consideration explores a question that is extremely relevant to the ‘moment of transit’

that we find ourselves in as citizens of a world that is growing beyond the boundaries of nation states. In such a world, the question: 'what constitutes home for the exile?' demands our attention.

Home in Europe

In Breytenbach's novel the two protagonists, Mano and Meheret – both born in Africa and now living in Paris – are in search of a sense of belonging that remains elusive in their foreign surroundings. Although Meheret refers to Paris as her home, it is not an instinctively recognised home, but rather a home determined by geographical necessity. Throughout the novel Mano, Meheret, and Barnum – another (South) African living in Paris – are exceptionally aware of the dislocation that they experience as a result of their separation from Africa; an awareness that permeates their lives and makes it difficult for the characters intrinsically to experience Europe as home.

The awareness of dislocation is present from the start of the novel as Meheret sits in a cathedral in Paris, writing a story for her unborn child – (Mano's, her South African lover's child) that centres around her Ethiopian family, and her relationship with Mano – much of which takes place outside of Paris, in Europe, and in Africa. Meheret expresses this sense of dislocation in the following comment: "it is lonely to be an animal in a city of no birds" (1989:5). Unable fully to belong in her surroundings, Meheret's image of being an animal in a city of no birds reflects her awareness that she is an 'other' in this city – lonely and alienated because of her 'otherness'. Even the home that she lives in is not her own; it is a house of a friend who is working abroad that she is temporarily taking care of (202). Her reflections on her life in Paris lead Meheret to contemplate why one is unable to feel at home in a foreign country. She wonders "Is it the fact of never fully becoming part of your new surroundings?" (113). In considering the predicament of this situation for Mano, she

reflects on his resolute attachment to Africa, and asks, “What is...this not-belonging that he must compensate for?” (160). Mano, who believes that he will find a sense of belonging upon his return to Africa, has given up on the attempt to belong in Paris. The futile attempt of the migrant to fit in with the new culture is described by Said, who comments on Joseph Conrad’s efforts to adapt to British culture as a Polish writer living in England. Said refers to Conrad’s “hopeless attempts to make satisfying contact with his new surroundings” (2001:179). Like Conrad’s experience, Mano’s and Meheret’s experience indicates that the migrant’s attempts to find a sense of belonging, and a new home in a new environment, is a complex and difficult task, perhaps even an impossible one.

Barnum – who often acts as a mouthpiece for Breytenbach – later comments on the nature of living in Paris. He describes the emotional journey of initially “being in love with Paris right through to deception, to the cheap taste of aluminium superficially in the mouth” (1989:80). His comment illustrates the bitter realisation that sets in when one realises that one is, as Said states, “always out of place” (2001:181) in one’s surroundings: the awareness that Paris is not ‘home’. Once the romantic vision of Paris has subsided, Barnum suggests, one sees the city for what it is. In the novel, France is described as “a racist country” (1989:146), and Paris as “Dogshit City” (86), in which “the poor are railroaded out to the suburbs where they will give birth to marginals and the permanently unemployable” (86). These descriptions make it clear that Paris does not welcome foreigners, and that it is difficult to feel a sense of belonging in an environment that does not encourage foreigners to integrate with local communities. Both Rushdie and Said comment on similar circumstances. Said suggests that the immigrant remains an “outsider” (1994a:xxvii) in his/her new surroundings, while Rushdie reflects on the racist attitudes that continue to prevail within Britain towards immigrant communities (1991:130-131). Barnum considers the difficulty such attitudes present to the migrant. He uses the following image to show the dilemma that foreigners face when trying to integrate into Parisian culture: “[they/foreigners] try and move in under the northern blanket, lying as quiet and prim as poor country cousins on the edge of the bed with a back

exposed to the cold draught, pretending not to hear the snide remarks about dirty feet, snoring and fleas..." (1989:83). Attitudes such as these towards foreigners only reaffirm the sense of not belonging that the characters experience in the novel; they never feel that they are able fully to be part of their surroundings.

Eventually, Meheret realises, "[t]he illusions of integration fade away" (175) and the dream of a home in Paris is abandoned. Upon departure from Burkina Faso after a short return to Africa, Meheret's feelings overwhelm her:

The heart shrivels with anguish and pain at the thought of going north, back into the cold of sour minds. How long? Two, three, four days of living with clenched teeth and reddened eyes, before 'adaptation', 'insertion', before we again harness the straps of paranoia and distrust to become functional in the Parisian milieu...My heart, you are like a child in me – how will you survive there? Will you be like a shell on a shelf which has forgotten the sea? (159)

Although able to become 'functional' in Paris, Meheret and the other characters are unable to experience Paris as home. To borrow Said's phrase, the characters simply learn to "make do in [their] new surroundings" (2001:xiv). It is an awareness the author shares with his characters, for Breytenbach admits that "given my condition and conditioning, it is difficult if not impossible for me to indicate and describe the state of non-exile, of belonging, of integration" (1986:71). This condition has implications not just in the migrant's new surroundings, but also in the old surroundings.

Home in Africa

The novel shows that while most characters do not belong in Europe, they are unable to recapture a sense of belonging in Africa either. The characters experience not only an inability to feel at home in Paris, but a more pervasive loss of home as a sense of belonging continues to evade both characters – and Breytenbach – even upon returning to Africa.

Meheret's observations about Africa reveal that she realises that a return home is no longer possible. She recognises that Africa exists only in the mind now, as a romantic vision, and is able to contrast the Africa of her dreams, "the soft green hills of [her] motherland...sun-flecked glades and trees spreading dark-blue perfumed shadows..." (1989:32), with the reality of "misery, poverty, death, [and] ignorance" (115). Even though during her time in Burkina Faso she wonders, "What is this thing that makes you feel at home here rather than elsewhere?" (113), she realises that she is no longer a part of that world and cannot return to it. Like Rushdie's example of the Indian writer outside of India who is "obliged to deal in broken mirrors some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost" (1991:11), Meheret realises that she can no longer fully reflect upon, or reinsert herself into, the world that she left behind. When Mano asks her to return to Africa, she replies by saying: "You know it's not possible" (1989:7). She also acknowledges that despite constantly reflecting on Africa, it is her choice not to return to the continent. She answers Mano's question as to whether she would want to stay in Europe forever by saying: "Why ever not? I have left nothing in Africa" (24).

For Mano, who still clings to the belief of belonging in Africa, it is not possible to reject the notion of Africa as home. Mano believes that he can return to Africa and reclaim his homeland. However, upon his return he is arrested, sentenced to death, and put in prison. Whilst in prison the realisation that (South) Africa is no longer his home penetrates his mind and he is forced to ask himself, "Where is home?" (280).

Mano's inability to return home is anticipated by the comments made by African locals at the Pan African Film festival. In the novel, exiles living in Europe or America, who return to Africa to attend the festival, are accused of coming back to "criticise the local regime for having imported bad Western habits" (104). Locals indignantly remark that "[t]hey don't have to live here" (104), implying that since they do not live locally they have no right to criticise the local authorities. Such attitudes from local groups enhance the migrant's awareness that he/she no longer belongs to the

community at 'home' either. Appiah writes about his experience of returning to his hometown, Kumasi, in Ghana. He describes the experience as follows: "[a]nd, again like many, when I am there I feel both that I do and that I don't belong" (2006:91). He describes the way in which certain people react to one as if one is no longer a part of the country of one's birth. When Mano returns to Africa to attend the Pan African Film festival, Mumpata asks him whether he does not hold a romantic view of Africa, one in which he is "'perhaps looking at Africa with disappointed European eyes, and through idealistic glasses?'" (1989:122). Having lived in Europe, Mano now sees differently, and is perceived differently. He is no longer treated as someone who instinctively belongs in Africa, but rather as someone who, having left the continent, can no longer fully claim to be African.

Breytenbach experiences a similar reaction from a reporter in a local newspaper review that criticises his continued involvement in South African affairs: "[Breytenbach is] bilious about us, as much because he no longer knows us as because of any innate right to take any point of view...It's as if Mr B, no longer having a firm footing anywhere, finds himself slipping and sliding" (Bernard, in Viljoen 1995:5). Breytenbach, however, is well aware that he is no longer fully able to experience his heartland as home. He makes the following statement: "[t]o be away from your home environment is to be deprived of ever again functioning completely and fitting in instinctively" (1996:42). This rings true not only for the attempts to fit in, in a foreign country, but also upon a return to the homeland.

That one in fact cannot return home is a central theme in *Memory of Snow and of Dust*. Breytenbach emphasises it through the use of repeated rhetorical questions, motifs, and images. This is done on purpose and Anom states that "there will be repetitions: it is the simplest way I know of to make patterns" (1989:215). One such repetition is the recurring, rhetorical question: 'Which Africa?', which anticipates the realisation that it is impossible to reconcile the Africa that exists in memory with the Africa that exists in reality, and which you no longer inhabit. Mano and Meheret have the following exchange: "'Let's return to Africa,' he whispered. 'Let's not stay in this land of

selfish and superficial people,' and it was as if a crow had swallowed his voice raw. I put a finger on his lips: 'You know it's not possible. Africa? Which Africa? Yours or mine?'" (7). Meheret's response indicates an understanding that they are unable to return 'home'; that the home which Mano holds on to is an Africa that exists only in his mind. This type of situation is reflected on by Rushdie in relation to exiled Indian writers:

But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely that which we have lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (1991:10)

A recurrent motif in the novel is that of the exile's impossible return home. There are at least three instances (1989:14, 45, 259) in which the exile is cast out of his village for having committed a murder. For a while, the exile lives abroad, trying to make enough money to return in the hope that he would (once again) be accepted by his fellow villagers. However, when the exile attempts to return he finds that the village has been deserted. The only inhabitant left is a blind man who curses him. The point is that it is impossible for the exile to return home. It is ironic that Mano – upon his return to South Africa – sees a film in which this motif reappears. The picture tells "the story of a young exile roaming abroad... [and his attempted] return to his home village...only to find it deserted" (1989:259). He sees this film while he is awaiting further instructions for an undercover mission, and is arrested in his hotel shortly afterwards. Mano's belief that he could return home leads to his imprisonment, and ultimately his death, illustrating the metaphoric transfer, the impossibility of the exile's return home.

It is upon the return to the place perceived as home that the realisation that one is no longer at home anywhere is reinforced. This is a theme that has received attention in various critical contributions on Breytenbach's work in recent years by – *inter alia* – Squire (1995), Grobler (2002),

Jones (2004), Chapman (2006), Anker (2007), and Dimitriu (2008a, 2008b). In the following statement Breytenbach reflects on the reasons why he feels that a return home is not possible:

An exile never returns. 'Before' does not exist for 'them', the 'others', those who stayed behind. For 'them' it was all continuity; for you it was a fugue of disruptions. The thread is lost. The telling has shaped the story. You make your own history at the cost of not sharing theirs. The eyes, having seen too many different things, now see differently. (1996:48)

Postcolonial perspectives on the impossibility of a return reveal a similar outlook. Bhabha, in his reflection on the position of the migrant in contemporary society, refers to "the unhomeliness" that the migrant experiences, "that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (1994:9). He indicates that once one has crossed the borders of the homeland into another country one cannot go back to a time in which one was unaware of what Breytenbach calls the "'Before'": in other words, a time in which one had not experienced life in another setting, in another environment. It is this condition of 'unhomeliness' – of living without an intrinsically experienced home in a physical, geographical location – that is the recurrent concern of *Memory of Snow and of Dust*.

Home and Memory

Mano does not realise that the Africa that he wishes to preserve does not exist in reality. In search of his memory and his past, Mano – whose "memory [has been] amputated" (1989:61) by his stay in Europe – returns to South Africa. He hopes to find in South Africa the sense of belonging that evades him in Europe. He refers to himself and others as "'the second generation of exiles. You know, the way one speaks of generations of computers – with very complicated, dead memories...I must return there [to South Africa]. I don't belong in Europe'" (123). As a result of his journey back to South

Africa, he eventually comes to the realisation that homecoming is out of the question; that he cannot return home.

His journey, prompted by a search for his dead memory, reveals the unstable nature of this faculty, and eventually Mano realises that which Meheret already knows: that “evoking memories is a way of imagining the world” (1989:5). The highly unreliable nature of memory is commented on by Rushdie in relation to his novel, *Midnight’s Children*, in which Saleem, the narrator, reflects on our faculty of remembering, in our attempts to make sense of the world around us (1991:23). Breytenbach takes a similar approach in the introductory poem to the book, and points out that memory is “a strange thing all by itself” (1989:3). We are often tricked by memories, as is illustrated in the film that Mano watches upon his return to South Africa. It is

the story of a young exile roaming abroad after having killed his fiancée in a fit of passion; how he cuts out the photo of some model advertising a soap powder because she reminds him of his beloved dead; how, delirious with hunger and the Africa blues, he ends up believing that it really is the picture of his sweetheart, and how he starts writing long letters to her, mailing them as it were to the Underworld; how he makes enough money to return to his home village with a dowry and a ruby on his pinky, only to find it deserted except for one old blind man who curses him. How he breaks down when he cannot find the girl of the picture... (1989:259)

In this case I believe Breytenbach is pointing out that we need to realise that we create in our minds memories of home which often take on a life of their own, quite separate to reality. In our creation of ‘imaginary homelands’ – to use Rushdie’s term – we need to recognise that the ‘home’ created in our minds bears no direct relation to the homeland that is left behind. It is a faculty of our memory, and it is essentially “apocryphal”, to borrow from Breytenbach’s introductory poem which describes *Memory of Snow and of Dust* as “a variously sliced-up or torn-apart book of myself as the essential apocryphal memory” (1989:3). Much of Breytenbach’s novel is shaped by his own experience of home and exile. Possibly, the aforementioned example of the exile that starts to believe that the ‘soap’ model is his dead beloved is a reference to the danger of becoming fixated on a memory of

home, and a desire to try and recapture that memory by returning home. The image of the exile who returns, and finds a deserted village with no sign of his beloved, is intended as a warning that one cannot return to a 'home' that has survived in the mind. The title of the novel is a further indication that memory is not a fixed, stable entity, but rather that it can be likened to particles of snow and of dust that refuse to be captured, and that remain elusive, fleeting particles that cannot be grasped.

At this stage Breytenbach may seem to propose that memories of the past be abandoned. However, the idea is not to give up on memory, but rather to recognise it for what it is, simply "a way of imagining the past" (1989:5). The message is clear: one must not confuse memory with reality. The aim is to realise that memories of home are essentially now "dislocated memories [that] totter and twirl through the arena heavy with dust and indifference" (1989:153-154). Furthermore, it can even be said that Barnum – Breytenbach's alter ego – encourages Mano to make the journey back to "No man's land", to "trace a memory" and in the process to "move forward" so that he can reach the realisation that "memory is a faculty of the imagination" (1989:215). It may even be a necessary journey for Mano, and perhaps for any exile, to make. Said argues that the way in which we respond to memories of our past informs the way in which we view the future:

I have argued that exile can produce rancour and regret, as well as a sharpened vision. What has been left behind may either be mourned, or it can be used to provide a different set of lenses. Since almost by definition exile and memory go together, it is what one remembers of the past and how one remembers it that determine how one sees the future. (2001:xxxv)

In relation to the story of the exile in the novel, it would seem that the danger lies in a misinterpretation of memory as a fixed and permanent entity, leading to the belief that one can retain an unaltered memory of home in the mind – and that a return to such a home is then possible. In a conversation with other exiles, an actress from the Ivory Coast warns that situations in which illusions become too real have disastrous consequences. She describes passengers on a train who, under the influence of potions, experience hallucinations and jump off the train screaming.

