

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**Postcolonial Nostalgia and Meaning:
New Perspectives on Contemporary South African Writings**

by

Beverley Jane Cornelius

211549783

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy, English Studies,

School of Arts, Howard College, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Supervisor: Professor Ileana Dimitriu

March 2019

Declaration

This research has not been previously accepted for any degree and is not being currently considered for any other degree at any other university.

I declare that this dissertation is my own work except where specifically acknowledged.

Beverley Jane Cornelius

211549783

Signature:

Date:

Abstract

This dissertation explores the concept and application of nostalgia in a selection of contemporary South African novels chosen as representative of the multi-cultural diversity of South Africa's literature.

The study explores novels by four authors – Etienne van Heerden (*Ancestral Voices; 30 Nights in Amsterdam*), Rayda Jacobs (*The Slave Book; Joonie*), Mongane Wally Serote (*Revelations; Rumours*), and Ronnie Govender (*Song of the Atman; The Lahnee's Pleasure*) – to analyse these authors' nostalgic treatment of the past as complementing their explorations of the anxieties of the present.

Much of South African literature deals with the past, and postcolonial themes predominate: e.g. dislocation, diaspora, hybridity, ambivalence, home, identity, and belonging. Many authors dealing with issues of the past write *nostalgically* about it: either fondly, or with a sense of yearning, even though the past that is examined might have been turbulent and traumatic. However, this does not necessarily mean that their representations of the past are superficial or sentimental. On the contrary, nostalgic writers grapple with the paradoxical emotions associated with longed-for times and places.

The term 'nostalgia' has often been misunderstood as an unreliable or biased form of memory. This is not always the case: the conventional understanding of nostalgia as 'bitter-sweet' gives the first clue as to the tensions inherent in its complex and nuanced texture. It is misleading to take nostalgia at its 'sweet' face-value only without also exploring its 'bitter' counterpart, as current research indicates.

This study applies the concept of 'nostalgia' as a complex conceptual and analytical tool within recent debates in postcolonial literary study. In my investigation, I draw especially on Boym's (2001) distinction between 'restorative' vs 'reflective' nostalgia, as well as on Medalie's (2010) differentiation between 'evolved' vs 'unreflecting' nostalgia.

I have also made intensive use of related postcolonial concepts – such as 'space and identity' and 'trauma and haunting' – to inform my analysis.

Finally, this study illustrates that contemporary writers can harness nostalgia as a positive force; and that instances of nostalgia, if critically applied and analysed, can unearth submerged memories and help transform trauma into meaning, thus providing fresh points of entry towards a reimagined future.

Contents

Declaration	ii
Abstract	iii
Chapter 1 - Introduction	1
Chapter 2 - Theoretical Concepts	11
Chapter 3 - Etienne van Heerden's <i>Ancestral Voices</i> and <i>30 Nights in Amsterdam</i>	27
<i>Ancestral Voices</i>	36
<i>30 Nights in Amsterdam</i>	62
Chapter 4 - Rayda Jacobs's <i>The Slave Book</i> and <i>Joonie</i>	86
<i>The Slave Book</i>	92
<i>Joonie</i>	117
Chapter 5 - Mongane Wally Serote's <i>Revelations</i> and <i>Rumours</i>	141
<i>Revelations</i>	151
<i>Rumours</i>	173
Chapter 6 - Ronnie Govender's <i>Song of the Atman</i> and <i>The Lahnee's Pleasure</i>	200
<i>Song of the Atman</i>	209
<i>The Lahnee's Pleasure</i>	237
Chapter 7 - Comparative Perspectives & Concluding Remarks	262
Reference List	273

Chapter 1 - Introduction

The aim of my study is to explore the concept and application of nostalgia in a selection of contemporary South African writings. My interest is in the diversity of South African literature, particularly its range of cultural perspectives of the past (both collective and individual). Furthermore, I am interested in our literature's multi-cultural platform for the communication, comparison, and reconciliation of its various pasts that, in turn, give meaning to a South African present. I examine novels by Etienne van Heerden, Rayda Jacobs, Mongane Wally Serote, and Ronnie Govender to explore how the authors' nostalgic treatments of the past complement their explorations of the anxieties of the present day.¹

Much of South African literature deals with the past, and postcolonial themes predominate (for example, dislocation, diaspora, hybridity, liminality, ambivalence, and the search for identity, belonging, and home). I have noticed, moreover, that many authors dealing with these issues write *nostalgically* about the past: either fondly, or with a sense of yearning, even though the past that is examined might have been turbulent and traumatic. However, this does not necessarily mean that their presentations of the past are superficial or sentimental. On the contrary, nostalgic writers grapple with the paradoxical emotions associated with longed-for times and places.

The term 'nostalgia' has often been misunderstood as an unreliable or biased form of memory. This is not always the case. The conventional understanding of nostalgia as a 'bitter-sweet' form of escape from the present gives a clue as to the tensions inherent in its complex and nuanced nature. It is misleading to take nostalgia at its 'sweet' face value only without also exploring its 'bitter' counterpart, as indicated by current research in diverse fields such as psychology, philosophy, sociology, and literary studies. Svetlana Boym (2001), for example, distinguishes between 'restorative' nostalgia, which seeks to restore an idealised past, and 'reflective' nostalgia, which engages with the fragmented complexities of the past. David Medalie (2010), similarly, refers to typologies of 'evolved' and 'unreflecting' nostalgia. Thus nostalgia – now recognised as a complex conceptual and analytical tool – has come to be incorporated in recent debates in postcolonial theory.

In applying current conceptual understandings of "postcolonial nostalgia" (Walder 2011) to my selection of South African authors, I have aimed to represent a broad cultural and geographical perspective. Since literature enables access to another's culture, I wish to show that the novels on which I have focussed in this study foster inter-cultural understanding amongst diverse audiences in South Africa – and beyond. Additionally, I demonstrate that, because nostalgia is a concept that

¹ This PhD thesis was prompted by, and is an extension of, the investigations undertaken for my MA thesis (Cornelius 2013). My examination in that thesis of Van Heerden's nostalgic writing – the writing of a white Afrikaner – prompted my curiosity about how other South African writers have represented places and characters shaped by nostalgic memories. This dissertation goes some way towards satisfying that curiosity.

encourages representations of rapid social change, contemporary writers can harness it as a positive force in the individual and collective search for identity, belonging, and meaning. For the reader/critic, instances of nostalgia can be considered as textual indications of subverted and/or submerged elements of the past that have the capacity to qualify the challenges of the present, thus providing fresh points of entry for a new imagining of the future.

The selection of authors for this project has been guided by the need for a broad representation of culture and gender, and also for geographical considerations. The authors – van Heerden, Jacobs, Serote, and Govender – represent diverse South African contexts and their novels illustrate various cultural backgrounds of South African literature. Because I wish to consider established writers who have experienced and written about (and/or during) South Africa’s changing socio-political contexts, I have not selected any new writers. Furthermore, although the selected writers all experiment with various genres, they have each written novels during recent years (as well as in previous decades) and can therefore be compared in relation to the genre of the novel.

At the risk of simplification at this stage, I introduce my selection of authors according to ‘ethnic’ lines as follows: Etienne van Heerden is a ‘white’ Afrikaner, whose characters are predominantly the descendants of early European pioneers. Rayda Jacobs is a so-called ‘Coloured’ (mixed-race) woman, a committed Muslim whose characters grapple with the complexities of Islam, while foregrounding the concerns of women and mothers. Mongane Wally Serote, a ‘black’ African, is rooted both in political struggle and in African spirituality; and Ronnie Govender, as a South African Indian from a Hindu background, is a representative of the writings of indenture. All these writers are loosely affiliated to different regions of the country, ensuring a sense of regional representativeness: Jacobs and van Heerden are linked to the southern Cape regions; Serote with greater Johannesburg and the northern provinces; and Govender with Durban and KwaZulu-Natal. In this respect, they represent a range of communities that are experiencing the challenges of South Africa in the new democracy, each writer bringing a fresh perspective to the present moment seen through the lenses of nostalgic longings for some past identity.