“There you have the case of illusion becoming too real” (1989:112), she comments. To maintain that you can find yourself in the past, and in your memories – your illusions – is not a realistic attitude to have, as Mano finds out on his return to South Africa. Instead of finding himself, he becomes Anom Niemand – a nobody – unable to locate himself within the South African landscape. He is arrested, jailed, and sentenced to death. It is in prison, however, that his journey comes full circle and he realises that he had to walk along the path of memory to reach the awareness that it is the way in which one sees one’s past that shapes the future. He realises that to continue to move forward, cognisance of the past is necessary, but also the realisation that one cannot go back to a way of life that precedes the awareness gained through the loss of a place to call home.

Homelessness and (an in-between) Identity

Unable to locate home in either Europe or Africa, the characters in the novel experience a high degree of uncertainty in terms of belonging and, as a result, in terms of identity. The in-between nature of Meheret’s identity is exemplified in the description, “still not a writer, only a part-time journalist” (1989:5). In Mano’s case, the unstable nature of his identity is clear as Barnum points out that Mano is “an actor, by definition a man without an identity!” (162). Mano describes himself as “a knockout, a hack actor, a stateless unemployed marginal, a shifta” (6); a man who is constantly moving from one role to the next. Furthermore, Mano/Anom with his “neither-nor identity” (261) is caught between being black or white (as a result of his status as a ‘coloured’, to use the South African terminology).

The unstable, changing quality of Mano's identity is commented on by Reckwitz, who points out that Breytenbach's frequent use of the image of the chameleon¹² in the text is indeed an apt symbol for the metamorphosis that Mano regularly undergoes in an attempt not only to fit in with the various roles that he takes on as an actor, but also as he – and the other characters – attempt to adapt to the Parisian environment (1999:95). Barnum mocks his own attempts at integration with Parisian society by likening himself to “a Paris parrot” (1989:85) who tries to become like the French. He adds that “[h]e even underwent a heart transplant although it would seem as if he now had some rejection problems” (85). The attempt to adapt to another culture leads to a sense of multiple selves; to a sense of camouflaging oneself to fit in to different roles. In the process “your self becomes a slippery eel” (1989:26). This persistent attempt to overcome a sense of displacement leads to the creation of “translated men” (Rushdie 1991:17), forever translating and changing in an effort to blend with one's surroundings.

Breytenbach comments on one's ability to be different persons in different places. He embraces the notion of the multiplicity of the self and builds his characters around his different 'selves':

‘When you create a book with different characters in it, in effect you are multiplying yourself...dealing with multiple personalities...people have been confronted with the need to be different under different circumstances in order to survive. I couldn't live in France as an Afrikaner, for instance, because that would make me permanently handicapped, not only in terms of language, but also as somebody having to function in that environment. To be able to survive, to be able to move around, one has to adapt, one has to forge the capacity of becoming a Frenchman when it's necessary to be a Frenchman...you would have to develop the patience of the chameleon. We are obliged by our times... [to become] more acutely aware of the multiplicities we have in us...Now, that would be for me what transplantation is all about.’ (In Dimitriu 1997:73)

This is evident in the chameleon-like re-invention that Mano undergoes in the text. Mano's name is Italian for ‘hand’ (Jacobs 2004:166), which links him to the writing process, a process which Meheret

¹² The Dutch version of the novel is titled *Sporen van de kameleon* [*Tracks of the chameleon*]. (My translation.)

states “is metamorphosis” (1989:5). Mano’s daughter Mona is described by Barnum – who writes as if he were Mano – as “the hand writing me” (198). In addition, Mano re-enters South Africa as a white male, taking on the identity of Anom Niemand (234): a ‘nobody’ in a no man’s land, in search of his identity and an understanding of himself. Ironically, he is arrested in “a case of mistaken identity” (10) – which is perhaps meant to represent the futile effort of the migrant’s search for an identity that is rooted, and stable.

Mano’s search for his identity ends in the realisation that his identity – the migrant’s identity – is always in flux, never stable. Barnum comments that “[w]hoever pretended, Mano, that acting is play-acting, is make-believe?” (1989:67). The role of the actor is now a life role which demands that one is never settled, never at ease with oneself. The existence of the migrant is one in which there is no longer an instinctive belonging in any environment, and so Mano is forced to become, as Barnum comments, “several stories in one, several people, as we all are” (1989:187).

The unsettled state of the migrant’s identity is reflected in Breytenbach’s definition of himself as “a Whitish, Afrikaans-speaking South African African temporarily living outside the continent” (Goddard & Wessels 1992:57). He admits that “a writer is always concerned with the notion of identity” (Goddard & Wessels 1992:63). Thus the portrayal of the shifting, insecure identities of the characters in *Memory of Snow and of Dust* can be seen as an embodiment of the migrant’s identity: an unstable identity that is no longer rooted in a specific place; alienated from any sense of belonging, no matter where one is.

Furthermore, Breytenbach categorises himself as an inhabitant of ‘the Middle World’ where existence is characterised by rootlessness. He explains that

[t]o be of the Middle World is to have broken away from the parochial, to have left ‘home’ for good (or for worse) while carrying all of it with you and to have arrived on foreign shores (at the outset you thought of it as ‘destination’, but not for long) feeling at ease there without ever being ‘at home.’ Sensing too, that you have now fatally lost the place you may have wanted to run back to. Have you also lost face, or

is it the 'original face' now unveiled? Exile? Maybe. But exile is memory disease expressing itself in spastic and social behaviour: people find it a mysterious ailment and pity you greatly [...] Exile could be passage and you may well speak of 'passage people.' Yet, the Middle World is finality beyond exile. (2009b:143)

This insight into the exile's in-between identity exposes the pain that accompanies a privileged position as "the questioner and the implacable critic of society" (Breytenbach 1986:99).

"For a man who no longer has a homeland", Adorno suggests, "writing becomes a place to live" (in Said 2001:568). However, he negates this statement immediately in the following conclusion:

'[Yet] the demand that one harden oneself against self-pity implies the technical necessity to counter any slackening of intellectual tension with the utmost alertness...In the end, the writer is not even allowed to live in his writing.' (In Said 2001:568)

Adorno suggests that it is the rootlessness that results from an absence of home that nurtures the unsettled identity. Both he, and Said, see value in such an identity that, as a result of its own unsettled nature, is constantly able to unsettle others (Said 1994b:53). To act constantly as an unsettling force leads to the re-evaluation, and critical examination, of society. If one wants to retain the moral high-ground that such a position allows, then one simply cannot allow oneself to be at home anywhere.

However, Breytenbach offers an alternative suggestion, one that can possibly allow for a certain sense of stability to be found even within the unsettled state of identity experienced by the migrant: "I would suggest that one way to attain a semblance or a season of coherent sanity would be to accrue, to deepen the processes of awareness, the actual awareness of what is happening to the extent that you are consciously aware of what is happening to you" (in Dimitriu 1997:74). For me, *Memory of Snow and of Dust* embodies such a journey towards greater awareness for Mano (and perhaps also for Breytenbach) so that he is able at last to realise what is happening to him, and to achieve temporarily some sense of stability and sanity. In the process, we as readers are allowed an

insight into the attempt of exiles to find a sense of coherence and belonging in a world in which they are homeless.

The Novel as a Book without a 'Home'

Breytenbach's novel offers further insight into the experience of homelessness as it 'migrates' between genres, without belonging exclusively within any fixed category; it is a book without a 'home'. Neither autobiography, nor travelogue, nor conventional fictional prose, the book – which has elements of all the above, as well as poetry, plays, and essayistic writing – does not belong to any specific genre. The explosion of the form of the novel can be read as a representation of the fragmentation of Breytenbach's/the migrant's inner state.

The fragmentary nature of the text is commented on in the book itself by the character, Baron Samedi, who says:

'People, good people – don't scrap like that...Although it must be part of the image we bring you, Anom. All these fragments, you ask? Truly necessary, the shards? Yes, rather. It is like a fellow sickening to write a book. How could there be a core of mutation or a pure central stem except you have all the shreds, all these pages like leaves on a tree?...you should live in accordance with the mirror image that you already are.' (1989:251-252)

The book functions as a mirror image of the painful experience of the exile: the inability to belong in a world in which exiles are rendered homeless. Breytenbach's fragmentary style is commented on by various critics, for instance Reckwitz (1999), Coetzee (2001), Grobler (2002), Jacobs (2004), Anker (2007), and Dimitriu (2008a, 2008b). These critics acknowledge that Breytenbach's style of writing refuses to belong to any one particular genre; his writings reflect an enhanced sense of de-centredness rather than embracing any form of fixity.

The use of fragmentation – a postmodern device – is one of the definitive characteristics of migrant writing. Boehmer, in a discussion of Salman Rushdie's essay "Imaginary Homelands", notes that

expatriate writers young and old speak passionately of their betwixt-and-between, 'not-quite' position as aesthetic boon and 'net gain'...the experience of cultural translation not only stimulates invention, but may also give valuable perspective on conditions in a writer's 'home' nation. Moreover, being 'borne across' equips out-of-country authors with the materials to give imaginative form to their dislocated worlds. Where the early modernists...often lamented the fragmentation of trusted traditions, cosmopolitans enthusiastically embrace it. (1995:240)

Memory of Snow and of Dust can be seen as giving imaginative form to the dislocated world of the migrant. The novel is a fictional representation of the alienation and dislocation that the migrant experiences. In transgressing genre boundaries the novel indicates a sense of no longer belonging within any fixed category; and, as such, functions as a fictional representation of the homelessness that the migrant experiences.

The Painful Initiation into an Alternative Conception of Home

In the rootlessness that is such an integral part of the migrant's existence, a constant yearning for home remains. Mano's journey to South Africa can also be seen as a journey of initiation towards a new state of awareness in which an alternative construction of home is imagined. Similarly, his death can be interpreted as the necessary sacrifice in this rite of passage that will allow him to move from one state of consciousness to another. As Barnum explains: "Sacrifice, we all know, gives second sight" (1989:187), and Mano's life is the sacrifice that is extracted from him so that he can be initiated into a new understanding of home. In this awareness a new level of consciousness is reached in which home becomes rooted in the mind, rather than in any physical location. Rushdie explains that "[t]he migrant intellect roots itself in itself, in its own capacity for imagining and reimagining the world" (1991:280). It is in prison that Mano – as Anom – becomes aware of his own

capacity to re-imagine the world, and it is this capacity that allows him to reconstruct an alternative vision of home.

In order to reconstruct an alternative vision of home a journey of initiation needs to be undertaken. The image of initiation in relation to Breytenbach's work has been discussed by Grobler (2002). She notes that the initiation rite serves as a rite of passage from "one layer of consciousness [to] another" (2002:31) and that the initiation process is a painful one that "is always accompanied by a sacrifice, a fatal choice or the denial of oneself – an insight which is [also] embodied in [Breytenbach's] paintings" (2002:31). Anom's journey simultaneously leads to his death, and to an initiation into a more complex understanding of home. It is during his time in prison that he is able to gain a heightened insight into the alternative reality of home that takes shape as he continues 'the noble art of walking': "I know that the path is a way of walking" (1989:294) he says. The journey is one that eventually takes him home.

The novel offers another image of initiation through the character, Victoire Mumpata, in one of Anom's reflections. In this particular reflection there is a symbolic image of Mumpata floating by in the river. His body is wrapped in a grey blanket, his head "bobbing", "bluish and bald" (1989:242). Although he appears to be dead from the above description (yet perhaps he was truly dead, and is reborn), he crawls out of the river, takes all of his clothes off, and walks towards the nearby settlement. When he is asked where he is going, he replies: "I'm going home" (243). This image is significant in that it anticipates the end of the novel: it captures the element of death and rebirth that is associated with the painful movement towards a new state of awareness. One is reborn into the realisation that home is no longer a physical place; an alternative vision of home presents itself. This alternative home is a place in which a sense of belonging can be felt, in which one can feel settled to a certain degree, in contrast to the alienating physical reality that has been experienced up until now. A home can be found within awareness: within a sense of belonging that is located in

the mind, separate from the material reality. However, a rite of passage needs to be undertaken before a new state of awareness, and belonging, can be experienced.

A rite of passage allows one access to an alternative reality through the transition from one state of awareness to another. In a study of representations of liminality in literature, Viljoen and Van der Merwe (2007) discuss rites of passage. They refer to stages in the rite of passage, and draw on Van Gennep's model of initiation. Their description bears a clear resemblance to the examples of initiation in the novel:

initiations are symbolically...separated from their usual social life and status. They cross the limen, in other words, into a new transitional state where the social fabric they are used to is allowed to unravel. They enter a different space and time that is so radically different from the ordinary that it cannot be expressed in ordinary language, but has to be described in metaphors or states of the in-between, like death, going underground or under water, going into eclipse. In this state of anti-structure elements of culture can be recombined into new configurations. The old self dies so that a new self can be born...the stage of liminality, is therefore a stage of transformation where...a new sense of *communitas* can come into being. (2007:11)

For Anom, the new transitional state is represented by the prison environment in which he is cut off from everything, and everyone. Anom's death results in a rebirth into a higher state of consciousness; he recognises a new home in an alternative reality and, at the same time, a vision for the future. Furthermore, Mumpata's emergence from the river is clearly another image of initiation. Thus, both characters die and are reborn so that they can reach another level of consciousness in which 'new configurations' of home are possible.

Upon Anom's arrival in Heaven, Barnum – Breytenbach's alter ego – is there to greet Anom. Unsure of where he is, Anom asks "Where am I?" To which Barnum replies: "You mean to tell me you don't know? You are home, here, in Heaven" (1989:292). Anom is led, by Barnum, towards a new awareness of home. The pain of this journey is voiced by Anom who, when he arrives in Heaven, lashes out at Barnum(/Breyten) by saying: "Why did you do this to me? Why *me*? Why did you want

me to walk the rope to get to this stage?’” (1989:292). Mano’s return to South Africa, his arrest, imprisonment, and death, are part of a rite of passage into a new state of awareness. The journey is a necessary one, as expressed in several of Breytenbach’s works, for an alternate state of consciousness to emerge in which the concept of home can continually be re-imagined, and re-invented. Ultimately, it is within the painful experience of exile that a new homeland is located: a “homeland of perpetual movement” (Breytenbach 1996:40-41) that exists within an awareness that recognises, and embraces, the instability of the exile’s reality.

In conclusion, this chapter has explored the difficulty that the characters in the novel experience in locating home, whether in Europe or in Africa. The central theme of this chapter has been the negation of home as experienced in both Europe and Africa (as the characters realise upon revisiting Africa, a return home is no longer possible). Memories of home need to be recognised as constructions of the mind that do not correlate with reality, and so the rootlessness that the characters experience needs to be embraced as part of their life, and part of their identity. The journey that ensues as a result of this dislocated state of existence is one towards a sense of belonging that can be found in an alternative, more complex concept of home (as discussed further on in my dissertation).

CHAPTER TWO: EXILE

Introduction

Not being at home anywhere, the migrant is in exile everywhere. The continuous dislocation of exile is both an alienating and an enriching experience. The migrant writer is able to offer us observations and critical reflections on a life that is shaped by an awareness of multiple realities, settings, cultures, and traditions – an experience that is now ubiquitous in a world that is characterised by border crossings, and migration. The exile speaks from an ‘in-between’ space that is located at the junction between cultures and countries and does not totally belong to any one nationality or community. It is the voice of the exile which, drawing on multiple sources, gives a valuable new perspective on our contemporary experience and directs us towards ‘new ways of seeing’.

This chapter concentrates on how *Memory of Snow and of Dust* contributes to a renewed understanding of the experience of the exile. I intend to show that the novel, which is infused with Breytenbach’s own views on exile, contributes to a literary field that explores the migrant experience (Rushdie 1991, Bhabha 1994, Said 1994a, 1994b, 2001, Loomba 1998, and Smith 2004). Being a novel of exiled characters – for instance, Mano, Meheret, Barnum, Walser, Mumpata, Diallo, Kathy Human, and Ka’afir – *Memory of Snow and of Dust* is a reflection on the complexity of the exile’s experience, and the effect that this experience has on the exile’s life, thoughts, and perceptions of the world.

Reflections on Migrancy and Exile in Postcolonial Theory

As I have suggested, postcolonial studies has served the purpose of “dismantling...centre/margin (periphery) models of culture [that call] into question the claims of any culture to possess a fixed, pure and homogenous body of values” (Ashcroft *et al.* 2000:37) and undermines the foundation

upon which colonial systems of thought were built. The migrant/exile is the modern embodiment of the postcolonial drive to continue to challenge modern systems of thought and structures of power in an era that – although no longer characterised by colonial domination – faces the challenges of xenophobia, mass displacement, and a culture of migration in the aftermath of the colonial era.

The migrant writer is in a privileged position to act as the narrator of the modern experience of cross cultural existence. Smith suggests that in a world in which the boundaries between local and global are becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish, migrants “[b]y becoming mobile and by making narratives out of this mobility...escape the control of states and national borders and the limited, linear ways of understanding themselves which states promote in their citizens” (2004:245). Speaking from the margins of society the exile/migrant attempts to dismantle the binaries that are still operating in our society and that form the basis of power relationships that are often abused.

The exile’s narrative offers us meditations on our contemporary reality, and shape emerging systems of thought by offering fresh perspectives on issues of identity and belonging. Much of the emerging migrant literature seeks to give creative expression to the experience of exile in a new global era in which migration is recognised as a shared global experience. It is novels such as *Memory of Snow and of Dust* that offer a fictional representation of this experience, thus contributing to changing the way in which we see the world.

One of the characteristics of the exile’s experience is the condition of ‘double vision’. In their reflections on exile, Rushdie, Bhabha, Quayson, and Said, all refer to the double vision that the migrant experiences. Rushdie reflects on the “double perspective” (1991:19) of the migrant who experiences new ways of seeing; Bhabha refers to a vision that is disorientating, and comments that “the truest eye may now belong to the migrant’s double vision” (1994:5); Quayson refers to the “double vision” (2000:141), “double consciousness” (143) or the “split consciousness” (145) that occurs as a result of cross cultural initiation; and Said points out that the migrant has a simultaneous

awareness of two settings, two cultures, and two 'homes' (2001:186). This condition of double vision is a painful reminder that migrants/exiles are no longer able to experience an instinctive sense of belonging in any place, but are permanently exiled to a space between 'worlds'. In his description of the migrant writer's position, Rushdie expresses the situation as follows:

Our identity is at once plural and partial. Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles. (1991:15)

Similarly, Smith points out that "[n]ow more than ever...we need the individual who can explore, in writing and art, what life is like in a world where everything is becoming borderspace" (2004:247). Breytenbach's novel explores the complexity of the exile's existence as it delves into what is lost as well as gained.

The Dislocation and Alienation of Exile

In *Memory of Snow and of Dust* the characters are portrayed as dislocated individuals in an environment in which they move on the peripheries. Mano and Walser, on a walk through Paris, are described as "nomads moving through [the] city-state without being part of it...they can be found on a bench in a public garden on the edge of Chinatown" (1989:72). This peripheral existence is summed up in Breytenbach's description of the exile as a "borderline case" (1986:75), living on the 'edges' of society. The pervasive sense of a loss of 'home' remains with exiles, preventing them from finding a sense of stability and belonging in their surroundings. Mano uses the following poetic image to illustrate the nature of the dislocation: "an exile lives abroad as a moon does in a lake" (1989:23). Unable fully to immerse themselves deeply enough in the foreign environment, although

they attempt to become a part of their surroundings, exiles have to be content with a surface-belonging. Breytenbach likens this experience to being a translation. He states that ““you will be a translation...a translated version of yourself”” in your surroundings (in Dimitriu 1996:98).

Mano realises that he is not fully functional in his Parisian surroundings. He comments on “living the imitation (mutation) of a normal life so far from his natural environment [Africa]” (1989:24). Furthermore, he describes exile as “the living proof that death doesn’t kill” (25). The psychological effect of the emotions caused by a rootless existence in a culture of which you will never be a part results in a kind of death for the characters: they are forced to accept their peripheral existence and surface-belonging in Paris, as a new way of life. They long for the stability and security they once knew, in a culture in which they were once fully immersed. However, it becomes increasingly clear to the characters that “exile...is fundamentally a discontinuous state of being...[that] cut[s] [one] off from [one’s] roots, [one’s] land, [one’s] past” (Said 2001:177).

The novel itself can be seen as a fictional representation of the dislocation generated by exile. As I have noted, the reader is relentlessly ‘alienated’ by the fragmentary style. The novel unfolds unchronologically, shifting between times, forms, places, and narrators, frequently interrupting itself and then resuming the narrative again, at a later stage. According to Anker (2007), who has undertaken a study of the nomadic subject in Breytenbach’s work, the use of this artistic strategy – a characteristic of Breytenbach’s work – is a simulation of the unsettledness of the dislocated lifestyle of the exile, and a rejection of a view of life that embraces any form of unity or fixity (2007:355). In *Memory of Snow and of Dust* we are given an insight into the exile’s life that debunks the romantic vision of the exile, revealing instead pain and a sense of loss.

The sense of loss is further compounded by the loss of the mother-tongue. Breytenbach explains that, as an exile in a ‘foreign’ environment, ““you are in fact translating yourself all the time, you have to interpret yourself. People around you cannot experience you instinctively. You have to

explain yourself. Because you are a foreigner to them, you are an intruder to them” (in Dimitriu 1996:98). Having lost the option of communicating in the mother tongue in their new surroundings, exiles are forced to use the language of the environment in which they find themselves. The “lack of fit between the language available and the place experienced” (Ashcroft *et al.* 2000:181) – a postcolonial concern that is illustrated in *Memory of Snow and of Dust* – highlights the impossibility of a unified existence.

The inability to use one’s mother-tongue in foreign surroundings leads to what Meheret identifies as a loss of “the daily bread of self-knowledge” (1989:113). In this sense, one experiences a loss of ‘home’ for a second time, as one can no longer use the language in which one previously ‘lived’. In time this affects one’s ability instinctively to feel, think and live in one’s mother-tongue. One learns to express oneself in another language. The (mother) tongue becomes “a bleeding stump” (1989:61), making the experience of exile “doubly difficult, choked up as it were, spitting a reddish substance in the toilet bowls of his dreamwakes” (1989:61). Cut off from the mother-tongue, exiles become “voiceless” (1989:61); “caught in a cleft mouth” (Breytenbach 1986:211) as they are forced to use a language that is foreign to navigate their environment, their lives, and their emotions.

The use of Afrikaans expressions in the book, as translated literally from Afrikaans into English, is a textual representation of the dislocation that the exile experiences. Expressions like: “snothead” (61); “Now I long for people I *never* met in my whole goddamn life” (220); and “we exchanged little cows and calves as our saying goes” (1989:227) are direct translations into English of Afrikaans expressions: ‘snotkop’; ‘Nou verlang ek na iemand wat ek nog *nooit* in my hele lewe ontmoet het nie’; and ‘praat oor koeitjies en kalfies’. These expressions show how Breytenbach is literally translating his language, as well as himself, into a different environment. The use of these literal translations in the novel emphasises the dislocation that the exile experiences. The translations in the text represent “a kind of permanent exile” (De Man, in Bhabha 1994:228) of the mother tongue in the exile’s environment. Bhabha explains that

[t]he 'time' of translation consists in that movement of meaning, the principle and practice of a communication that, in the words of de Man 'puts the original in motion to decanonise it, giving it the movement of fragmentation, a wandering of errance, a kind of permanent exile'. (1994:228)

The nuances of the Afrikaans language, and the idiomatic expressions, are permanently exiled once another language is used, as these are aspects that cannot be captured by another language in the same way as expressed in Afrikaans. Breytenbach's use of nuances that are characteristic of the Afrikaans language, as noted by Viljoen (1995), and the visible movement between Afrikaans and English in his writing, as commented on by J.M. Coetzee (2001), illustrate the attempt to retain certain aspects of the mother-tongue in his writing. This practice fictionally represents the longing for the mother tongue in an environment in which it cannot be used to communicate.

Lastly, when the exile reverts back to the mother tongue, the experience is no longer pure, for now "[y]ou end up speaking all languages with an accent, even the distant one of your youth, the one you kept for love and anger" (Breytenbach 1996:43). Thus, part of "the anguished awareness of exile" (1989:113) – as identified by Meheret – is a loss of language, not just in your new environment, but also to a degree in the old one.

The loss of language contributes to feelings of alienation and dislocation that become a permanent part of the exile's existence in an environment that cannot instinctively be experienced as home. The characters in the novel move around in the Parisian milieu without being able to experience a sense of belonging; instead, they carry around with them an acute awareness of their dislocation and 'un-belonging'.

The 'Double Vision' of the Exile

As briefly mentioned above, exiles live in a peripheral position between two worlds that gives rise to a condition of 'double vision'. Throughout the novel, the characters experience Europe in contrast to Africa. Meheret's descriptions of Paris as "cold", "grey", and "black" (1989:5) are followed by descriptions of the warmth and communal roasting of coffee beans in Ethiopia (12). The culturally different ways of telling time is also highlighted by Meheret's explanation that "one o'clock [is] your seven a.m. in Europe" (15). Her reflections on how she would have prepared for her pregnancy in Ethiopia by seeing a *dabtara* and undertaking the traditional rituals (167) show her constant awareness of a previous way of life that belongs to her past and is unlinked to her present surroundings. Said explains that "[f]or an exile, habits of life, expression, or activity in the new environment inevitably occur against the memory of these things in another environment. Thus both the new and old environments are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally" (2001:186). Meheret's memories of 'home' in Africa illustrate the 'double vision' that influences the way in which she experiences her new surroundings. This double vision simultaneously incorporates knowledge of both old and new environments into a distinct way of seeing that is a definitive part of the exile's existence.

Meheret's reflection upon a return to Paris illustrates her awareness of the 'double' reality that she inhabits. She describes the grey fog that lies over Paris as resembling "the tattered remnants of a once flamboyant African toga" (1989:160). This observation illustrates how her 'vision' is influenced simultaneously by a sense of Europe and Africa. The exile looks at the new reality through the eyes of a previous reality.

At the end of the novel, Anom realises that although the condition of double vision is a constant reminder of the alienation and dislocation of exile, there is great value to be found in this condition.

Anom's drafting of a memoir – "On The Noble Art of Walking in No Man's Land" (1989:222) – brings him to the realisation that

The holy number is not One, but Two. It is in the relationship between One and One that the ineffable is established. Can there be any awareness of the fugacity, the furtiveness, the impermanence of life, except with reference to the other? One is self-fulfilling, is perfect. Two contains in it the break, the breakdown, the absence which will take you over the edge of yourself. (1989:301-302)

Anom's realisation reveals that it is the double vision that makes it possible for the exile to be taken 'over the edge' of normal experience, a process which brings about valuable new insights for him. Anom's revelation shows how the exile's double vision results in a unique perspective that incorporates knowledge of a past and a present environment in reflections on contemporary reality. This unique vision also acknowledges that in an age of migration we need to redefine the world in ways that reflect the flux, incoherence and instability of our age. Exiles are in privileged positions that allow them to draw on multiple dimensions as they migrate between cultures, and between 'worlds'. Although the duality of the exile's existence negates the possibility of being "a singular, coherent person again" (Breytenbach, in Dimitriu 1997:74), it is the condition of double vision that facilitates a greater capacity to reflect critically on the contemporary world. Breytenbach's novel enhances our understanding of the exile's experience, and encourages us to consider alternative ways of interpreting our modern reality.

It is interesting to note that in relation to the "double lives" (Bhabha 1994:213) that are led by migrants, *Memory of Snow and of Dust* makes use of multiple artistic strategies – incorporating both postmodern and postcolonial devices. The novel has been identified as a postmodern text (by – *inter alia* – Squire 1995, Reckwitz 1999, and Jacobs 2004) as it makes use of various postmodern strategies such as "dissemination, dispersal, indeterminacy, hyper-reality, normless pastiche, *bricolage*, difference, aporia, play and suchlike" (Quayson 2000:138). However, *Memory of Snow and of Dust* displays postcolonial traits as well (as identified by Dimitriu 2008a, 2008b) as a text which

focuses – with a social concern that is not secondary to an artistic concern – on marginalised people from the peripheries of the world. Quayson believes that the blending of postmodern and postcolonial strategies allows us the full advantage of “their multiple illumination of conditions in the contemporary world” (2000:133). *Memory of Snow and of Dust* is, according to my study, a “meditation upon real (and imagined) conditions in the contemporary world...contributing to an understanding of the world in which we live” (Quayson 2000:134) – an element which is shared by both postmodern and postcolonial texts¹³. It is especially on “questions of marginality” (2000:133) that Quayson argues “the two [postmodernism and postcolonialism] can be brought together” (2000:133). It is such an awareness that is represented through Breytenbach’s use of both postmodern and postcolonial devices in the novel.

The Difficulty of Adapting to a New Way of Life: a Liminal Existence

As exiles are constantly aware of a past social environment, the danger of becoming consumed by the absence of a lost home and, as indicated earlier, a lost language, is a real threat. It is not a simple task to let go of the past, and Breytenbach warns us that exiles who cling to the past and fail to adapt within a foreign environment face a grim reality. Typically, these exiles mix mostly with other expatriates/exiles – “sucking [each other’s] lifeblood like leech[es]” (1989:185) – and become absorbed by a sense of loss, sorrow, and dislocation. For instance, the following observation is made: “[m]ost exiles take pride in their differentness and they squat behind the ramparts of their native sound-castles, sucking and masticating stale bread; they take refuge, they exile themselves there as in a home away from home” (1989:61). There is the added danger that when exiles form their own communities, “violent sentiments about racial purity and racial exclusivism” emerge

¹³ The use of both postmodern and postcolonial strategies in Breytenbach’s writing has been noted by, for instance, Chapman 2006, and Dimitriu 2008a, 2008b.

(Loomba *et al.* 2005:75). Said comments that “the sheer fact of isolation and displacement...produces [in the exile] the kind of narcissistic masochism that resists all efforts at amelioration, acculturation, and community” (2001:183). This can result in a dangerous situation for the exile, who remains rooted in the past and cannot move forward to adapt to a new way of life.