*

I refer briefly now to the themes and the reception of each writer’s works in general and outline how my contribution to the debate is organised.

- I begin with Van Heerden. The theme of identity has been examined in his work in a number of ways by various critics: for example, identity within changing contexts (Heyns 1994), the crisis of identity resulting from the loss of nationalist mythologies or cultural father figures (van den Berg 2011), the ‘refiguring’ of the Afrikaner as Coloured and white (Wicomb 1998a), and the earlier European roots of Afrikaner identity (Human 2008). Van Heerden’s search for a sense of identity –

which complements and sometimes contradicts official South African history (Viljoen 1993) – often prompts a return to the *plaasroman* convention (Warnes 2009; Venter 1993), while some of van Heerden's other works can be described as *grensliteratuur* (Warnes 2009) and as providing a view of the border war and its consequences (Kriel 1990; Popescu 2008).

Dealing with past trauma, Van Heerden's characters must review the past (van den Berg 2011), sometimes contemplating complicity, guilt, and betrayal (Heyns 2000), and at other times linking trauma to places/spaces – e.g. the land/farm in the *plaasroman* (Warnes 2011, Venter 1993), or the space of the human body (Nel 2010). Some of Van Heerden's interrogations of the past that blur boundaries between the living and the dead are described as 'colonial Gothic' (Irlam 2004), while the magical realism in his work (Warnes 2011; Alberts 2006) is likened to the writings of García Márquez (Toerien 1987).

For my part, I shall pursue the 'reflectively' nostalgic features (Boym 2001) of Van Heerden's writings of the past – a research focus that I have not detected in the abovementioned critics.

- In Rayda Jacobs's 'historical fiction' (Guestyn 2013), previously denied voices recuperate alternative pasts (Green 2004) that depict personal history alongside social history. In rewriting the slave narrative from a 'retrospective stance', Jacobs's work takes on a 'testimonial quality' (Wenzel 2004a) that explores identity formation; according to Chaudhari (2013), identity is further complicated by a practice, common in slavery, of name 'stripping' and renaming, which also strips away a sense of history, place and culture.

In her novels with a more contemporary setting, Jacobs's identity negotiations mix the autobiographical with the historical and factual (Kruger 2003); her characters co-exist within the 'fragmented, hybrid society' of their South African context (Roos 2005). With regard to Islam, Jacobs's fiction represents, on the one hand, the Muslim in greater society – what Roos (2005) refers to as 'Islam and the Other' – while, on the other hand, foregrounding Islamic belief and practice within Muslim communities (Kearney 2006). Jacobs's writings also explore the entanglements between physical appearance (particularly of the oppressed) and gender, race, and class (Murray 2011).

The existing critical literature on Jacobs's writing pursues the historical and religious/spiritual bent of her novels and her feminist focus, but does not appear to engage with the persistent nature of her memories of the past. I will, therefore, explore the evocative nature of her writing.

- Turning my attention to Mongane Wally Serote, I found that considerable attention has been given to Serote's art in relation to politics (Chapman 2003; Ndlela 2004; Mzamane 1983), with Patel (1990) going so far as to call Serote a 'Poet of Revolution'. Serote writes about South Africa's recent history – roughly the last thirty to forty years (Hlabane 1998; Moslund 2003; Ndlela 2004) – and,

although his explorations deal with a ‘shameful past’ and a ‘fractured society’ (Ndlela 2004), his writing remains optimistic (Hale 1976; Willemse 1985).

With regard to identity, the trajectory of Serote’s work charts a movement from the (lost) individual ‘I’, to the (unified) collective ‘we’, while searching for a sense of identity and meaning (Sole 1991; Willemse 1985; Mashigoane 2000; Patel 1990). It also explores the relationship between African identity and ancestral guidance (Oloaluwe 2010).

Further to the critics cited here, I intend to show that, in the post-apartheid era, Serote’s characters return to the concerns of the individual and that his writing displays a deep sense of yearning for an earlier sense of identity and meaning.

- With regard to Ronnie Govender’s work, much of the critical reception concentrates on his role in South African Indian theatre (Naidoo 1997; Hansen 2000; Singh 2009; Annamalai 1998). Inspired by political events to write and stage ‘satirical popular theatre’ (Annamalai 1998), Govender also utilises comedy to deal with identity anxieties (Hansen 2000). The South African Indian community is not, of course, homogeneous (Naidoo 1997) — its many cultural differences and senses of identity being reflected in Govender’s work (Brown 2005). It is also interesting to note the way in which Govender recasts his work from one genre to another, while altering its aesthetic and political purposes, as Singh (2009) has pointed out.

While the literary reception so far has mainly focussed on the more acerbic commentary in Govender’s dramatic writing, Pillay (2014) comments on Govender’s nostalgia for an area (Cato Manor) that has disappeared in the way that he knew it; Rajendra Chetty (2017) also explores the loss of Cato Manor as reflected in Govender’s writings. I will add a perspective that examines his apparent longing, in his novels, for the close-knit communities of the past.

It is apparent that each of the authors mentioned above has written prodigiously (each author’s oeuvre will be discussed in subsequent chapters) and that much of the work focusses on the past. However, critical attention seems to have been concerned more with what authors look at in the past, rather than with how they engage with their own memories. The nostalgic flavour of their work is what I wish to examine: especially how it pertains to the particular culture each writer explores, and how postcolonial concerns figure their searches.

*

Postcolonial concerns are paramount in these novels; hence, the theoretical framework of my study has its foundation in postcolonial literary theory. Initially, postcolonial theory dwelt on the struggle of the marginalized cultures of the ex-colonies against dominant imperial centres following

decolonisation (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin 1989). Subsequent to its initial discussions, a paradigm shift occurred in postcolonial studies: a shift from more locally inflected, to more globally inflected arguments. As suggested by Edward Said and Homi Bhabha, postcolonial theory now attempts to go beyond simplistic binary oppositions. Said (1993), for example, considers the relationship between culture and power, introducing the idea of ‘colonial discourse theory’ and ‘Orientalism’, and notes the stereotypical images and myths resulting from, and perpetuating, discrepant power relations. Bhabha (1994), on the other hand, suggests concepts such as ‘hybridity’ and ‘ambivalence’ as more nuanced representations of the contradictions inherent in asymmetrical colonial conditions. Briefly, the term ‘postcolonial’ has expanded its scope to become an umbrella term for a broad area of research that puts its emphasis, as I have said, on concerns such as dislocation, liminality, hybridity, ambivalence, double perspective and the search for identity, belonging and ‘home’. In the last decade or so, it has also incorporated ‘nostalgia’ as a concept and diagnostic tool, and I will explain in the next section how nostalgic memory can also be seen to form a double perspective with traumatic memory. These postcolonial themes predominate in contemporary South African literature, thus integrating it with global cultural paradigms.

As mentioned above, recent debates in postcolonial theory have incorporated the concept of nostalgia. Although viewed by some in the contemporary world as sentimental and biased, in recent years there has been a serious rethink about nostalgia, and inquiries are being made into why nostalgic feelings arise, what they mean, and what can be learnt from them. It is being recognised that, although it deals with the past, nostalgia has significant bearings on the present and the future. While attempting to come to terms with the past, it simultaneously helps one comprehend and accept current social dynamics and future configurations.