In the novel, Barnum considers writing a film script about an exile who does not learn to function in his present environment. He explains that the script would be based on a painter called Serpent, “a black South African painter” (1989:82) living in Paris. It would focus on the notion of alienation as Serpent realises that, no matter how long he lives in Paris, he is “doomed to remain a ‘foreigner’” (83). Barnum reveals that “Serpent would be shown living in his small flat, painting, attached by hand and goggles to his painting like a pilot obsessively flying over a lost landscape” (83). In the end, with death approaching, Serpent would be shown to suffer from delirium, facing a lonely death in his flat in Paris. This story shows how the inability to move beyond a ‘lost’ past can lead to physical and spiritual ‘death’.

To prevent extreme failure of adjustment, the novel suggests that continual self-invention is necessary. However, as *Memory of Snow and of Dust* illustrates, the metamorphosis that is required to ‘translate’ the self in a new environment is a difficult process. The novel shows the way forward in all its complexities and reveals that the death of our old inflexible identities that cling to the past “is but the casting off of old skin” (1989:299). Anom’s reflections in prison ““On The Noble Art of Walking in No Man’s Land”” (222) further illustrate the importance of a movement beyond the past. He notes that “[i]n my cell – now permanently shackled as is the case with all condemns – I quite forgot the art of walking, I became impervious to the outside world” (268). Although Anom is literally in prison, his reflections can be read as a commentary on the state of ‘mental’ imprisonment that can be experienced if one becomes trapped by the dislocation of exile, and consumed by the constant longing for that which has been lost; that which is in the past. When a chameleon is smuggled into his cell Anom realises that it is the ability to “change colour” (282) and to “adapt to

life” (281) that allows the chameleon to live. This means that, for exiles, to transcend their often painful existence, they need to be able to adapt themselves to different environments. Anom’s question, “Is walking an unnaturally acquired habit, an awkward gait?” (272), emphasises that it is not an easy process for the exile to let go of the old self, and of a past reality, in search of a new future vision. However, real danger lies in losing the ability to adapt, for then, like Serpent, you find yourself ‘obsessively flying over a lost landscape’ and going nowhere.

Part of the art of adaptation lies in the exile’s ability to embrace a liminal existence on society’s peripheries. The use of liminal spaces – i.e. the prison, the off-stage conception of Mona (Mano and Meheret’s child) – is a postcolonial device that reflects the exile’s peripheral position in society. Barnum says to Meheret that the writer has the duty to unearth the “sordid everyday rituals” and to “walk through the outer regions of our awareness, consciously off-centre, along the edges of our central lake of experience” (1989:62). *Memory of Snow and of Dust* promotes the idea that liminal spaces need to be explored, and that these spaces are “more authentic” (1989:24) than clearly configured centres. The importance of liminal spaces is highlighted in the novel by Mona’s conception, which takes place not on stage, but off stage, on the periphery of the playhouse. Clearly, Breytenbach attributes importance to the events that take place on society’s peripheries as events that prod us into considering alternative perspectives.

There is a movement in postcolonial theory to reconstruct the ways in which we interpret reality from the social margins. Bhabha points out that

[t]here is an attempt to construct a theory of social imaginary that requires no subject expressing originary anguish (West), no singular self-image (Gates), no necessary or eternal belongingness (Hall). *The contingent and the liminal* become the times and the spaces for the historical representation of the subjects of cultural difference in a postcolonial criticism. (1994:179) [My emphasis]

In this new approach the focus falls on the liminal, and those who occupy liminal spaces in society.

Memory of Snow and of Dust allows us to gain an insight into the exile’s ability to function within the

margins of society. In literary representations of liminality, it is, as Gaylard points out, “that very peripherality [which] is its strength for it allows fiction to exhume the forgotten, the unseen, the unsaid and the marginalised in culture” (2005:11).

To be able to speak from the margins of society is, as Breytenbach notes, “a blessing in disguise...[as] your senses are sharpened to needles with which you skewer the grey flesh of dull daily appearances” (1986:211). He realises that living a liminal existence sharpens the critical faculties of the exile. The importance of cross-cultural living in our modern world, what Appiah (2006) refers to as “cosmopolitanism”, can be defined as the ability to “simultaneously...be rooted and rootless, attached and detached; ...to retain the trickster quality, always somewhat sceptical, whether looking North or South, always the precursor of alternatives” (Chapman 2006: 354). According to Chapman, Breytenbach would “endorse Appiah’s conception of the cosmopolitan” (2006:352). Breytenbach continues to seek an alternative understanding of the world in which we live. His work illustrates a relentless exploration of ways of creatively representing the exile’s experience. In *Memory of Snow and of Dust* he illustrates that he is capable of “weav[ing] a rich account of the world we live in, an account committed to forwarding notions of plurality, temporality, flux and change, and to show the diverse ways in which human existence and its experiences are created” (Grobler 2002:165).

Exile, Movement, and Creation

Breytenbach is very aware that new conceptual frameworks are required in an era in which worlds interact with each other, and increased border crossings take place. He identifies *Memory of Snow and of Dust* as a novel which migrates between countries: “one third of [the narrative] takes place in West Africa and one third in South Africa...the other third...takes place...outside Africa [Europe]” (Goddard & Wessels 1992:57). The characters are depicted as they move through various settings:

Switzerland, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Spain, and South Africa. The characters' travels to various destinations, and the movement of the narrative from one setting to another, reinforce the motif of journeying in the novel, simultaneously reaffirming that a sense of belonging evades exiles no matter where they go.

The constant movement from one location to another represents the restlessness and rootlessness of exile. The emphasis on movement and travelling can be seen as an external manifestation of the inner journey that the exile has to endure in order to reach a new consciousness of 'home'. Anom describes this journey as his "true mission" (1989:286) – the mission "of scaling [his] own life" (286). It is a journey that is chartered in his reflections "On The Noble Art of Walking in No Man's Land" – the second part of the novel. His reflections show us that this inner journey is a painful initiation into another level of consciousness that – the novel suggests – is required as a rite of passage towards an alternative home. It is through "the process and procedure of walking" (1989:251)¹⁴ that the exile becomes a traveller who is able "to live in new rhythms and rituals...*cross[ing] over*, *travers[ing]* territory, and abandon[ing] fixed positions, all the time" (Said 2001:404). Through constant movement, the exile rejects all notions of fixity and journeys into what can be new realms of awareness.

Breytenbach's novel encourages movement. The aim is to have the reader 'walk' through the text and to construct a meaning through the mixture of texts, narratives and comments by the various characters and 'authors'. Through this process, the reader is able to gain an insight into the nomadic existence of the exile. The text, which is a series of fragmented narratives, starts with Meheret "telling [her unborn child] of [her] past" (1989:11). She is later interrupted by Barnum, "the ghost writer" (19), who tells us of Meheret and Mano's meeting in Switzerland at Mont Aigu. Barnum then writes a reflection piece ("A Touch of the Moon") from Meheret's perspective. In the next chapter

¹⁴ De Certeau's study on 'Walking in the City' (2000) is of particular interest as it explores the liberating experience of walking.

Meheret continues telling the unborn child of her past and ancestors, and then Ka'afir and Polichinelle are introduced (50) as mouthpieces for the author discussing the social and political situation in South Africa. In this manner the text continues its journeying via fragmentation.

Jacobs comments on the multi-dimensional nature of Breytenbach's writing by saying: "the fragmentedness, the gaps, and the collage-like quality of language, imagery, thinking and structure... [reflect]...not the seamless expression of a unified self but...his nomadism" (2004:170). The novel shares with us insights on the fragmentary, restless existence of the exile. The reader is encouraged to see the novel itself as a journey: "...words become images when penned down on paper. And words are steps and steps constitute movement and movement is walking. Walking is a story. The story is a walk...Isn't life the process of filming and editing a long walk to nowhere?" (1989:223). Breytenbach's use of the de-familiarising, alienating techniques employed in the text are aimed at making the reader (and characters) "walk the long way around" (1989:251) in order to gain new insights into the experience of exile. In Rushdie's words, the author becomes a "travelling adventurer [who] can, after all, gain knowledge that is not available elsewhere, and then, by living to tell the tale, offer that knowledge to us" (1991:225).

With no physical place to call home, the exile becomes a nomad, living an unsettled existence. This existence is characterised by the double vision of 'home' and 'exile'. However, instead of finding the condition of double vision disturbing, the novel suggests that this state of heightened awareness should be embraced as it may become a catalyst for acts of creation. According to Boehmer, "the migrant novel...draws attention to the regenerative experience of straddling two worlds" (1995:241). The in-between position that the exile occupies in society encourages creative activity. In the novel the characters are all, in one way or another, involved in acts of creation: Barnum is a novelist; Meheret an aspiring novelist; and Mano's profession as an actor involves a continual self-reinvention, a form of creation. The exile's choice to express him/herself creatively is commented on by Said, who notes that

[m]uch of the exile's life is taken up with compensating for disorienting loss by creating a new world to rule. It is not surprising that so many exiles seem to be novelists...each of these occupations requires a minimal investment in objects and places a great premium on mobility and skill. (2001:181)

It is through acts of creation that exiles are able to find a way to transcend their material reality. As a result of these processes of creation, "the earth of exile is not only bitter" (1989:199). This sentiment is expressed in a lament called "Lovesong to an Unborn Child" (192) written by Barnum – from Mano's perspective – in which Mano "weep[s] over the future" (193) as he will never see his unborn daughter, Mona. However, through Mona's creation he is able to "go beyond the sepulchral rhythm of the self" (199) and "kn[o]w again how trembling and sweet one note of happiness can ring in a penumbra of space" (199). He exclaims that she is "the hidden Africa of [his] bones" (201); that he "writes to give birth to [his] love" (201), and in the process Mona becomes "the hand writing [him]" (198). The lament illustrates the regenerative energy that the experience of exile can bring forth. Through the act of creation exiles are able to move beyond their realities, and enter into new realms of consciousness.

Breytenbach explains that as an exile "[y]ou learn about creation...you also come to realise that...creation [is]...a reordering of existing images" (1996:42). The re-ordering of images in the novel returns to the motif of journeying as it symbolises movement. In the above-mentioned lament, Mano repeatedly says "THERE IS NO DEATH" (1989:294) drawing on the belief that death and life are interchangeable. As Anom expresses it, the two are intertwined: "[t]hat death to which I'm attached through the navel string" (1989:293). Through death you give birth to new life, and so exile – "the living proof that death doesn't kill" (1989:25) – may become a precursor to creation, and new life. Breytenbach's illustration of the subtle link between life and death indicates that the dislocation and alienation of exile can lead to acts of creation that concentrate on another reality and transcend temporarily the painful awareness of exile. Breytenbach's belief that life and death are interchangeable draws on African beliefs of metamorphosis, as well as on Zen Buddhist beliefs. This

multi-dimensional view of reality is characteristic of a time in which cultural products are increasingly becoming hybrids, “tying together influences from many traditions, as existing not so much *in* a specific place and time as *between* different places at once” (Smith 2004:245). It is the exile’s position between cultures, and between ‘worlds’, that allows for exciting new possibilities in a process of cross-cultural creation.

Transcending the ‘Prison’ of Exile

Exiles can either view their peripheral position in society as a space that sets them apart and enriches them, or as a space that constricts and confines them to a liminal existence. In the novel there is a striking image of Meheret in her flat with the windows closed, standing in front of the mirror, possibly wearing her one traditional dress. She remarks that “[i]t is like being in a glass cage herself” (1989:185). This image could be seen as a representation of prison. Prisons exist to separate certain people from others in society: exiles are outsiders to society, and are separated from others through their sense of loss. Breytenbach comments that exiles isolate themselves by “carrying the absence within...as an unspeakable disease – and this disease keeps [them] separate from others” (1986:75). This separation is further enforced by their recognition of themselves as exiles, which Breytenbach describes as the “double bind of exile: it is you sensing yourself as an exile, but it is also others looking at you as an exile” (in Dimitriu 1996:98). This can lead to a form of self-imprisonment in which the exile views a liminal existence as a space from which he or she wishes to escape, but cannot. Consequently, exiles become psychological prisoners of their circumstances, living lives that pay tribute to a lost world, unable to live a more fulfilling life in their present reality.

The inability to embrace a liminal existence affects exiles’ functionality within their surroundings. The exiles’ lives then become a type of prison that constricts movement. While Anom is in prison he

becomes, temporarily, a victim of despair. He is shown lying in the foetal position – defeated by his surroundings –

quiet petrifact, clean as the conscience of a firearm without the merest whiff of gunpowder-smoke in the barrel, clean as a tooth from which the last fibre of meat has long been sucked, silent as an upper lip with neither inkling nor education...silent and clean as a human in prison and that prison the concretising of inner life. (1989:248)

The abandonment to despair leads to a carceral experience that constricts the movements of one's 'inner life'. As a result, exiles become feeble victims of their circumstances. And in the end, they lead lives that resemble death, for as Anom realises, "[i]t is quite possible to die while nominally still alive" (1989:257). He describes his resolution to snap out of defeat, to return to movement: "[w]ithout any coordination, except as mechanical programmatic action and reaction. Without any central control..." (1989:257) he starts to live again. He rises above the despair, and moves beyond it, as he works on his memoir, "'On The Noble Art of Walking in No Man's Land'" (222). This allows him to lay to rest his past, and his self, and proceed to a new realm of consciousness that represents the future.

In the situation mentioned above, the prison functions as an external expression of the internal condition of the exile. Yet, paradoxically, it is in this most unlikely space that creative activity occurs. It is here that the realisation dawns on Anom that although "[i]t is not possible to walk away from prison" (258) – or from the perpetual, inescapable state of exile – an alternative is at hand. Through (enforced) states of stillness, new mental landscapes can be explored. The aim is to achieve an "immobile mobility" (1989:286) which will release one from the 'prison of exile', allowing one to build an alternative landscape in the mind. This re-conceptualisation of home allows one – in Breytenbach's words – to "[possess] every possible landscape. There I know that I own nothing, that the mind can be a mirror to nothingness, that the land itself is a heart of coming and going to be bequeathed to a beloved" (1996:161). Like the colonial writers who – Boehmer holds – used to turn

to “their uneasy marginality or supplementarity” as a “position for self-reconstruction” (1995:117), so migrant writers – including Breytenbach – continue to do the same in today’s world.

Migrant writers draw inspiration from their liminal existence so as creatively to re-imagine the world. Thus, the state of perpetual dislocation that is inhabited by the exile becomes a new kind of home. Meheret observes that “[w]ith us foreigners it would appear that, as you move into dimmer regions, your exile becomes purified, more of a conscious state” (1989:175). It is through this purification process that a home is created in a mental landscape, enabling the exile to transcend the physical, and the psychological, dislocation of the material world. Breytenbach’s novel allows us to gain valuable insight into this experience. The novel proposes that it is the exile’s ability to adapt (create new spiritual landscapes) which represents the key to survival. According to Breytenbach, the journey of the exile can be described as follows:

Then comes exile, the break, the destitution, the initiation. The maiming which – I think – gives deeper sight, provides a path into consciousness through the mimicry of thinking yourself as part of the environment. Now you can never entirely relax the belly muscles. You learn, if you’re lucky, the chameleon art of adaptation, and how to modulate your laughter. You learn how to use your lips properly. Henceforth you are at home nowhere, and by that token everywhere. (1996:42)

Breytenbach suggests that you create your own homeland by developing the faculty to enter into another reality. Ultimately, it is a mentally constructed reality, independent of the material surroundings which the exile inhabits. It is here that the exile can cultivate a new understanding of what it means to be at home in an environment that can provide a sense of stability and belonging amid the instability, movement, and dislocation that characterises the exilic condition.

In conclusion, the novel shows that exiles, aware of multiple realities, cannot locate a sense of belonging anywhere. Even the language is lost, and the difficulty of adapting to a life that is restricted to a peripheral reality is a challenging task. To continue experiencing inner growth, it is vital that exiles do not give in to the pain and dislocation that permeate their lives. Instead of

becoming victims of the fraught nature of a liminal existence, exiles can be liberated by this very experience and embrace a life that thrives on being perpetually in motion. Although not a desirable state of being, the experience of exile can generate creative activity from which new perceptions of reality can emerge. Living an exilic existence – an experience that can be likened to being in prison – exiles seek an alternative reality in which the mind is free to venture into other realms of consciousness: psychological, artistic, and metaphysical. In spite of the hardships involved, the experience of exile can facilitate the creation of an alternative home in which, momentarily, a sense of unity can be achieved.

CHAPTER THREE: 'THE PARADOX OF WONDER'¹⁵: THE TRANSFORMATION OF HOMELESSNESS INTO HOME

Introduction

For the exile, home is not a fixed place, but rather a psychological construct that is constantly being redefined through one's experiences and insights. During his imprisonment, Mano learns that while the prison space may confine the body, it cannot restrict inner growth. His experiences in prison lead to a renewed perception of home that is brought about through a heightened state of awareness which enables him to transcend the restrictions of his physical environment through the construction of an alternative imaginary reality. It is this journey towards greater understanding, acceptance, and mindfulness that allows him to cope with the psychological terror of incarceration as he is able to find a sense of meaning in an invisible world.

In this chapter I concentrate mostly on Part Two of the novel, subtitled: "On The Noble Art of Walking in No Man's Land"¹⁶. In this section of the novel, Mano, who has returned to South Africa – taking on the identity of Anom Niemand, 'a nobody' – is arrested, and imprisoned. The entire section depicts his time awaiting execution on Death Row. To survive from day to day he constructs a web of inner dialogue through which he searches for explanations that help him navigate the alienation of imprisonment. Although he is utterly alone, his mind is cluttered with various characters and players of what he refers to as the Game: a game that is mentally constructed to resemble his life. The characters and players of the Game emerge as part of the psychological coping mechanisms that he establishes. In drafting a memoir, "On The Noble Art of Walking in No Man's Land" (1989:222), Anom shares with us his meditations on structure and space. He also shares various insights into his

¹⁵ A term used to describe the power of the imagination to transcend – according to Zen Buddhism – rigid categories. See Epstein (1995).

¹⁶ This section of the novel is yet another retelling by Breytenbach of his own prison experience following his arrest in 1976.

prison experiences, insights contained in letters that are written to Noma, his father, who represents not only a patriarchal figure but, generically, various structures of authority. In addition, there are descriptions of nightmares; reflections on these nightmares; and a theatrical play referred to as “the Game” (1989:217) – a mental construct that helps Anom tolerate the prison environment as an alternative reality. Furthermore, Anom’s frequent philosophical reflections help him create a greater state of mindfulness. In these reflections he employs some of his favourite metaphors: chameleons, mirrors, and masks. Through the imaginary creation of various alternative realities, Anom is able to ‘control’ the prison space – in a psychological sense – through a deepened understanding of some of the philosophical considerations that underpin the experience of imprisonment. The chapter concludes with a letter to Greta Garbo – an alias for Mano’s lover – in which Mano/Anom announces that he must take his leave, and asks for her forgiveness. The storyline is embedded within these various fantasies which enable Anom to translate the experience of incarceration into a meaningful experience, and to come to terms with his situation.

Thus, the second part of the novel functions on a much more abstract level than the first, as Mano – who has assumed the identity of Anom – is unable to leave his cell on Death Row, except through the psychological constructs that he creates as coping devices. In these flights of the imagination he explains his problem with authority, apartheid, and prison. Although isolated while on Death Row, the final part of the novel shows how Mano’s/Anom’s mind is bursting with creative ideas and imaginative ways of finding meaning within an environment that is intended to isolate and repress the human spirit. However, it is – as Anom’s reflections show – one’s attitude towards the prison space, and towards exile for that matter, that determines whether you will be destroyed or, paradoxically, ‘set free’ by the very experience of incarceration.

Much of the focus of this chapter is on the use of paradox in the novel as a technique that enables one to transcend one’s external reality through an internal journey. Such a journey may enable one to go beyond categorical ways of thinking – e.g. ‘home’ and ‘exile’ – and to attain a higher state of

awareness and understanding, which becomes a new home: a home located within awareness. Most of Breytenbach's work is paradoxical and the following explanation is useful in understanding the 'paradox of wonder' in relation to his writing:

...paradox...cuts through the problem of the intellectual observation of everything in terms of categories, *not* by denying the existence of the various concepts, but by acknowledging the bi-polarity of everything, like the two sides of one and the same sheet of paper. In *Boek* Breytenbach articulates it thus:

Life and death are kif-kif,
two drags of the same cigarette,
white finger and ash of the same process,
inside and outside of the same void.
(Sienaert 2001:26)

Sienaert further states that "[i]t is, however, a polarity that implies the necessity of both poles to make the mechanism possible; and they are, moreover, in a state of tension or balance with one another, not in a state of conflict" (2001:26). Thus the 'paradox of wonder' implies an apparent contradiction that, upon deeper investigation, reveals interpenetration of opposites. The aim of this chapter is to illustrate how – in *Memory of Snow and of Dust* – the 'paradox of wonder' leads to a reinvention of 'home' through continual self-invention and transformation that enables one to gain access to an alternative reality.

At this point it is necessary to explain how I shall deal with the link between imprisonment and exile in this chapter, as both represent states of homelessness. Although the chapter draws heavily on Anom's time on Death Row, and although most of the examples used refer to Anom's incarceration, in very profound psychological terms the prison experience can also be interpreted as a form of exile. The extreme mental suffering and isolation that becomes a way of life for prisoners can be applied to exiles' mental conditions as well. Both prisoners and exiles experience a loss of freedom as externally imposed structures (the prison cell/the foreign environment) cut them off from a nurturing home environment. The prison experience discussed in this chapter, therefore, represents an amplified form of exile, being based on similar mental conditions.

The 'Spiritual Turn' in Postcolonial Theory

Through the reconstruction of the concept of 'home' – via non-linear, anti-structural thinking – the exile shows how it is possible for one to escape controlling structures in society. In the last decade or so, a new orientation in Postcolonial Theory has taken root that anticipates the need for precisely such alternative ways of interpreting our contemporary world. This movement is driven in part by the recognition that an over-dependence on fixed concepts – i.e. binary models of thinking – can be exploited by those in power, and that such models of thinking limit our perceptions of reality. Behdad, citing Rouse, makes the following statement: “the gradual unfolding of the global shift from colonialism and classic forms of dependency to a new transnational capitalism has meant that, during the last 20 years, we have all moved irrevocably into a new kind of social space, one which our modern sensibilities leave us unable to comprehend” (in Loomba *et al.* 2005:66). What Behdad does not mention, but what several postcolonial critics have begun to realise, is that new conceptions of social space may not be fully comprehended by relying exclusively on the well-worn categories of race, class, and gender.

There is recognition that a metaphysical dimension – the category of religion or, less dogmatically, spirituality – has been largely disregarded. It is suggested, therefore, that postcolonial theory, although not adhering to any religious belief system, re-orientate itself to include matters of a spiritual nature. Ashcroft *et al.* in the second edition of the landmark publication *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, for example, point out that “[a]nalyse of the sacred have been one of the most neglected, and maybe one of the most rapidly expanding areas of post-colonial study” (2006:8). There is a renewed concern with religious and spiritual matters – referred to as “the spiritual turn”, by, *inter alia*, Boyd White (2006), Eagleton (2009) and Mathuray (2009) – in an attempt to broaden the scope of postcolonial studies by acknowledging the role that belief systems play within contemporary society.

This new point of entry to postcolonial studies indicates a more inclusive approach, one which acknowledges that spirituality plays an integral part in the lives of various cultures and people across the world. Furthermore, the spiritual turn that we are witnessing within postcolonial theory recognises the limitations of exclusively relying on Western models of secularised thinking, and acknowledges that “the sacral is emerging again as a part of a broader rethinking of post-colonial identity” (Ashcroft *et al.* 2006:518). Western models of thinking are often exclusively materialist and secularising, with an emphasis placed on technical advancement and modernisation, quite often at the expense of spiritual and individual wellbeing. Chakrabarty argues that “the historical and analytical legacy within the Western Academia has prevailed over the more imaginative, responsive, intuitive engagements with the real, but also that an accommodation between the two is possible and necessary” (in Brown 2009:11). This anticipates a more inclusive approach that draws on Western as well as non-Western systems of thought in an era in which – as Gaylard points out in relation to Africa – “internationalisation is causing a syncretic, disjunctive world that demands new ways of doing and thinking” (2005:63).

Religious responses often carry a particular weight in the post-colony, as compared with the West. Ashcroft notes that “European societies since the eighteenth century, while continuing to subscribe to a notional religious affiliation, have really understood truth as a matter for scientific, secular reason alone” (2006:517). Religion in Western society is strictly demarcated to specific areas, while in many other parts of the world it is often infused within all spheres of communal life. The dichotomy that exists between the material and the spiritual in relation to centre (Western) and periphery (Indian) cultural practices is discussed by Chatterjee (2001) who considers the position of the subaltern in Indian society. He refers us to Bhudev’s description of households in India, in contrast to those in Europe:

‘Those who laid down our religious codes discovered the inner spirituality which resides within even the most animal pursuits which humans must perform, and thus removed the animal qualities from those actions. This has not happened in Europe.

Religion there is completely divorced from [material] life. Europeans do not feel inclined to regulate all aspects of their life by the norms of religion; they condemn it as clericalism...In the Arya system there is a preponderance of spiritualism, in the European system a preponderance of material pleasure.' (Bhudev, in Chatterjee 2001:159)

In reinforcing Bhudev's observations, Chatterjee points out that with the spread of modernity in India, family life continued to be organised around the premise that "the crucial requirement was to retain the inner spirituality of the indigenous social life" (2001:159). As the West begins to realise that going beyond the material is necessary, it recognises the value of fictions such as Breytenbach's which depict oscillations between worlds by drawing on various belief systems, including African and Zen Buddhist. Many cultures place enormous value on an everyday engagement with the spiritual. Breytenbach's novel contributes to a growing global dialogue that acknowledges the spiritual dimension as a gateway to "alternative ways of thinking, feeling, and acting" (Appiah 2006:97).

First, a brief description of African belief systems. In Africa – as in many other societies – religion and spirituality are central elements of collective life. The African philosophy of life places greater emphasis on the communal, and acknowledges the interdependent relationship that exists not only between members of a community but, also in a larger sense, between people and the environment that they inhabit. The importance of the spiritual in African communities is emphasised by Chapman who states that, "[t]his consonance of earthly and mystical life is summarised in the idea of the land as providing both physical and sacred roots of existence in binding the living to the ancestral living-dead" (2003:51). Furthermore, he draws attention to the communal approach to life that is central to an African way of thinking which acknowledges that "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am" (2003:51). It is a way of thinking that is alien to Western/Cartesian models of individualism. Moreover, traditional African knowledge systems undermine binary models of thinking by asserting that no knowledge is based on intellect alone, and that emotional and spiritual aspects of life play an important part in knowledge formation. However, such views are often

rejected by Western society where, as Goduka points out, “indigenous ways of knowing have been in the past, and are currently, devalued and undermined within the academy” (2000:63). This is largely because African knowledge systems are connected to relationships with the environment, ancestors, and traditional spiritual practices which emphasise the “interrelatedness, interconnectedness and interdependence among humans, and of humans with living and non-living creation” (Goduka 2000:68). In African communities, Chapman continues, “the balancing of forces in the political kingdom accords with mystical design, in which God’s power permeates the entire environment including the plants and animals” (2003:52). Following from these beliefs is a view of life that is predicated on metamorphosis and transformation – important features of Breytenbach’s writing.

Many of the features of traditional African beliefs are similar to the values of Zen Buddhism. Breytenbach’s incorporation of Zen Buddhist beliefs in his writing deserves our attention as this form of spirituality that originated in the Far East is his chosen belief system. (Consequently, throughout this section I will draw on Zen concepts.) Zen is, according to Suzuki – an influential writer on Zen Buddhism in the West – “an antipode to logic...[to] the dualistic mode of thinking” (1977:38). The purpose of Zen is to attain a state of consciousness that transcends duality, and goes beyond separations of subject/object, self/other. In Zen, self-realisation is achieved through the development of a heightened sense of the obstacles to awareness, so that these can be overcome. The fostering of greater awareness – known as *satori* – leads to the removal of ignorance:

In Zen there must be *satori*; there must be a general mental upheaval which destroys the old accumulation of intellection and lays down the foundation for a new life; there must be the awakening of a new sense which will review the old things from a hitherto undreamed-of angle of observation. (Suzuki 1977:96)

Through greater mindfulness one is liberated from the limitations of rigid conceptual frameworks, and able to reach a state of heightened awareness that grants one “an illuminating understanding

into the very nature of things” (Suzuki 1977:47). Thus, maximum existential attention allows one to go beyond logical systems of thought, and to access a cognitive dimension in which the mutual interdependence of all entities of life is recognised.

Zen Buddhism illuminates the artificial separations that exist in binary models of thinking. The focus in Zen is on a world-view that recognises – via apparent contradictions – the mutual interdependence of all entities: the whole is contained in each part, and vice versa. To reach this higher state of consciousness, the ego needs to be transcended, and the inherent sense of duality that exists within oneself – between the individual and the whole of humanity – needs to be overcome. Materialist systems of thought are discarded and exchanged for a deepened perception of the impermanent nature of being. In Zen Buddhism it is the journey, or the process, through which the heightened state of awareness is reached, that is of importance, and not a particular destination; the emphasis is on movement, transformation, and continuity. In Breytenbach’s particular case – as Dimitriu maintains – Zen Buddhism acts not as “a religion in the conventional sense of the word, but rather as a form of psycho-therapy” (1992:14) which, according to her, enabled Breytenbach mentally to cope with the prison environment.

Breytenbach’s experience of incarceration features strongly in his work, and *Memory of Snow and of Dust* is no exception. The novel is infused with both African and Zen beliefs, and guides the reader towards new ways of thinking that offer an alternative understanding of the world in which we live. In the novel the concepts of ‘home’ and ‘exile’, which appear to be binary opposites, are transformed into mutually dependant constructs that are constantly in the process of being reconfigured. Through the characters in the novel, Breytenbach attempts to portray an alternative conception of exile, one which transcends socially imposed conceptions that are inflexible and do not respond imaginatively to a multi-layered reality. By suggesting that there is an interrelationship/interdependence between home and exile, he shows that within this awareness one can journey beyond the suffering of exile into a new configuration of home. Ultimately,

Breytenbach proposes – through the novel – that one embraces a view of the world that incorporates multiple beliefs which acknowledge different ways of being, of interpreting, and responding to, one’s situations.

The examples discussed in this chapter concentrate on Anom’s time on Death Row. Yet, to reiterate, the insights gained from coping with prison can also be applied to the exilic condition, as both exiles and prisoners have to adjust to forms of homelessness.