The word ‘nostalgia’ is made up of two parts: *nost(os)*, meaning a return, and *algia*, which means to feel pain or to care about. Thus, to feel nostalgic is to feel pain with regard to a return home; in other words, to feel homesick or to long for home. This is a feeling that has been recognised for centuries if we consider that one of the earliest examples of longing for home in literature is to be found in Homer’s *The Odyssey*, where Odysseus fights many obstacles (including himself) to satisfy his need to return to his place of belonging. In our more recent history, nostalgia was considered a medical or neurological disease. A Swiss doctor, Johannes Hofer, first coined the term in the 17th century (Juhl & Routledge 2013:214; Dlamini 2010:16; Wildschut et al. 2006:975). He regarded nostalgia as a neurological disease that could be cured, for example, by taking a trip to the Swiss Alps, or by using opium or leeches. Scheuchzer, also a Swiss physician, attributed the neurological disorder to atmospheric pressure, whilst Swiss military physicians thought that damage to the eardrums, caused by the loud and constant clanging of cowbells in the Alps, led to nostalgia (Wildschut et al. 2006:975). In the early 19th century, nostalgia was increasingly considered as a mental illness, a psychological condition – a form of melancholia or depression (Juhl & Routledge 2013:214; Wildschut et al. 2006) –

and it has “remained relegated to the realm of psychological disorders for much of the 20th century” (Wildschut et al. 2006:975).

Nostalgia is still prevalent in the contemporary world; perceived now as a concept rather than as a disease, but still regarded by many as sentimental and biased, as founded on a subjective selection of recall and emotional yearning. It tends to be perceived as presenting an unreliable and inauthentic perspective of the past, with negativity seemingly bracketed off and ignored in nostalgic explorations of times gone by. This is why nostalgia that is only based on pleasant memories of longing is often mistrusted. However, recent thought about nostalgia questions why these feelings emerge and what their meanings could be. Jacob Dlamini, for example, in *Native Nostalgia*, notes that “the irony about nostalgia is that, for all its fixation with the past, it is essentially about the present. It is about present anxieties refracted through the prism of the past” (2010:16). Bearing this in mind, my study aims to add to existing studies of nostalgia by exploring how a nostalgic treatment of the past, as represented in a selection of South African novels, complements an exploration of the anxieties of the present.

I reiterate that the tensions inherent in nostalgic memory are hinted at by the term ‘bitter-sweet’. Some recent studies focus on these tensions: on how some nostalgic ponderings try to keep the past intact, while others dwell on the complexities of the past for clues, missing parts, and a sense of meaning. Such recent debates are timely and appropriate because the effects of nostalgia do not appear to be diminishing, despite the progress of technology and the ‘shrinking’ of the world into a global village. On the contrary, nostalgia appears to be more pervasive. Exploitation and commodification of nostalgia are abundantly evident, for example, in kitsch art and in the oversimplified sentimentality very often present in advertising and branding. In the late 1980s and again in the early 2000s, it was in fact marketing and consumer psychologists who re-awakened interest in the study of nostalgia, particularly as it relates to consumer behaviour and the potential manipulation of emotion in sales and marketing. The consequence has been increasing suspicion of the power and prevalence of nostalgia. Immigrants, moreover, who have more obvious grounds for longing, often reject nostalgic feelings, regarding homesickness as sentimental and indulgent: “like a waste of time, and an unaffordable luxury”, as Boym (2001:xv) puts it in *The Future of Nostalgia*. But nostalgic feelings of longing, of pain, and of dissatisfaction nonetheless persist, and there has been, in recent years, serious thought about nostalgia that acknowledges this “harking back” as a persistent yearning that is a “genuine human need” (Su 2005:3).

Nostalgia, therefore, is persistent; it is a yearning, and it is a real need – but what is that yearning *for* and why is it so persistent? Although people look back to distant memory of a longed-for home, is such homesickness necessarily about a place? Boym, herself an immigrant, notes that many immigrants do not wish to be nostalgic; that they deny themselves the ‘indulgence’ and regard nostalgia as a derogatory term. Speaking for herself, Boym found that unbidden “phantoms [...] touched [her]” (2001:xv) when she visited a familiar place from her distant past. Even though she was

physically at the site about which she was feeling nostalgic, the feelings of longing and nostalgia did not abate. This suggests that nostalgia is a yearning not just for a particular place, but for a particular place at a *different time*.

Similarly, as noted by Walder (2011) and Boym (2001:xiv), outbreaks of nostalgia historically follow the upheavals of revolutions.² This suggests again that nostalgia is connected not only to memories of certain places, but also to the way those places were perceived, imaginatively, in other times. Walder suggests (2011:10) that certain conditions seem to be conducive to nostalgia. Time seen as linear, not cyclical, for example, leaves no recourse to the past. Present social and political conditions that are not satisfactory may prompt desire for an earlier time when conditions were perceived to have been better. Also, like styles of architecture, so do objects and images from the past stimulate the senses. Noting the conditions that are conducive to nostalgia, and pointing out their strong link to notions of time, Walder makes the further point that these conditions are also conditions of modernity.

In similar vein, Boym argues that “nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress” (2001:xv). We could say, therefore, that the modern condition is conducive to nostalgia, which in turn explains nostalgia’s prevalence in contemporary (and global) society and why Boym sees it as a “symptom of our age” (2001:xvi). It is a symptom of modern life, a sign of the condition of modern life, pointing perhaps to something that is not quite right. As a society, as humanity, we yearn for a more satisfying experience of life and of the world; in short, we yearn for ‘home’, a space in which we feel comfortable and to which we belong. The author Kazuo Ishiguro is quoted as saying that “we carry some sort of distant memory of that [better] world somewhere, even though it is a flawed memory, a flawed vision” (qtd in Su 2005:10).

The symptoms of nostalgia are evident in its numerous manifestations in one area or another of modern life and in its expression through a range of different mediums, as Boym (2001) discusses. The most obvious examples (by their physical prominence) are monuments. Statues, buildings, tombs and stadiums are erected to commemorate something or someone so that a community remembers together and does not forget. Parades or festivals are participatory activities that serve a similar purpose in linking people and ideas and inducing a sense of shared belonging to reinforce commonality. In the same way, rituals and traditions, threading through both the daily and the larger cycles of life, bind people to a common way and to a particular outlook. Even the preparation and consumption of food, the most elementary and essential of commodities, are invested with meaning in communal gatherings that have links to the past and to other people. None of these activities is innocent; each has meaning, whether explicit or implicit; and the meanings we assign to such activities are ambiguous, mysterious and, of course, nostalgic. So, can those meanings (those ‘somethings’) be

² It could be surmised that nostalgia might also follow other traumatic events: for example, “the advent of sociopolitical transition” (Hook 2012:227). This is important to bear in mind for a study concerned with the “postapartheid context” (Hook 2012:227) of contemporary South African literature.

identified or articulated? To articulate and explore the ‘unexplainable’, humankind, through the ages, has turned to art – in the images captured in painting or photography, in sculpture, and in the words and language of literature.

In literature, nostalgic memories can be recorded by the author and explored by the reader, and the manifestation of nostalgia in literature (intentional or unintentional, deliberate or inadvertent) is the focus of this study: ascertaining how nostalgia has been expressed and what its possible meanings and purposes could be.