“On The Noble Art of Walking in No Man’s Land”

Whilst in prison, Anom realises that ‘the noble art of walking’ is one that concentrates on “understanding, not control” (1989:274); an understanding that “[u]ltimately reality is a series of approximations” (1989:274) and that no entity is fixed, or stable. Rather, as Breytenbach points out: “All meaning is of course métissage...a new mixture of existing truths” (in Jacobs 2004:177), a belief which, in drawing on Zen Buddhist values, rejects any one particular view of reality. In Zen, Sienaert explains, the doctrine of *sunyata* (emptiness) implies that permanence does not exist, but that “[t]he universe must be seen as process, as continuously in motion” (2001:21). It is human beings who advocate a belief in stable realities; consequently, when *sunyata* is reached “there is no longer a cleaving to things, be they either intellectual or material; for ‘the function of understanding emptiness is simply to cut out grasping’” (Sienaert 2001:21). It is through the process of walking – an internal movement – that all fixed entities are discarded, intellectually and materially, and in the process new insights emerge and new perceptions of reality become available. As a result, the process of walking, identified as “The Noble Art of Walking in No Man’s Land” in Part Two of the novel, is not a victim’s walk, but a ‘noble’ walk that pursues true freedom and liberation not only from the prison cell, but from socially imposed ideologies and constrictions.

Much emphasis is placed on the act of walking in the work of de Certeau, the distinguished French philosopher. Although not guided by Zen Buddhism, there is in de Certeau's writing a similar emphasis on walking as a vehicle through which to transcend conventional ways of thinking about the world, and a search for what it truly means to be at 'home'. It is possible that these similarities bear a direct relation to de Certeau's training as a Jesuit priest (before he became a professor of theology and philosophy). De Certeau's own life was characterised by a restless academic nomadism, as he taught at various institutions, and produced research in a number of different fields. His life is identified as a journey: "As a thinker, he [de Certeau] moves out to question what we might mean by home; to question the fixity of place. His was the search for somewhere else, another city, a heteropolis, another spatiality" (Ward 2000:3). Practising 'the art of walking', according to de Certeau (2000), enables one to challenge the authoritative mechanisms that create and control spaces. His writing indicates the need for individuals to redefine space by constantly re-appropriating its meaning. He advocates walking as a procedure that enables the inner transformation of reality, an act which allows one to "evade discipline, without thereby being outside its sphere" (2000:105). His writing illustrates how one's response to external surroundings can lead to the creation of new worlds that operate on a metaphysical level.

It is through one's attitude towards a particular space that an alternative space is created – a new consciousness, à la de Certeau – through which, Breytenbach suggests, prisoners can transcend the painful restrictions of their existence and enter into a spiritual sphere/home. Walking is an internal activity that, paradoxically, requires no movement. While Anom is alone in his cell on Death Row, he creates characters that exist only in his mind, as players in "the game which may also be called 'life'" (1989:238). These personae help Anom cope while alone on Death Row; they co-ordinate his efforts of resistance and keep his mind moving. One of these 'characters', Carl Rogers – an intertextual reference to an influential American psychotherapist – explains that

...all reality is contained in each of us and each of us is a part of all reality. In fact we make him walk – because we are changing by jumps in the mind. After all, consciousness is an important part of the web of interrelationships...what we need to study is the processes of change that come from within. (1989:274)

These characters become Anom's companions, who allow him – through their dialogue – to gain a deeper insight into and understanding of his situation. The power of internal movement is referred to by de Certeau when he says that “[t]o walk is to lack a site” (2000:110). In a similar fashion, Breytenbach, through the voice of Han Noordhoek, another character/player of the Game, affirms this belief: “‘since we are his [Anom's] steps, he doesn't have to walk at all” (1989:274). This is the conclusion that the players of the Game reach. After much deliberation over Anom's situation in prison, they decide that he “has to stay where he is” (1989:275); for the procedure of walking to take place, only internal movement is necessary.

During this process of internal walking, which is facilitated through the various characters that exist in his mind, Anom reaches the understanding that through mental movement he is able to escape external structure. He states that “I know that the path is a way of walking. And meanwhile...everything has been smashed to smithereens to emerge purified from my stuttering” (1989:294). The external reality is “smashed to smithereens” as prisoners see through the constructed nature of external reality and are able to reconfigure their own spaces; they realise that a home can be located within an alternative mental reality. According to Grobler, “thought initiates movement, which can be borne into eternity” (2002:143), for “to orientate oneself in thought infers no fixed point of reference” (2002:143). Thus it is not one's location, but rather the journey taken – internally – that matters. Although the experience of imprisonment is not desirable, it may become the catalyst for the emergence of a highly creative state of mindfulness. While the harsh external reality remains, prisoners may learn new ways of journeying that ‘free’ them.

As mentioned above, in Part Two there are various characters who are manifestations of Anom's imagination, actors in a play that takes place within his mind. The senior king, a character in one of the plays, reveals during a session of the holy office of kings that "[y]es it is lonely in the head, but we admit that the mind is capable of great beauty" (1989:269). He states that he is "hinting at what's already set down, gained and at that which still may come!" (269). What is being anticipated is an alternative vision of home, as it becomes clearer to Anom that he can overcome the limitations of his external surroundings through greater mindfulness. On that note, the kings' session ends and a meeting of the Waterworks Commission follows in which, amongst other points, various characters enter into a discussion about the nature of truth and walking, as well as discussion of Anom's situation. Morland, who is a "resistance leader and chairman of the Waterworks Commission" (217) chairs the commission's meeting and observes that in order to overcome the apparent contradictions in society, one has to accept them, based on paradoxical thinking. BB – a player of the Game – says: "Look, the private individual is a mutation of the public one, and he doesn't survive despite this dichotomy, but because of it" (272). Through practising the 'art of walking' one realises that the external reality is based on interrelationships. One learns to "forget about one-ness. Forget about being" (273), and embrace a model of thinking that rejects all notions of fixity. Through the 'noble art of walking', prisoners may achieve the 'freedom' to construct their own definitions of home, as they realise that all objects/entities/concepts are also constructs of one's imagination.

Exiles, like prisoners, may achieve the 'freedom' to construct their own definitions of home. An internal transformation of reality becomes possible once exiles realise that the only sense of home that is available is a temporary one: that the life of exile is always unsettled, always unstable, and that there is no permanence, not even within the home. Moreover, as Bhabha asserts, the "liminality of the migrant experience is no less a transitional phenomenon than a translational one; there is no resolution to it because the two conditions are ambivalently enjoined in the 'survival' of migrant life" (1994:224). The migrant/exile finds a way to exist within movement, acknowledging the

power of walking. For the exile, journeying – and not the destination – becomes a place in which to live. It is within the act of journeying that an existential, a spiritual home is envisioned, within which, momentarily, a sense of belonging can be found. De Certeau observes, “[t]races of a journey lose what existed: *the act of going by itself*” (2000:106) which “causes one way of existing to be overlooked” (2000:106). The exile locates a home within this overlooked dimension of spatial habitation.

Operating within the belief-system of Zen Buddhism, the character Baron Samedi – a so-called mental “[partner] in undertaking” (1989:217), another reference to death or inner life – suggests that for the process of walking to take place, two opposite poles are required: ““To have penetration (or progress) you must have exchange, for reciprocity there must be development, for development you need opposite poles, or paravents, even if the prerequisite barricade or obstacle is a ghost image. This is the process and procedure of walking”” (1989:251). Thus, the ‘opposite poles’ of home and exile are necessary points of reference, as they facilitate movement and ultimately a journey that leads to a new awareness of home. A discussion between the characters, Baron Samedi and Dr Yama – both undertakers – reveals that exiles “[exist] in an essentially hostile environment... [However, their] relationship with [the] environment is not a compromise. It is more in the nature of a symbiosis. (There lies the soul of walking, which is a relationship. A *camouflage* really.)” (273). The exile’s environment, and the state of exile itself, facilitates ‘The Noble Art of Walking in No Man’s Land’. It is within the creation of a No Man’s Land – a land that cannot be located geographically – that the exile is able to enter into a heightened state of awareness that embraces an alternative reality. Sienaert points out that in Zen Buddhism a heightened sense of awareness cannot be grasped rationally. She states that “[a]s a dynamic process, it is only able to be experienced... experimentally and existentially” (2001:29). Breytenbach’s novel is a fictional attempt to illustrate ‘the art of walking’ as momentarily transcendent of the apparent dualities of Western patterns of

thought. Accordingly, prisoners may 'escape' their surroundings, and exiles transcend their homelessness.

A Spiritual Home: 'Home' within 'Homelessness'

It is especially significant that Anom's journey home to South Africa results in his imprisonment, and that during his time of incarceration he becomes aware of an alternative vision of home. The prison space, paradoxically – as identified by Dimitriu – acts as “a springboard for a deeper state of awareness” (1992:127). Whilst in prison, Anom realises the need to create “an *alternative* to incarceration, another world to escape into” (1989:258). It is within the prison space that, as Dimitriu points out, “the mind's potential for creatively reconstructing concepts/spaces through the power of the imagination” (1992:55) is unlocked.

The potential, mentally, to adjust one's environment is an area of interest in current debates on psychological responses to forms of space. Gaston Bachelard, an important philosopher of space, offers intimate meditations on spatial symbols. Bachelard considers spaces to be either “hostile” (1994:xxxvi), or “*felicitous*” (1994:xxv); both terms being of particular interest for my study. Furthermore, spaces can be ambiguous; a space that appears initially to be 'hostile' (oppressive, restrictive) can, on deeper investigation, also prove to be 'felicitous' (nurturing, homely). For my purposes, Bachelard's discussion of 'the corner' and 'the shell' is worth noting.

'The corner', a space synonymous with solitude and emptiness – and which can thus be interpreted initially as 'hostile' – is shown to be a space of new possibility: “all who live in corners will come to confer life upon this image...[f]or...nothing is ever empty, the dialectics of full and empty only correspond to two geometrical non-realities” (Bachelard 1994:140). It is suggested that 'corners' – and here I include the prison space – foster a different type of mobility located in the cognitive

realm: the very emptiness of 'the corner' facilitates mental movement in the form of meditations that lead to greater awareness – a means through which material surroundings can be transcended. The corner becomes "the chamber of being" (Bachelard 1994:138) through which one is able to reconnect with one's most intimate desires; and so, "[t]he most dynamic escape takes place in cases of repressed being" (Bachelard 1994:111).

Bachelard's observations on the capacity, imaginatively, to transform the 'hostile' into the 'habitable' are of particular interest as the prison space, like 'the corner', implies isolation and immobility. However, it is in the apparent 'emptiness' of his prison cell that Anom is able to locate an alternative reality that 'liberates' him spiritually. The novel illustrates the power of the mind, and of the imagination, which offer a route of imaginary escape from the 'hostile' space of imprisonment.

'The shell', like 'the corner', can be interpreted as metaphorically representing the prison space as, during incarceration, the cell becomes the prisoner's home. 'The shell' is a home that confines its inhabitant to a restricted space: a deep and secret abode. However, even though confined, the creature living in 'the shell' remains intimately connected to the outside world, feeling "the great cosmic rhythm of winter and spring [vibrate] none the less" (Bachelard 1994:118). Similarly prisoners, although physically restricted, may escape mental suffering. Prisoners may experience inner growth that determines their ability, mentally, to transform the alienation of the prison cell, for "[s]pace that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor" (Bachelard 1994:xxxvi). Bachelard explains that as the snail's body grows, the shell grows proportionally. Likewise, from within the solitude of prison cells, prisoners are able to expand their conceptions of 'home' through the power of imagination and memory.

The image of dust – as found in corners – is used by Bachelard (as by Breytenbach) to capture the presence of the past. Bachelard explains that the dust of previous eras, the memories and dreams of

forgotten realities have been swept away into 'the corners' (1994:140-142). In discovering that these apparently lifeless spaces contain a vast array of life, one is able to reconnect with the past. Thus, the prison space – as in the image of 'the corner' – enables the prisoner to bridge the gap between the past and the present, paradoxically facilitating a connection with multiple worlds. This is a view that is also echoed by the African philosophy of life, which – as explained earlier – is one of Breytenbach's sources of inspiration.

It is the anticipation of the moment when he can transform the 'hostile' prison space into a 'felicitous' one that provokes Anom's exclamation: "[m]y thoughts are waiting like a train of sealed coaches in a dark station – inside the skeletons would have become indistinguishable. The chains are free. This is the place – in this street in the sun between nothing and nowhere – to meditate on a bowl of dust" (1989:280). Soon he will be free from the chains of his surroundings, and he will be initiated into another level of consciousness, which will liberate him from all worldly restrictions. The novel leads us towards a deeper insight into the process through which spaces of oppression and pain – in prison and exile – can be transformed, psychologically speaking, into places of liberation. Throughout the novel Breytenbach exposes "his individuality against all the intertexts he is compelled to live with, by imaginatively creating his own 'textual and intra-textual and infra-textual contexts', where new configurations can triumph over outworn meanings" (Reckwitz 1999:100).

* * *

As mentioned previously, de Certeau envisages a multilayered response to space. Both de Certeau and Breytenbach suggest that openings into alternative spaces exist all around us:

Eluding the imaginary totalisations of the eye, there is a strangeness in the commonplace that creates no surface, or whose surface is only an advanced limit, an edge cut out of the visible. In this totality, I should like to indicate the processes that are foreign to the 'geometric' or 'geographic' space of visual, panoptic or theoretical constructions. Such spatial practices refer to a specific form of *operations* (ways of doing); they reflect '*another spatiality*' (an 'anthropological', *poiétik* and mystical spatial experiment); they send us to an opaque, blind domain of the inhabited city, or to a transhuman city, one that insinuates itself into the clear text of the planned, readable city. (De Certeau 2000:103) [My emphasis]

De Certeau's experience of space suggests a movement from one reality to another; the ability, mentally, to create new spaces. This becomes a powerful tool for exiles/prisoners in accessing a reality that exists beyond the physical environment. Anom's meditations in prison facilitate an alternative reading of space that leads to a new conception of 'home'. A heightened sense of awareness emerges, which – both in prison and in exile – can provide access to an alternative vision of home.

Building up to an alternative sense of belonging, Anom experiences new ways of coping, imaginatively, with the prison environment. He comments that "I am in prison, I have always been, I shall always be here, even beyond my death" (1989:257). (This is possibly a wider reference to life in exile which, as explained, can also be viewed, metaphorically, as a type of prison.) It is the prison space that, paradoxically, facilitates access to another reality. In practising the 'noble', internal, art of walking – facilitated through homelessness — he establishes "a way of *passage*" (de Certeau 2000:110) "between the *site* from which [the walking] issues...and the *non-site* it creates" (de Certeau 2000:110). Although the prison cell is not a pleasant site to occupy, it may lead to the emergence of another level of consciousness.

Visions of the colour white, in one of Anom's meditations, anticipate the moment of sublimation from the external 'site' to the internal, 'non-site'. Anom has a vision of being on a train from which

he is told to disembark; he observes around him a “white light” (1989:279), “a blindingly white building” (279), and a “white façade” (279). He comments that “[t]he sharp light fractures and fragments my vision” (279). The frequent mention of the colour white can be viewed as a way of emphasising the purity of vision that emerges from times of suffering: a vision that attempts to embrace a fragmented reality through the movement from one form of reality to another. The colour white is also referred to by de Certeau, who employs it as a symbol of sublimation:

In those white spaces of some foreign logic, proper nouns plumb the reserves of hidden and familiar meanings. They ‘make sense’, i.e. they impel movements, like the vocations and appeals that turn or divert the itinerary by making it resound with still uncertain meanings. They create non-sites within sites; they change them into passages. (2000:111)

The prison acts as a site of passage in the novel, a site from which the “simulacrum of inherent structure” (1989:213) is transcended to “capture the essential” (1989:213). The prison space is a site characterised by emptiness: a reference to the barrenness of the prisoner’s surroundings, and also to the desolation, loneliness and despair experienced. However, at the same time this empty space can also represent absolute freedom from all things and symbolise the higher state of awareness that is achieved through *satori* in Zen Buddhist meditations. Dimitriu notes that, in the process, “[t]he very notion of emptiness is being sublimated, emptiness becoming...a habitable space full of possibilities...death itself becoming harmless” (1992:27). Ultimately, this leads to a “sense that inner freedom may be as enriching as freedom outside the prison walls” (Dimitriu 1992:28). Simultaneously it facilitates the journey to a state of greater mindfulness in which an inner transformation of reality takes place. Thus the prison becomes a symbol of the ‘emptiness’ to which followers of Zen Buddhism aspire. Through Anom’s meditations in prison a vision of ‘home’ located in ‘emptiness’ emerges.

As the exile journeys towards a heightened state of awareness, a home-within-homelessness is presented: a homeland that is located within the mind and which is experienced existentially. Anom reveals that during a dream he becomes aware of an alternate landscape:

'I became a monkey, I attempted to find my way out of the maze...and found myself at sea. Luckily, Kashyapa, my *alter ego*, smashed the chains of illusion by explaining to me that there *is* no way. He encouraged me to take the gap. It was like telling me to walk on! I saw *a magical landscape* opening up before me – so, becoming, like an instant, a batting of the eyelid...*a life at last.*' (1989:292) [My emphasis]

The magical landscape refers to Anom finding a home, a Heaven – a temporary settlement – where Barnum/Breyten is waiting to congratulate him: “At last! Please once more accept my apologies and my congratulations. Welcome to No man’s land!” (1989:294). However, this vision of home is not one which can be retained, or to which the route can be retraced; rather, it is to be enjoyed as ‘a batting of the eyelid’: a momentary release into sublimation. As the Zen Buddhist master Chang-tzu states: “The perfect man employs his mind as a mirror. It grasps nothing; it refuses nothing. It receives but does not keep” (in Sienaert 2001:35). Thus a sense of unity can be achieved, at last, within a conception of home that embraces the instability of the prisoner’s existence. Home reveals itself as a construction that is no longer located within the geography of the material world, but can be found, instead, within moments of transcendence.

For Breytenbach, one single conception of home is impossible¹⁷: “My homeland is a conception. If I could confine myself to one single comprehension, then I’m dead” (1986:239). Once again, the notion of home is predicated upon multiplicity and renewal, as Breytenbach draws inspiration from the Zen view that – as Sienaert notes – “oneness is possible *in* and *through* differentiation” (2001:39). Ultimate wholeness can be achieved only through a process of transformation and continual re-invention.

¹⁷ This rejection of a fixed concept of home is also hinted at in the subtitle to Part One of the novel, “Utéropia”, as noted by Jacobs (2004).

* * *

A perception of 'home' and 'exile' as fixed concepts becomes a mental obstacle. Breytenbach advocates a way of thinking that transcends the restrictive categories of home and exile by rethinking nomadism:

What is it that constitutes the anguished awareness of exile?...Is it the fact of never fully becoming part of your new surroundings? Such will also be the case of many indigenous categories, *both at 'home' and in 'exile'*, all the marginalised sectors of the population of any country. Is it simply because it is 'unnatural'? Is it still unnatural? Masses of people, in groups or as individuals, have been uprooted, deported, resettled during our century. *And are we not nomads at heart?* (1989:113-114) [My emphasis]

Meheret, Mano's lover, wonders: "...are we not nomads at heart?" (1989:114), questioning a socially derived definition of home that implies a specific geographical location. Breytenbach suggests an alternative understanding of home, one which differs from socially accepted models of home. In contrast to European models of interpretation, he suggests an African concept of nomadism – building on an historical time in which people travelled and wandered without attachment to any geographically situated location of home. To embrace an African concept of home, according to Breytenbach, is to return to a primordial rhythm of life which, by eradicating any ties with specific geographic locations of home, will set people free from the constrictions of Western systems of thought. For Breytenbach, Africa is a land that "is beyond the realm of dichotomy" (1989:159).¹⁸

¹⁸ It must be noted that Breytenbach realises that this romanticized version of Africa is not entirely accurate, given the horrors of both present and past history on the African continent. The nostalgia and idealistic views of Africa that permeate his earlier work have been followed by a far more sceptical attitude towards the continent in later years. However, Breytenbach continues to make use of Africa as a romantic-symbolist opposition to the analytical Western mindset.

The deep desire to reconnect with ancient African rhythms is also evident in Barnum's poem dedicated to Mona (written from Mano's perspective): "Lovesong to an Unborn Child" (1989:192) which utilises Africa as a romantic-symbolist device. In the poem he states: "How I longed for you" (1989:200); "You came forth from my loins *and yet you precede me* and I shall never see your face, ancient one, countenance of flight, the hidden Africa of my bones" (1989:201) [my emphasis]. The poem can be interpreted as a longing for traditional patterns of existence such as nomadism – a recurring theme in Breytenbach's work. Nomadic images, Sienaert maintains, portray "the diversity of Africa evok[ing] our potential to change, and by implication to grow" (2001:84). Thus Mona's anticipated birth can also be seen as a rebirth of ancient principles of being that embrace a nomadic existence and a spiritual homeland.

Breytenbach has made references to nomadism in previous arguments, in which he reflects on the Afrikaner's situation in South Africa. His arguments are discussed by J.M. Coetzee, who offers the following interpretation:

the sooner the modern Afrikaner discards the illusion of himself as the bearer of light in Africa's darkness, and accepts himself as merely one of Africa's nomads – that is to say, as a rootless and unsettled being, with no claim to proprietorship over the earth – the better his chances of survival. (2001:312)

Breytenbach bases his argument not only on the nomadism that existed in Africa/South Africa – e.g. the hunter-gathering San – prior to colonisation, but also on Zen Buddhist beliefs. The latter discourage an attachment to fixed structures such as a singularly definable 'home'. Breytenbach seems to suggest that the concepts of 'home' and 'belonging' need to be relativised and approached in a more neutral sense. An over-attachment to land, especially in the light of South Africa's history – not to mention world history – has caused hostility and warfare. It may be that Breytenbach is suggesting that our attachment to fixed conceptions (such as land ownership) needs to be revised and, perhaps, readjusted. Similarly Said (1994a) and Rushdie (1991) seem to point to alternative

approaches in our modern world. For instance, Said supports Adorno's assertion that "the perfect man has extinguished" his love for a particular homeland (in Said 1994a:335). Breytenbach suggests a return to an African heritage of nomadism, to a primordial attitude towards land, embracing an existence not in one space but in the movement between places.

A homeland that is a mental state is not necessarily less 'real' than a physical home, for as Mano puts it: "illusion is not less real than reality, indeed it can even be more real since one apprehends reality through an imitation or a reconstruction thereof" (1989:24). Breytenbach reveals, through Anom's meditations in prison, a technique of mastering the 'hostile' prison space through awareness of alternative realities that liberate one from the limitations and dangers of categorical models of thinking. Anom is able to rebuild, imaginatively, a different conception of home as founded on both African and Zen beliefs. By blurring the boundaries between external circumstances and mentally constructed realities, Breytenbach in *Memory of Snow and of Dust* depicts an awareness of a limitless, anti-structural vision of home predicated on multiple belief systems.

Transforming the Self into 'a Point of Passage': The Writer and Memory

The understanding of a spiritual home, as described above, is not easily attained. It is possible only through the transformation of the self into "a point of passage" (Breytenbach, in Sienaert 2001:15) through which a heightened state of awareness can obtain. This awareness can be partially facilitated by the process of writing. Breytenbach suggests the need to access ancient memory in an attempt to recapture a nomadic, African conception of home that existed prior to the imposition of modern classificatory systems of thought. It is the transformation of the self, and the concepts of writing and memory, which contribute to the transformation of the prison space – or the space of 'exile' – into a 'habitable' place, that will now be discussed.

i) A Metamorphosis of Self

To access an alternative vision of home, one has to transcend the physical environment as well as the ego through a metamorphosis of self. Lazarus – one of the players of the Game – explains during a session of internal dialogue (that takes place among the characters in Anom's mind) that to learn 'the noble art of walking' is "essentially the faculty of letting go of the so-called self" (1982:273). These mental conversations act as psychological coping mechanisms that enable Anom to consider various responses to the prison environment. The idea of letting go of the self is similar to Meheret's Ethiopian grandmother's belief that one keeps the evil at bay by being able to "change same constantly" (1989:18). This attitude is based on the "African belief that metamorphosis is the condition of life" (Squire 1995:91). The idea of a fixed self is repeatedly undermined in Breytenbach's oeuvre. He insists that "we are being metamorphosed into new beings all the time" (in Dimitriu 1997:74). Transformation and metamorphosis are primary motifs in his painting and writing and indicate the capacity for self-invention that exists within all of us, and that can be used as a form of liberation from one's circumstances.

The ability to let go of the self results in selflessness which, according to Dimitriu, "points to the significance of a holistic/integrative attitude of the 'I' in his/her relationship with the other" (1992:108). The ego is abandoned, and a more complex conception of the self is formulated: the self acts as a point of passage connecting the individual with all of humanity and vice versa, thus facilitating an inclusive view of being. This view implies a more complex perception of the self which extends to others – which is not unfamiliar to African spirituality – and which requires an opening up of the self to all of humanity. This African view resonates with Zen beliefs, in which to let go of the self is to recognise that "one is a changing collection of images, and that what you strive towards, is to move through the exploration, through the deepening of perception, to the dissolution of that. To stop being, and to be for always, as it were" (Breytenbach, in Sienaert 2001:15). One of the principal features of Zen is doing away with the artificial subject/object divide. In surpassing the conventional

separation between subject and object one opens oneself up to the whole of humanity. Existing alongside and within all of humanity, one is then able to empathise with others' pain, not just with one's own. Through metamorphosis one continually reinvents oneself in order to survive, transforming one's beliefs and conceptions of self in the process. The self becomes a point of passage: one lets go of the ego and experiences a release from self-obsession. A fundamental shift occurs within the mind, which recognises the common humanity shared by self and others. It is this awareness, Breytenbach insists, that enables one to transcend the self/other dichotomy. He expresses it thus:

'All of your being is a lung. Upon breathing out you open up, are purged, the entire inner you flows out and perishes, becomes part of the totality, the void; upon breathing in everything around and without you enters and becomes a part of you. This is the solution...there are two motions, a duality, a coming and going – but both are integrated in the coming-and-the-going (the All) and thus there is motion without there being motion, there is being still without stopping. Everything around you is a lung, and you are being breathed in and breathed out'. (In Sienaert 2001:33)

Carl Rogers – a player of the Game – states that “[t]he whole is contained in each part” (1989:274), and Anom reflects that as an actor he is “a man of parts” (278) who is constantly migrating from one part to another: “[t]he actor as person must become invisible...a transit point...a translation” (1989:24). Like a nomad who has no fixed place to call home, the actor exists in the moments between parts; between ‘homes’. This unsettled state is one in which true liberation can be found. Unable to act while incarcerated, Anom observes that “when your craft of actor is taken away from you...not being anybody, is true liberation” (278). In ‘not being anybody’ one is in fact ‘everybody’ and, at the same time, nobody. True liberation lies in overcoming the dichotomies of life, in embracing a view that annihilates the separation that exists between self and other, and in recognising all of humanity in oneself.

Mano points to the fatal price one pays if one only recognises certain parts of one's identity and renounces the rest. A mixed-blood/a coloured, Mano – upon his return to South Africa – takes on the identity of the white Anom Niemand, rejecting his blackness. Breytenbach suggests, however, that we must become fully integrated human beings recognising within ourselves all those around us. Sienaert expresses it as follows: “he [Breytenbach] feels himself, together with every other existing being, simultaneously and jointly, as a vassal of all of the world and all of humanity” (2001:27). He advocates the need for more comprehensive identities and intercultural reconciliation in South Africa, a country that, at the time of the publication of *Memory of Snow and of Dust*, was still under the apartheid regime. Towards the end of Anom's time on Death Row, Ka'afir – a black revolutionary, and also a member of the Movement – is placed in a neighbouring cell. As a result, their friendship deepens – Ka'afir having previously befriended Mano and Meheret in Paris – and in the end Anom's sense of worth is restored when his 'blackness' is recognised by Ka'afir who calls him “‘*Mfowethu*’, meaning ‘Brother’ in Zulu” (1989:285). This reconciliation is emblematic of the process in which you leave the self behind, and embrace the whole of humanity; by becoming aware of the artificial separation of self and other, one is empowered, overcoming the fear of that which is different/alien. In a wider sense, Anom realises that to acknowledge his worth is to embrace inclusive, alternative ways of thinking. Such an approach would encourage transcendence of racial barriers and result in joyful celebration of shared humanity, as anticipated by Anom's response when he realises that Ka'afir is his neighbour on Death Row:

I found myself banging against the walls and the door and bawling, incongruously, at the top of my voice, the liberation hymn, ‘Nkosi sikelel’ iAfrika’. What a fury of freedom I felt surging through my whole body!...my life had political meaning – my death would be seeding the future! For the first time in my life I could weep and sing without it being an act. (1989:284)

Through his joyful celebration of Ka'afir's presence, Anom (the coloured man) reconciles himself with the black part of Africa, which he had previously rejected. When Ka'afir joins him on Death

Row, Anom experiences a cathartic moment, in which he negates his former rejection of his blackness. In doing so he reaches across the racial divide in solidarity with the oppressed. The novel suggests the need to enter into a mental space that transcends rigid classifications, as the hope for a liberated future.

ii) The Role of the Writer

Writing helps to transform the self into a point of passage. It is partly through the creative writing act that one is able to recognise the constructed nature of reality, and thus the ability to transcend inflexible classifications of self. In the course of the novel, readers become aware of the constraints that are imposed on them through traditional/Western ways of thinking. Similarly – Sienaert maintains – it is during the writing process that the writer becomes aware of these restrictions:

Not only does the canvas or sheet of paper become the mirror for self-awareness as ‘the temporary sum of [the writer’s] impressions’, but it is also held up to the observer as the mirror of his own human condition. Thus the observer or reader is not only confronted with his own state of illusionary ego, but is also induced into the (Buddhist) dissolution of subject-object polarity. As participant in this process he or she, as the ‘other’, is led into a paradoxical relationship *vis-à-vis* the painter/writer: integrated with him, on the one hand, as his mirror image; yet, on the other hand, always remaining his essential opposite pole. (2001:42)

As far as the writer is concerned, the reader becomes ‘the essential opposite pole’ that enables a movement towards a heightened state of awareness in which all dichotomies are dissolved. The characters that exist in Anom’s mind – as extensions of the self – can be seen as various readers of his work, and as the ‘opposite poles’ that he requires in order to facilitate inner growth and development.