Nostalgia is a form of memory, a form of remembering. But nostalgic memory is made up of specifically pleasant memories – it bathes the past in a rosy glow – and can therefore never give a complete account of the past. We can look at nostalgia from another angle, though, and consider it in relation to amnesia, in relation to forgetting instead of remembering. Although nostalgic behaviour and activities can foreground pleasant memories, for example through tradition and ritual, nostalgia can alternatively, by its persistence, also prompt the awakening of latent painful memory. It can lead to what has been forgotten, or, more importantly, to what has been submerged or subverted – and what has been submerged or subverted is likely to be traumatic memory. For example, sensory triggers, such as smells or tastes, can stir nostalgic feelings of longing that are much stronger than seem appropriate or necessary, and investigation of those strong reactions can lead to the unearthing of other memories – traumatic memories. As Walder puts it,

the rosy, sentimental glow most commonly associated with nostalgia is only part of the story, and [...] pursuing its manifestations with a proper sense of the complex of feelings and attitudes it engages, and the contexts upon which it draws, reveals its potential as a source of understanding and creativity. (2011:3)

*

This introduction prompts my investigation of the uses and merits of nostalgia in general and, more specifically, as applied to South African literature. I have touched, tentatively, on the questions of what nostalgia is as a cultural and critical concept, and have briefly questioned the ways that conventional assumptions about nostalgia could be misleading. This initial discussion also suggests that I seek to clarify the relationship between nostalgia and the postcolonial condition. Walder states, in the quotation above, that nostalgia is not simply a ‘rosy, sentimental glow’ and I propose that – to begin an exploration of the ‘complex of feelings and attitudes it engages’ and to start thinking about the ‘contexts upon which it draws’ – we should return to the question that I posed earlier. I asked: if nostalgia is a yearning, then ‘what is that yearning *for*?’ I addressed the question by discussing nostalgia’s relation to time and place. In the next chapter I will expand on that connection with the intention of also addressing the question, ‘why is nostalgia so persistent?’ This provides further understanding of nostalgia’s place (as a concept) within the field of postcolonial theory and sheds light on the double perspective formed of both nostalgic and traumatic remembrances.

Once the far-ranging complexity of nostalgia, as a concept and postcolonial tool, has been established, subsequent chapters will provide analysis of the application of postcolonial nostalgia in the writings of the four selected contemporary South African novelists. A chapter will be dedicated to each of the authors to explore what issues, times, and places the writers are nostalgic about; and how they express and represent nostalgic memories or longings. I will apply the various typologies (as per, for example, Boym and Medalie) to each of the novels to ascertain whether the respective author's view of the past is 'restoratively' fixed or whether it 'reflectively' aids their understanding of the past. Finally, the study will compare – in terms of cultural and gender considerations – the works of the four authors, so as to ascertain commonalities and differences in their respective uses of nostalgia.

The substantive part of my study will be based on close-text analysis of the primary texts, an analysis that will seek to apply theories as adumbrated in the next chapter, to the chosen eight novels (i.e. two novels by each author). Instances of nostalgia from each novel will be identified and examined (in conjunction with related concepts of identity and place, trauma and haunting).

My overall conclusion will consider whether nostalgia offers the characters, the author, and/or the reader insights into representations of societal complexities. In short, my findings will answer the question: 'what is the impact of nostalgia?'

*

Overview of the Project's Overall Structure

Chapter 1 – Introduction: (the current section).

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Concepts: I explore, explain, and compare crucial concepts and the theoretical background to the study. (Nostalgia as a concept; postcolonial nostalgia; nostalgia in relation to trauma and haunting, and to place/space; and nostalgia in South African literature.)

Four chapters follow (chapters 3 to 6) which focus on each of the authors in turn.

Chapter 3 – Etienne van Heerden's *Ancestral Voices* and *30 Nights in Amsterdam*: The 'nostalgic' tone of the novels are explored in this chapter. *Voices* (1989) is set in the early 1900s and portrays an insular Afrikaner community, whereas *30 Nights* (2011) broadens the horizons of the Afrikaner community to encompass its European origins and its global present and future.

Chapter 4 – Rayda Jacob's *The Slave Book* and *Joonie*: In this chapter, the evocative nature of Jacobs's novels is analysed. *Slave Book* (1989), set in the 1830s, features South Africa's slave ancestry and its varied origins, while *Joonie* (2011) has a contemporary and international context with protagonists moving between New York and Cape Town in the 1980s and 2000s.

Chapter 5 – Mongane Wally Serote’s *Revelations* and *Rumours*: This chapter discusses two fairly recent novels. In *Revelations* (2010) and *Rumours* (2013), Serote’s characters dwell on the past in their search for identity and meaning. Both novels feature former anti-apartheid fighters/soldiers who revisit the past in order to make sense of their place as individuals in contemporary South African and global society. In *Revelations*, the protagonist visits the various sites of his Struggle years, while in *Rumours* the protagonist grapples with earlier ancestral hauntings.

Chapter 6 – Ronnie Govender’s *Song of the Atman* and *The Lahnee’s Pleasure*: These novels blur the generic lines between the novel, the biography, and the play. This chapter takes a close look at *Atman* (2006), which is a fictional ‘biography’ of the author’s uncle, and *Lahnee* (2008), which is a novel that was previously presented in the form of a play. The apparent longing for the close-knit communities of Govender’s past is examined here.

Chapter 7 – Comparative Perspectives & Concluding Remarks: the findings of chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 are summarised to facilitate a comparative perspective of the writers’ works (in terms of similarities and differences) from which final conclusions are drawn.

Chapter 2 – Theoretical Concepts

Nostalgia, Postcolonial Literature, and Meaning

There are arguments promoting nostalgia as a positive concept, but also arguments denouncing it as either useless or harmful. Could both of these arguments have merit? Could there be different types of nostalgia that might be used in different ways?

I touched earlier on some typical reservations about nostalgia: for example, that it offers a biased and subjective perspective and is not a truthful or accurate portrayal of the past. There are more serious criticisms, though, such as the objection that a nostalgic approach is utopian and therefore limited and limiting, or that focusing attention on an ideal perspective of the past inhibits more comprehensive knowledge about the world. John Su (2005), for example, tackles one of the “central critiques of nostalgia” (18), namely that it purportedly encourages passivity and xenophobia because it “represents a dangerous reaction to collective trauma, leading individuals to indulge in fantasies of the past rather than to confront crises facing them” (2005:18). These are serious charges, indicating that the concept of nostalgia is more problematic than might be initially apparent. But, as with any complex concept, there is also potential for positive effect.

Although nostalgia appears to be a universally recognised emotion, reactions to it vary, and its manifestations may dictate its value as a positive or negative force. In her ground-breaking book, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Boym (2001) – referred to earlier – offers a typology of nostalgia (2001:xviii): ‘restorative’ nostalgia and ‘reflective’ nostalgia.

Restorative nostalgia is concerned with a ‘return home’. It seeks to restore the ‘home’ that has been lost, and regards itself not as some longing, “but as truth and tradition” (Boym 2001:xviii). It provokes the impetus for national and religious festivals – activities that seek to restore a feeling of togetherness, of belonging, and of wholeness. (This would be the type of nostalgia that prompts the xenophobia and passivity mentioned in Su’s book.) According to Dennis Walder (2011), what distinguishes the two types of nostalgia is the way that history is regarded: people who are restoratively nostalgic regard history as “tradition, myth and monument” (11), whereas those who are reflectively nostalgic see history as “partial [and] fragmentary [as they] linger on ruins and loss” (11).

Reflective nostalgia deals with the longing, with *algia*. It “delays the homecoming” by facing or dwelling on the pain of longing, confronting the “ambivalences of human longing” and the “contradictions of modernity” (Boym 2001:xviii). Reflective nostalgia explores ways of “inhabiting many places at once” (Boym 2001: xviii); it utilizes ‘double vision’ (as noted earlier) to contemplate the past, or the space that is longed for, from the perspective of the present and the currently inhabited space.

In continuation of Boym's typologies, David Medalie (2010) distinguishes between an 'evolved' nostalgia and a 'static' nostalgia. According to him, in literary texts, nostalgia can often be "glib, unambitious and utterly lacking in self-consciousness [partaking] of idealization [...] without interrogating it" (2010:37,40), and could therefore be understood as 'static' nostalgia. In contrast, 'evolved' nostalgia is a "sophisticated and trenchant form of nostalgia [which] enables one to understand better the complexity of the relationship between past and present, as well as the interwoven nature of utopian and dystopian impulses" (Medalie 2010:37).