Writing illustrates ‘the art of walking’ which leads one into new areas of consciousness. Writing is presented at different levels: Anom is mentally drafting a memoir, “‘On The Noble Art of Walking in No Man’s Land’” (1989:222); he is writing imaginary letters to Noma, as well as various theatrical plays. In the last, the players of the Game are cast as characters who through their actions and

comments, lead Anom towards greater insights: “In the inkscape – where steps matter – there is a coming and a going and a staying put”; “there is a mirroring, and so multiple insights” (1989:248). The various voices that emerge from his writing fill his mind with conversations that expand his consciousness. The various devices used by Anom to depict a greater mindfulness illustrate the difficulty of articulating this mental journey.

The writer comes to know himself at a deeper level through the process of writing. This is in itself paradoxical, as Zen Buddhism is a philosophy of direct experience which, compared with other philosophical discourses, does not highlight the power of words. It highlights the experience of ‘non-teaching’ by shocking people into awareness in unconventional ways. Nothingness/emptiness as that transcendental level of awareness that leaves rationality behind – a Zen Buddhist’s form of sublimation – is impossible to teach. In fact, Suzuki points out that “Zen teaches nothing. Whatever teachings are in Zen come out of one’s own mind. We teach ourselves; Zen merely points the way” (1977:38).

The paradox is partly resolvable in that Breytenbach uses the image of the labyrinth to help visualize the journey towards another level of consciousness; while in writing one experiences other realms of awareness, yet Breytenbach is not trying to teach the reader the path towards greater mindfulness. Rather, he shows that through the very act of writing one experiences the journey towards inner development. ‘The path’ cannot be taught, as it needs to be experienced in the moment, and cannot be set out beforehand. Dr Yama – a partner in ‘undertaking’ and a player of the Game – states that ““The more direct the path you take, the smaller your chance of finding something at the end of it. You must walk the long way around. Labyrinth – that’s the in-thing, the name of the game. It’s the dead-ends that count”” (1989:251). The awareness that is reached through journeying, which for the writer takes place – paradoxically, as I have said – in the writing, cannot be taught or shown verbally, as it transcends all rational patterns of thought. Once again, the element of ‘non-teaching’ is emphasised by Baron Samedi, who describes the process that Anom has

to undergo by saying: “I show him nothing...I’m letting you see this nothing” (1989:251). It is through one’s exploration of the labyrinths that “the wiping out of borders” (1989:247) takes place. The illuminating insights of Zen are gained through a process of expanding consciousness.

In one of Anom’s letters to Noma he reflects on the art of writing, stating that “the writer discovers, in the process, the story he’s trying to pen down...the art of writing is to convey the known *without* stating or describing it, or also that only the transcription of a fragmentary awareness can bestow an impression of veracity upon reality” (1989:225). In expressing, through various polyphonic devices, the movement towards greater awareness, Breytenbach is portraying the experience of *sunyata*, in which duality and non-duality are transcended. In surpassing duality and non-duality one is exposed to the Great Void, in which one is able to go beyond the limiting scope of ordinary ways of experiencing oneself. Therefore the aim of writing “is not...to project some form of *meaning*. [Instead] [i]t is about experiencing a condition of being” (Sienaert 2001:42).

The suffering that Anom experiences in the novel is “a well-known Zen method of ‘no-teaching’” (Dimitriu 1992:72). In one of the letters that he ‘writes’ to Noma, Anom confesses that: “[h]ere the outside has ceased existing...we live as if below the surface of life. We do not communicate with the world. For all that, we are not dead yet” (1989:280). The prison space denies prisoners any form of self-affirmation by isolating them. On Death Row, prisoners like Anom are placed in solitary confinement, and all contact with the outside world is withheld. This is an incredibly dehumanising environment, and the psychological challenges that accompany such confinement can be terrifying. However, this process of suffering can also be referred to as a catalyst for creative activity; Anom finds his mind bursting with ideas and with a multitude of characters who construct subversive dialogues that transform the ‘hostility’ of the prison space into a somehow familiar and non-threatening environment. Anom acknowledges this through the character, Master Basie, who sums up a meeting in which the various characters in the play (that takes place in Anom’s mind) have decided that “we agree, Anom, as bait for decomposition, has to stay where he is” (1989:275).

Anom's suffering leads to the ability, psychologically, to reconfigure his reality; an art that cannot be taught, which is why the characters "propose and...accept" Anom's fate "without showing [their] hands" (275). They are the invisible guides that propel movement towards a painful initiation into new areas of consciousness. Just like the image (in Anom's dream) of the tin full of pebbles that is shaken "to make the steed walk" (1989:248), so the conversations that clutter Anom's mind impel movement, response, and resistance to the alienating effect of imprisonment.

In the period of imprisonment that Breytenbach experienced during apartheid, it was his "self-scrutinising self-fictionalisation" (Dimitriu 1992:10) that helped him deal with the harsh reality of prison life. He transfers this knowledge to the novel: inner freedom can be achieved through an acceptance of the painful instability and insecurity of life. To reach an alternative construct of home – the Heaven Anom enters into (though not 'Heaven' in a biblical sense) – is possible in writing; Anom 'writes' himself into a sense of worth and into a renewed vision of home as a spiritual reality that exists in another temporal dimension. This writing is a painful process, as Anom describes to Barnum upon his arrival in Heaven: "[t]he obtundent, the obduration and the alienation I wrote stone by stone. That death to which I'm attached through the navel string. That was the writing lying before me, on its side if you wish, which I had to eat up to reach you [No Man's Land/Heaven]" (1989:293).

By revealing his own experiences, the writer – according to Grobler – can become "a consciousness-expanding agent" (2002:96). Breytenbach is aware of this role and "knows how to make visible the constructedness/manipulation of truth" (Dimitriu 2008b:97); the act of writing enables him to position himself not only against various structures of authority, but also to "introduce society to deeper levels of consciousness" (Grobler 2002:96). Breytenbach explains it as follows: the writer becomes an "explorer of the limits of writing. Meaning: reconnoitring the frontiers, sniffing along all the barriers, lifting a proprietary leg, shifting the parameters, extending the spaces of liberty and

getting to sense the spacing thereof” (1996:18). The writer is able to point us in other directions than those recognised by social protocol.

iii) The Role of Memory

For the self to become transformed it is important to access a different kind of memory. In a dream that offers meditations on movement, Anom establishes that if walking is the method then you “trace a memory” (1989:215), by which Breytenbach is invoking the ancient conception of memory in Africa. An ‘African’ memory does not conjure up experience as “an insurmountable demarcation between ‘reality’ and ‘illusion’ and ‘magic’” (1989:103); rather, the conception of memory is cyclical, relying on pre-modern insights in which intimations of the past and the present overlap. In contrast, Western models of memory are linear, clear, and chronological. Breytenbach suggests a return to an ‘African’ memory, which is more fluid and flexible than modern, Western constructions: in fact, it is closer to the classical (Greek model).

The Greek tragedy, “Iphigenia in Aulis” (by Euripides), in the novel takes place on stage, while Mona (Mano and Meheret’s daughter) is conceived off-stage. This juxtaposition can be seen as symbolising the “transference of memory from one generation to the other” across cultures (Grobler 2002:312). In the same vein, a cross-cultural continuum is achieved via Meheret’s recital of anecdotes and historical facts linked to Ethiopia, along with memories to an unborn child, Mona: “[t]his, the telling of your past, will be my present to you...the stories which in time should colour your world” (1989:11). In addition, Barnum creates Mona as part of the script for a verse play that he writes for Mano. (In various parts of the novel Barnum /Breyten directs the actions of the other characters.) In this instance, Barnum anticipates Mona’s birth and creates a child for Mano and Meheret “from the threads of memory and imagination – history, in fact” (187). Barnum identifies Mona as the bearer of the ancient memory of her ancestors. Furthermore, the constructed nature of history is a reflection on the many concepts in our world that are often incorrectly viewed as fixed truths.

Mona's creation will, according to Barnum, make it possible for Mano to "lean upon his past and look back over what he has done, as also to peer forward into the fog of the future." (187) This is in anticipation of the alternative ways of seeing that Anom will need for a future in which he will require the faculty of imagination and of a memory that draws on ancestral, pre-modern belief to construct another version of home.

As Barnum observes, "the West [is] not in any sense the navel of the world" (1989:86), and the three continents – Africa, Asia, and the Americas – have offered valuable alternative, pre-colonial, systems of thought that existed prior to those that have been promoted and accepted in the modern West. It is up to Anom to unearth this forgotten memory, which lies beneath the surface as a dormant, yet still potent, force: "[s]omewhere on one of those bones may be scratched the unspeakable formula of memory" (1989:279). If this memory can be reclaimed, it can help shape one's views of reality.

Once again – as in Chapter One, where it is by tracing a memory that Anom returns home – it is memory that is the key agent in transformation. By tracing memory, a journey which requires an initiation is undertaken; the Greek tragedy symbolises the 'death' that takes place in the painful initiation into another level of consciousness (represented through the juxtaposition of Iphigenia's death and Mona's conception which occur at the same time). Mona's birth points to the rebirth of a primordial memory as Anom dreams of entering a vision of home that recalls an ancient 'coherence' in diversity:

Soon I shall enter the limitless no man's land of death, the South Africa of the shades, the colourless dream of the chameleon. I'm in a hurry for it to be done. My fate is sealed. Maybe I'll find you there in the forest of spirits, and then at last you may finally recognise me as part of you, some dream you once may have had. Any day now, any day now, we shall be released. (1989:288)

It is "the diversity of Africa [that] evokes our potential to change, and by implication to grow" (Sienaert 2001:84). Anom's search for a place to call home ends with the realisation that his ideal

image of home does not need a specific geographical location; in fact, he admits that: “[i]t needn’t even be Africa” (1989:306). In a final letter to Greta/Meheret he says:

The restrictions are gone; I’m marking my remaining moments with images, words, silences. This is what life is really like. And this is the true liberation: to live up to the white-out as a skin vibrating to the alacrity or obtuseness of interaction with the surroundings. I am a passage imperfectly aware of what passes through me and of the fact that I’m a passage. (1989:295)

In this passage, the process of discovering a new home, is referred to thus: “[b]lack is the dust and white is the snow, white petals where the tears will grow and the wind will blow black” (305). Breytenbach ends the novel with an acknowledgement that he had forgotten certain older truths, and asks for Meheret’s forgiveness before he enters into that eternal memory: “Forgive me for forgetting” (1989:308). His plea also depicts the predicament of much of Western contemporary society, which – Breytenbach implies –has also forgotten about ancient wisdom.

In conclusion, Anom’s meditations on Death Row lead, paradoxically, to the birth of a heightened sense of awareness that reality can be mentally reconstructed. Through an internal journey – referred to as the ‘noble art of walking’ – Anom ‘escapes’ the external prison structure and experiences a deeper mindfulness that leads to the removal of mental obstacles. A paradoxical vision of home-within-homelessness emerges, liberating Anom – psychologically – from his material surroundings. A multifaceted sense of home – embedded in Zen Buddhist and traditional African spiritual principles – takes shape in moments of deepened awareness. Anom’s changing perceptions of reality are facilitated through a multi-layered understanding of the nature of the self, the role of writing, and a reconnection with ancient ‘African’ memory. Human solidarity is achieved through transcending the ego. In addition, the creative writing act propels Anom towards more complex conceptions of both home, and exile located, paradoxically, in nomadism or the onward journey of enlightenment. Finally, attention is drawn to the importance of regaining a more fluid, primordial

memory that will facilitate a sense of belonging and an awareness of a home that is located not in a particular place, but that emerges from ancient truths that have been forgotten.

CONCLUSION

In this mini-dissertation I have attempted to show that the question of what constitutes 'home' for the exile is not only complex, but also relevant to our time. *Memory of Snow and of Dust* explores the concepts of 'home' and 'exile' as part of the vocabulary of ever-changing processes of representation. My reading suggests that in a world characterised by border crossings and cultural diversity the rigid categories of home and exile need to be reconfigured according to a simultaneity of ancient trajectories and stabilities.

Both in the old and new environment a sense of belonging evades exiles as they journey in search of a new home. Not wholly a part of their new surroundings, unable fully to return to a previous home, exiles inhabit a state of perpetual homelessness. The realisation that rootlessness will henceforth be part of one's identity is a painful one. Yet it is this knowledge that may provide access to alternative patterns of thought and action, as exiles navigate fresh states of being. Memories of a former home environment – which suggest the potential for a return home – are recognised as illusory, but also as constructs of the imagination in which re-imaginings are possible. The journey towards a multidimensional understanding of the concept of home is unsettling, yet necessary, as it 'initiates' the exile into creative awareness.

For exiles the challenge of belonging, therefore, constitutes a double challenge. The dislocation in foreign surroundings is amplified by the 'double vision' experienced. Migrants occupy in-between spaces – in 'border communities' – and their double vision can lead to new conceptual models through which to understand contemporary reality. Breytenbach's use of both postcolonial and postmodern strategies is symbolic of the difficulty of inhabiting the 'in-between' at the interstices of incommensurate worlds.

A new vision of home presents itself in the novel, paradoxically, in a space that represents the un-homely, the unfamiliar, and the 'hostile': the prison cell. The novel may be interpreted as offering

through Anom's reflections in prison not a solution, but rather a glimpse into Breytenbach's coping mechanisms with forms of homelessness. The psychologically alienating experience of imprisonment is overcome by a mental alertness which through continual movement evades all fixities.

The prisoner's mental suffering – an extreme depiction of the exilic state of mind – acts, surprisingly, as a catalyst which facilitates the translation of the self. Through the process of writing himself into different personae Anom is able to practise 'the noble art of walking' which enables him to experience inner growth in the prison enclosure. He experiences an internal journey, through which he gains insight into a new form of consciousness that acknowledges the fluidity of the material and the spiritual; of the past and the present.

It is a consciousness that shifts from Western dualities towards an amalgamation of ancient African and Zen Buddhist principles and practices. Home, in consequence, is aligned with nomadism; space is transformed (through the writing self's transcendence of the ego) into a site of 'liberation'. Home and exile are forced beyond their own binaries to a composite state of home-in-exile, exile-in-home; not a state of perfect harmony, but a positive response to a multi-dimensional future.

In conclusion, I have endeavoured to show that *Memory of Snow and of Dust* is relevant beyond its original reception as a novel of dissent. The author's reflections on the exilic condition – a postcolonial concern – are of interest in an age characterised by migration. In 1989, at the time of first publication, *Memory of Snow and of Dust* would have suggested a challenging analogy: not social revolution, but mental-cognitive revolution beyond the rigidities of the apartheid system. What the novel may suggest today – post-apartheid – is a significance even closer to Breytenbach's original purpose: that even within a 'liberated' political state, the human mind remains 'unliberated'. (The crudities of public discourse in South Africa at present are but one manifestation of 'closed' systems of thought.) In fact, *Memory of Snow and of Dust* fits well into a recent turn in postcolonial and postmodern studies – as discussed by, *inter alia*, Boyd White (2006), Eagleton (2009) and

Mathuray (2009) – in the realisation that secular times require a rekindling of a spiritual dimension. What I am suggesting is that Breytenbach's book is not confined to an apartheid past, but speaks to us still. In my opinion, *Memory of Snow and of Dust* – currently out of print – deserves republication, as it has increasing value as a novel that challenges one to cultivate an expanded awareness regardless of the times in which one lives.

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