Evolved – or reflective – nostalgia is contemplative. As Boym explains, reflective nostalgia can "at best [...] present an ethical and creative challenge" (2001:xviii). It is the creative challenge on which doctors in the 18th century were relying when they suggested that those suffering from nostalgia should consult with poets and philosophers. As a literary tool for the writer, nostalgia can be used to facilitate the integration of traumatic versions of the past, to nudge dormant memory, and to hint persistently at current dissatisfactions. For the reader and critic, instances of nostalgia can be considered as indications in the text of subverted and submerged elements of the past; such instances can highlight, by comparison, the unsatisfactory present, and can provide impressions with which to imagine the future anew. I mentioned earlier on, that in recent years there has been serious thought about nostalgia. Current research extends to the diverse fields of psychology, philosophy, sociology, and literary studies. Derek Hook (2012) utilises knowledge from more than one of these fields to advance understanding of nostalgia. Comparing sociological approaches with psychological theories, he reminds us that nostalgia is ultimately concerned with aspects of human memory and subjective emotion – in other words, with the psychological. Hook describes Boym's book as a "landmark [for the] prospect of nostalgia as critical instrument" (2012:226), although he sees her (restorative and reflective) typologies as "rudimentary" (227). He points out that Boym's basic distinctions risk being "considered [as] mutually exclusive types" (Hook 2012:227) to be juxtaposed against one another – which they are not. Rather, Boym's types occur simultaneously, they overlap, even though they are different. Hook suggests that further distinction and explanation are necessary for a full appreciation and utilisation of the complexities of nostalgia in what he terms "progressive (i.e. potentially transformative) and regressive (or rehabilitative)" types that operate "simultaneously" (2012:226-228). Expressing a similar opinion to Boym and Hook, Pickering and Keightly suggest that,

[r]ather than dismissing [nostalgia] as a concept, we should perhaps reconfigure it in terms of a distinction between the desire to return to an earlier state or idealized past, and the desire not to return but to recognise aspects of the past as the basis for renewal and satisfaction in the future. (2006:921)

To highlight the full potential of nostalgia, Hook comments on the "missing psychological dimension" (2012:227) thus comparing sociological theories of nostalgia with psychological theories, since nostalgia relates essentially to aspects of human memory and emotion. In nostalgic memories, the individual takes 'centre stage'. Nostalgic scenarios are about "the self as central character and revolve

around interactions with important others” (Wildschut et al. 2006:988). In psychological terms, nostalgia is thus a “phenomenon of the ego” (Hook 2012:230) and as such can be seen to support and protect the identity. Hook suggests, therefore, that no instance of nostalgia can be considered transformative unless (or until) its sociological implications have been balanced or juxtaposed with its psychological implications, in relation to which nostalgia is first and foremost a *defensive* mechanism “affirming, supporting and strengthening an identity”.³ What follows is a brief outline of the psychoanalytic concepts that Hook uses for his reconsideration of nostalgia, and of the way in which these concepts can facilitate the “simultaneity of [nostalgia’s] regressive and progressive movements” (2012:228). ‘Simultaneity’ is an important factor to keep in mind when looking at each of the concepts that Hook considers: just as the bitter-to-sweet ratio of nostalgia eludes clear-cut distinction and measurement, so too do the parallel psychological concepts. The concepts here are fetish, fantasy, affect, screen-memory, and retro-action/deferred action.

A nostalgic version of a past event that is consistently recalled and revered, says Hook (2012), could be seen as taking on the status of a fetish. A fetish is an excessive devotion to something (for example, an object or an idea). ‘Fetishistic nostalgia’ will preserve a single version of events that leaves no room for memory to evolve, and because fetishistic nostalgia clings desperately to a conservative picture of the past, it serves as a tool of denial, ‘wallpapering’ over the cracks. I made the point earlier that nostalgia can be considered in relation to forgetting, as well as to remembering. Hook also makes the point, stating that fetish-like nostalgia gives licence to forget, thus covering up trauma. However, by examining such instances of nostalgia, the ideological make-up of these thought processes can be identified: what is being denied, what is being asserted, and what is being maintained are questions that arise in response to such evocations.

Hook also likens nostalgia to fantasy. Both fantasy and nostalgia are modes of thinking that can create a deceptive picture of reality and block out uncomfortable thoughts; but this, in turn, will foster complacency and resignation. So, although a particular memory may be pleasant and comfortable, as an instance of ‘fantastical nostalgia’ such a memory will, in fact, have negative value because it makes it possible to avoid traumatic issues, thereby impeding healing or progression. Here again, though, if an instance of nostalgia is seen to parallel a fantasy, the nostalgic memory can be examined closely and used diagnostically. “It is what we do with that instance of nostalgia that counts,” says Hook, because these fantastic or nostalgic reminiscences are selective and “may be connected to a broader strata of related but less readily accessed memories and associations” (2012:233). In other words, instances of ‘fantastic nostalgia’ lead to something else, to unprocessed sites of discomfort or trauma.

³ Svetlana Boym also points out that nostalgia can be a defence mechanism: “Nostalgia inevitably reappears as a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals” (2001:xiv).

Nostalgia is commonly seen as a bitter-sweet emotion, in which the ‘sweet’ feelings are often the most prominent. However, in what he calls the “lie of affect” (2012:233), Hook states that the sweetness is not the truth. Although the sweetness of nostalgia is often more prominent than the bitterness, that kind of sweetness cannot be taken at face value; it does not necessarily make the nostalgic memory a positive force. Rather, the sweetness should be scrutinised as the façade for a more complex, serious – and possibly/probably negative – matter. When examining an instance of nostalgia, the ‘bitter’ part should not be forgotten or ignored. Rather, it should be foregrounded, because ‘the bitter’ suggests a sense of loss or lack that prompts nostalgia in the first place: “the bitterness [...] of affect may be a more reliable indicator here than the apparent sweetness” (Hook 2012:233) – the bitterness being the anxiety associated with loss.

Foregrounding is a technique that focusses attention on something by making it prominent. The subconscious itself sometimes uses foregrounding. One example of this is what psychologists call a ‘screen-memory’. A very prominent, vivid memory presents itself as a version of an event in the past, an event that is not necessarily noteworthy. The vivid memory is like a ‘snapshot’, presenting a very clear picture, but one seemingly without any important information. Its purpose is to foreground unimportant information in order to screen off more serious, traumatic information/memory. As is the case with fetish, fantasy, and ‘untruthful’ affect, the screen-memory is also useful as an alert that there is a more weighty association involved. Nostalgic memories, too, can present themselves in the mode of screen-memory and should therefore be handled in much the same way as a psychoanalyst would handle a screen-memory: as a clue or trigger to be investigated further. In effect, it seems that Hook is suggesting that instances of nostalgia be ‘psychoanalysed’, as it were: each individual example can be carefully discussed and interpreted.

Hook also relates the suggested ‘psychoanalysis’ of nostalgia to time. Nostalgic thought is predominantly about ‘then’ and ‘now’. Hook avers that the more progressive types of nostalgia *do* juxtapose the past and the present, but only fleetingly, whereas in the realm of the psyche, time is not linear, but simultaneous: thoughts or memories of the distant past and the not-so-distant past can appear as clearly as the present. The suggestion is that the linearity of nostalgic time and thought can be facilitated by ‘psychic time’: the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (also known as retro-action or deferred action), can induce a better understanding of the dialogical relation between past and present. In *Nachträglichkeit*, significant reaction to an event happens only much later than the event itself, not at the time the event occurs. Something is ‘triggered off’ in the present that causes a reaction to an event in the past; usually, something that did not have an impact at the time, but now is fully and shockingly realized as a trauma. The reassessment then colours the way that everything has been considered since that event. The *Nachträglichkeit* has the effect of making the present seem precariously unfinished or unstable because with each revision the past re-forms the present. The relevance of *Nachträglichkeit* in the post-apartheid/postcolonial context is that the way in which the

present is viewed is constantly changing because of the as yet incomplete record of the (colonial and apartheid) past. Hook says that the psychoanalytic concept of deferred action treats the interaction between past and present differently from the way that nostalgia does. Nostalgia, he says, is limited because it ultimately protects the ego and does not ‘release’ the repressed parts of the past (or the memories of the past). *Nachträglichkeit*, on the other hand, deals with anxiety and “a coming undone of repression” (Hook 2012:236). Where nostalgia “no doubt has its uses” in investigations of the past, deferred action is “crucial” (Hook 2012:237).

In pointing out the restrictions and defensive properties of nostalgia, Hook does not denounce it; he simply cautions that nostalgia is not to be accepted as ‘the whole truth’; but, rather as a version of the past that hints at other versions of the past. He ends by discussing how the (original) Greek and (newer) American conceptions of nostalgia diverge. The American view trivializes nostalgia as “romantic sentimentality”, whereas the Greek emphasis is on “ongoing pain, an inability to adapt, the persistence of longing, and desire for transformation” (2012:238). And

it is precisely at the moment that the ego-comforts and protections of nostalgia are dissipated, at the point when nostalgia becomes less sweet, more troubling, more anxious – exactly when the American notion reverts to the Greek – that nostalgia becomes useful to us. (Hook 2012:238)

This echoes Boym’s description of a reflective nostalgia that “thrives on algia, the longing itself, [that] dwells on the ambivalences of human longing, [and that, furthermore, represents] an ethical or creative challenge” (2001:xviii).

Boym explores nostalgia from a philosophical and sociological point of view. While Su (2005), Dlamini (2010), and Walder (2011) consider nostalgia as a literary phenomenon, Hook combines sociological and psychological perspectives. Further to their explorations, psychological research (Wildschut 2006; Juhl & Routledge 2013) in the 21st century has also established that nostalgia is an emotion that is both negative and positive; that it is ambivalent. Following on from the opinions of nostalgia as a mental illness in the early nineteenth century, Fred Davis (1979) and, subsequently, Tim Wildschut and others (2006) examined word choices in participants’ narrative accounts of nostalgic events. They found that nostalgia was often associated with warm words and feelings. The word choices indicated that there was indeed a feeling of yearning or longing, but the longed-for object evoked warm and positive feelings; and that the words relating to positive emotion were used three times more frequently than words relating to negative emotion (Wildschut et al. 2006:978). Wildschut and colleagues then set out to examine the content, triggers, and functions of nostalgia. Their research showed that, although the *content* of the narratives was negative, “in a large majority of cases, these negative life scenes were redeemed or mitigated by subsequent triumphs over adversity” (Wildschut et al. 2006:988). In other words, that negative emotions progressed into positive feelings. As to the way that writing about nostalgic events “made the subjects feel, it was found that, “[f]urthermore, nostalgic narratives were richer in expressions of positive than negative affect [...] and participants reported

experiencing more positive than negative affect recalling a nostalgic event” (Wildschut et al. 2006:988-989).

Regarding what triggers nostalgia – or what nostalgia is in reaction to – Wildschut and his colleagues found that those who were experiencing negative emotions were prone to nostalgia. However, they also found that the psychological benefits of nostalgia were linked to a sense of well-being, as it “bolsters social bonds, increases positive self-regard, and generates positive affect” (Wildschut et al. 2006:989). Subsequent studies have continued to explore the functions of nostalgia. In addition to the three functions of nostalgia mentioned above (better self-image/self-esteem; better mood; better social relations), an examination and analysis of empirical data by Jacob Juhl and Clay Routledge (2013), established that nostalgia has “meaning-making capacity” (216). Nostalgia provides two types of meaning: a sense of “personal meaning in life”; and a sense that “the world outside of the self is meaningful” (Juhl & Routledge 2013:213). In relation to personal meaning, Juhl and Routledge state that

[n]ostalgia not only increases feelings of meaning, but it also helps people navigate situations that threaten meaning, improves well-being, and reduces stress for those who lack meaning. Thus, in addition to positive affect, self-esteem, and feelings of social connectedness, nostalgia functions to provide feelings of meaning in life. (2013:220)

Juhl and Routledge state also that people use “the past to make sense of the world” (2013:220): in the endeavour to cope with a rapidly changing world, the past is seen as simple, understandable, and just. They found that engaging nostalgically with the ‘world of the past’

increases perceptions that the world is meaningful. People turn to nostalgia when the meaningfulness of the world is undermined. In addition, nostalgia increases perceptions of a meaningfully structured world, decreases the need to make sense of the world, and increases tolerance for senseless stimuli. (Juhl and Routledge 2013:223)

Empirical data thus supports the idea that while nostalgia is both a positive and negative emotion (indeed, bitter-sweet), its positive aspects ‘win out’ overall.

Be that as it may, although nostalgia is scientifically verified and appears to be an emotion universally recognised, reactions to it vary and its manifestation may dictate its perceived value as a positive or negative force. What the psychological studies cited have confirmed is that instances of nostalgia should not be taken at face value, but identified rather as starting points for investigation.

As Walder suggests,

the imaginative reconstruction of the past may be a conservative and parochial activity, reflecting a ‘restorative’ desire for belonging that overrides distance; equally, it may be a radical and disturbing activity, reflecting a challenging sense of the inadequacy of recalled or [...] reclaimed images of earlier times and places; or it may in complex ways address both possibilities. In any case, nostalgia has a power that can be used in a multitude of ways, which is what makes it worth exploring; it is also what raises the issue of the ethics of remembering, and/or forgetting. (2011:12)

Walder examines nostalgia from a literary point of view and, in relation specifically to postcolonial writing, he agrees that in literature there is sometimes a “dark side of nostalgia” (2011:14). He quotes Derek Walcott’s suggestion that there has been a tendency for postcolonial literature to be “literature of revenge” or “literature of remorse” (qtd in Walder 2011:14). However, there is also a potential for the positive influence of nostalgia in that nostalgic self-reflexivity can lead to acceptance of the past and the present, and a reimagining of the future. This “tough aesthetic [...] uses what the past has delivered” and should be part of a “complex negotiation between remembering and forgetting” (Walder 2011:16).

My interest resides in nostalgia’s usefulness as a concept or ‘tool’ in postcolonial literature when employed strategically, as Steiner (2009) suggests, to ‘salvage’ aspects of the past. I mentioned earlier (in the concluding remarks of the *Introduction*) my intention to clarify the relationship between nostalgia and the postcolonial condition, and tentatively discussed nostalgia’s relation to time and place: how it involves not just a yearning for certain places but, more specifically, a yearning to be in those places in times past. This feeling of displacement is also a postcolonial condition. Both the ‘postcolonial condition’ and the ‘nostalgic condition’ are preoccupied with themes of identity, belonging, and home that emanate from a sense of displacement in rapid and profound (local and global) changes of recent decades.

As I have mentioned, postcolonial theory’s sphere of interest has expanded from its original focus. Initially, it “described the political and economic situation of nations following decolonisation” (Buchanan 2010:372). Since then, however, postcolonial theory has broadened to consider “vexed cultural-political questions of national and ethnic identity, ‘otherness’, race, imperialism, and language, during and after the colonial periods” (Baldick 2008:265). Ashcroft et al. point out how postcolonial discourse has been an important contributor to “developing a new language to address the problems of global culture” (2007:vii), while Buchanan states that it is in literary studies that “the term has put down its deepest roots [...] allowing the term to encompass the analysis of virtually any aspect of colonisation” (2010:372).

The importance of this ‘new language’ increases as rapid global change continues and people move – from choice or necessity – both “unidirectional[ly]” and in “asynchronous, transversal flows” (Cohen; qtd in Nyman 2009:15). People move across multiple boundaries and borders to work or to study, or simply as tourists, blurring the concept of ‘home’ and consolidating the notion of the ‘global village’. Postcolonial theory (and postcolonial literature) thus continues to be relevant, and particularly so in relation to global issues of the “‘transnational’ [as it affects] the migrant, diasporic and refugee communities not directly emerging from the colonial experience” (Ashcroft et al. 2007:ix).

Postcolonial literature is thus occupied with people and places: how people feel about themselves and each other, and how they relate to places (that is, in terms of a sense of belonging to certain places and communities, and to what they refer to as ‘home’). Such themes unfold further to broach conceptions of the ‘in-between’, the ‘otherness’ of hybridity, or of not quite belonging or feeling at home (either in a place or in one’s own skin). Although the idea of people/s, cultures, or territories as discrete entities lies behind the concept of the ‘nation’ and the ‘colony’, the meeting points cannot be clearly-defined borders. The meeting points are liminal spaces, in-between spaces, or spaces where the two entities merge. Boundaries are “porous [and] the reality of the colonial experience [...] was that it enabled cross-cultural encounters and mixtures which produced hybrids (as much of persons as of cultures), which simply couldn’t be absorbed into the colonial apparatus” (Gupta 2001:113).

Because people are increasingly mobile globally, opportunities to meet increase. If there are more meeting points; then there are more “porous” borders (Gupta 2001:113). Alternatively, Schoene refers to “trans-territorial communities”: the idea being the “existence of communities beyond the constraints of territory” (Rofe; qtd in Schoene 2010:13). However, these scenarios – these meeting points, porous borders, “communities beyond the constraints of borders” – are not always seen in a positive light. People may begin to fear the loss of their identity and could therefore revert to “crav[ing] a national identity” (Schoene 2010:182).

But can the “flattening effects of global systems” be avoided (Kolodziejczyk 2010:151)? Can sameness and difference be simultaneously retained? Schoene suggests that it is time to “venture beyond our nationally demarcated horizons into the world at large and understand the domestic and the global as weaving one mutually pervasive pattern of contemporary human circumstance and experience” (2010:15-16). Hence, the term ‘glocal’ and the concept of ‘glocalization’ “accompan[y] the greatly nuanced view of the relationship between the local and the global that has been introduced by postcolonial studies” (Ashcroft et al. 2007:105).

It is appropriate that I use postcolonial theory as a “meta-perspective” (Kral 2009:15) to discuss “mobile identities” (Nyman 2009:10) and the notion of culture as an “on-going and dynamic process” rather than a “static product” (Nyman 2009:13). ‘Meta perspective’ is the phrase that Françoise Král uses to describe the liminality – or the “double subjectivity” – of the diasporic writer (2009:15), a condition described as being both a “blessing and a curse” for the writer: “[a] curse in the sense that the diasporic writer is doomed to a life of in-betweenness, but a blessing in the sense that s/he enjoys a double outlook” (2009:15). However, I am mostly concerned with exploring how or why people – more particularly, migrants, or those who are in-between and have a double vision – attempt to “salvage” aspects of the past in reverting to nostalgia, “strategically”. (See Steiner 2009:39 on why nostalgic memories are so intense and persistent.)

To be nostalgic (to long for home) implies a movement from one time or place to another (from one space to another space) and having a perspective of one space from the positioning of another. But to have been in two different spaces implies that even in looking at one space, the mental image of the other is likely to influence one's view. Inadvertently or not, there will be a comparison. The original view will be coloured by the subsequent view, and vice versa. This results in a double perspective because neither space can be denied or disregarded. Two images are superimposed: "home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life" (Boym 2001:xiv).

This double perspective is a feature of the postcolonial condition and, especially, of the migrant. Rushdie (1991), Said (2001), and Boehmer (1995) each discuss the 'double vision' or 'double perspective' of the migrant, the exile, and/or the (post)colonial writer or person, as being in a privileged, albeit challenging or even painful position. Rushdie refers to the migrant's 'double perspective' (1991) as a consequence of living between cultures; Said states that the exile has "plurality of visions [that] give rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions" (2001:186); whilst Boehmer considers that colonial writers "learnt to exploit the resources of their own half-and-half status" (1995:117). The study of nostalgia can therefore be a useful addition to the toolbox of postcolonial analysis in view of the subjective perceptions of time and place that constitute nostalgia. Nostalgia's double perspective also helps us to address the question (posed earlier) of what nostalgic yearnings are for.

The further question that I have raised is: why is nostalgia so persistent? I suggest that nostalgia and memories of trauma also provide a double perspective. As we know, subverted and traumatic memories will always return in one way or another. It is the connection between nostalgic memory and associated traumas that could explain nostalgia's persistence. Furthermore, like the double exposure of two images on film, nostalgia and traumatic memory can complement each other. Nostalgic memory can provide a 'safe place' from which to view uncomfortable or traumatic memory; it can be used as a starting point for an investigation of a past. Traumatic memory, being so overwhelming, can then be balanced by the pleasant memories intrinsically provided by nostalgia. In other words, by allowing for both trauma and nostalgia, each version of remembering is deepened, thus creating an overall broader, more nuanced perspective. This double perspective allows us to be "both actor and spectator" of our past, as Walder (2011:9) claims in reference to Proust – who, as a master of remembered sensory impulses, enables us to revive "not merely the past moment, but the epiphanic experience of the past in its entirety" (2011:9).

Nostalgia: Trauma and Articulation

Earlier, I mentioned that for many critics nostalgia is a form of memory that selectively recalls *pleasant* memory (and therefore cannot possibly give a complete account of an event). Memory, whether personal or collective, is subjective and selective so that the parts that we do not want to know, or do not want to remember, can be omitted. The point is that memory (in its various forms) does not tell the whole story. And there are parts of one's life story on which nostalgia will not focus, because it is within the factual, ordinary memory (personal and historic) that a recall of trauma resides, never within the nostalgic memory. However, I believe that nostalgic memory and traumatic memory are closely related, and I would now like to pay closer attention to the way that nostalgia – together with traumatic memory – can form a double perspective, a dual view, a fuller picture of the past.

Traûma, in the original Greek, means 'wound', and implies a physical or psychic wound. Psychic wounds are not visible, and traumatic memories can either be subverted by the psyche, so that the individual does not remember the event, or the traumatic memories can dominate memory, obliterating or colouring all other aspects of recall.

Exploring nostalgia in a literary text will prompt questions such as: 'what has evoked this nostalgia?' or, 'why is this character nostalgic?' But the question could also be: 'what memories are associated with this case of nostalgia?' and the answer, very often, is that the memories associated with nostalgia are of a traumatic time or event, memories that have been forgotten or, more seriously, memories that have been subverted. As Walcott notes in relation to the traumas of colonisation, "traumas [...] must, in a sense, be forgotten as a means of survival [...] in time, the slave surrendered to amnesia" (Walcott; qtd in Edwards 2008:132). Amnesia, Walcott claims, is our inheritance as the "true history of the New World". Much of the work done in postcolonial writing aims to fill in the gaps in records and narratives of the past – the forgotten parts, the parts that have not been written/told.

Whether acknowledged or not, trauma remains etched in one's memory and has influence over an individual or over a whole society, "for trauma is that which inverts linear history, that which forever inserts a wedge into history's doors, keeping them permanently open, preventing closure" (Punter 2000:137). In other words, the trauma, the wound, does not go away and will not heal until it is confronted – but how can something be confronted if it cannot be remembered? Slavoj Žižek says that

there is an inherent link between the notions of trauma and repetition, signaled by Freud's well-known motto that what one is not able to remember, one is condemned to repeat: a trauma is by definition something one is not able to remember [...] as such, it repeats itself indefinitely, returning to haunt the subject – more precisely, what repeats itself is the very failure, impossibility even to repeat/recollect the trauma properly. (qtd in Wolfreys 2002:136)

"Do you remember?" is a question that literature consistently seems to ask in one way or another (Punter 2000:131), and it appears that what is recounted is what can be remembered. But what cannot

be remembered also finds its way onto the page, surreptitiously, there to be deciphered by the reader and critic. This is “literature’s memory work”, says Julian Wolfreys (2002:131), adding that “literature *just is* testimony”.

The aim of articulating trauma in postcolonial writing is that “if a trauma can be explained, can be represented in speech or writing, then it sometimes exorcises the trauma that has haunted the subject or the community” (Edwards 2008:136). “These acts of remembering are recorded with the hope that abuses of power will not be repeated and that the process of articulation will enable the individual and the community to heal and move on” (Edwards 2008:138). To reiterate, nostalgia can facilitate the articulation of trauma (by, for example, awakening subverted traumatic memory, and/or by balancing and complementing traumatic memory). Nostalgia can help an individual and/or a community to recuperate, heal, and integrate traumatic memories.

*

The articulation of trauma in the form of literary language is an attempt to convey that which is “outside of language” (Herman; qtd in Edwards 2008:136). Literary language attempts to put into words something that has been suppressed because it is “unspeakable and unrepresentable” (Herman; qtd in Edwards 2008:136). Some traumas, however, are more “unspeakable and unrepresentable” than others. Toni Morrison offers the proposition that “unspeakable things unspoken” can be represented by the “literary use of haunting” (qtd in Edwards 2008:119).

I have said that in exploring instances of nostalgia, it is inevitable that we will encounter traumatic memories. It is also possible that we will face scenes of hauntedness, scenes that are suggestive sites of repressed memory. Like nostalgia, hauntedness is a persistent emotion, an unsatisfied and persistent call from the past – it is (or it symptomises) the repressed insisting on return. Bhabha says, in regard to the collective haunting of a nation, that “repression always leads to a return of the repressed and that, as a result, the ‘unified’ nation is haunted by that which has been erased” (qtd in Edwards 2008:127). In other words, a psychic wound, or a trauma that has been repressed, will not stay forgotten forever, and its attempts to be remembered or recalled can be manifested as a haunting.

It has been suggested that trauma “effects an incision” in the self and splits one into two (Felman and Laub; qtd in Wolfreys 2002:139) in a process called “internal psychic splitting” (Abraham and Torok; qtd in Wolfreys 2002:139). “These two selves are the one who experiences, and the one who survives” (King; qtd in Wolfreys 2002:139). The one who survives, however, cannot ever be free of the one who experiences.

Haunting and nostalgia are very similar in that they both prompt the memory by bearing memories (or messages) from the past that will not allow movement into the future without being acknowledged.

But haunting is the opposite of nostalgia. Nostalgia is an evocation, it is gentle and pleasant, something you move towards; it coaxes you. Haunting, on the other hand, is a provocation. Ghosts are frightening, are something you try to escape. Ghosts, like trauma, are difficult to face but, like nostalgia, ghosts persistently raise memories and emotions that must be faced and acknowledged in order to form a more complete, integrated picture of the past.

In the postcolonial world, pictures or accounts of the past are often incomplete. Edwards says that “the nation relies on repression to manufacture a homogenous culture” (2008:127) in the struggle to form and assert itself. Bhabha avers, however, that the repressed will return and that “the nation is haunted by an uncanny return of the differences that have been denied” (qtd in Edwards 2008:127). In postcolonial writing, the ‘return of the repressed’ is apparent in the ghosts and the hauntings that often feature, and some postcolonial literary works have even been labelled ‘postcolonial gothic’, conveying the idea that there has been a transfer of a “European genre [the Gothic] to a colonial environment” (Newman 1994:85).⁴ For Abraham and Torok, “what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others” (qtd in Punter 2000:63). I would add that ‘the secrets of others’ could also apply to the secrets that our ‘other self’ keeps from us – namely, the secrets of the traumatised self that is left behind by the self that survives the trauma; the self that has repressed the painful memory.

We can see, then, that within postcolonial studies, an understanding of “spectral criticism” (Punter 2002:259) and an awareness of the concepts of ghosts and haunting are important additional concepts to be used and explored in conjunction with nostalgia. An understanding of spectral criticism and what it yields when applied to the reading of a literary text will complement the nostalgic investigation of the novels in this study, in cases where the novel presents sites of haunting, and therefore suggests that ‘unspeakable things’ are waiting to be ‘spoken’ or expressed in one way or another. To reiterate, articulation – even when prompted by nostalgia – can exorcise the haunting of a trauma and “the process of articulation [can] enable the individual and the community to heal and move on” (Edwards 2008:138).

⁴ A Gothic novel, according to Baldick’s definition, is “a story of terror and suspense, usually set in a gloomy old castle or monastery (hence ‘Gothic’, a term applied to medieval architecture and thus associated in the 18th century with superstition). [...] In an extended sense, many novels that do not have a medievalised setting, but which share a comparably sinister, grotesque, or claustrophobic atmosphere, have been classed as Gothic” (2008:144).

Nostalgia: People & Spaces

At the core of nostalgia is the yearning for a return to a sense of home, a longing to be in another place, another time – to be in a different space.⁵ I have noted already how nostalgic feelings for a place are not always dissipated even when the individual has physically returned to that place. It is not simply the place that is longed for, but that place at another time. This suggests that the place does not stay the same – that it is not static – but that it changes, just as time does. Earlier thought had it that space was constant, even though it was accepted that time was not: “Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile” (Foucault; qtd in Wegner 2002:179). Studies in various disciplines, however, have challenged the “concept of space as an empty container in which human activities unfold” (Wegner 2002:181). It has been found, on the contrary, that “space itself is both a production, shaped through a diverse range of social *processes* and human interventions, and a *force* that, in turn, influences, directs and delimits possibilities of action and ways of human being in the world” (Wegner 2002:181). Also, the “apparent stability” of social space, according to Lefebvre (qtd in Wegner 2002:182), is “short lived and contingent”. In other words, social space is modified and influenced by us (humanity) but we, in turn, are influenced by the space we inhabit, which is constantly changing and developing.

So there is a link, a relationship, between people and spaces in that, as suggested by Viljoen, Lewis, and van der Merwe, “both the concept of space and that of identity have to do with our experience as human beings. [...] We can thus view the relationship between space and identity as a symbiotic relationship, a mutual dependency creating meaningfulness” (2004:12). It follows then that when people are nostalgic for a particular space they are longing for the way they felt in that time and place – for the person they were, for the identity that particular space afforded. In order to explore nostalgic references to place/space in literature, we need to understand the relationship between the person and the place in the present and the past (that is, both in the current space and in the space longed for). What has changed – the person, the space, or the relationship between the two?

In postcolonial studies, this relationship between people and spaces is an important and prominent new area of investigation. Many people in the modern world are living in ‘different spaces’: different in the sense that they have physically moved from one place to another (the migrant, or the exile), or that the place they are in has changed and their relationship to it is different (for example, there has been a change in the power structures of a country or region). Furthermore, literature is a site where people can share their experiences with different spaces and it is in “literary and cultural texts” that we can see reflected the “changes in actual spatial practices” (Wegner 2002:186).

⁵ There are different connotations to the words ‘space’ and ‘place’. ‘Space’ is considered more neutral than ‘place’. ‘Place’ is “understood as a matter of the human response to physical surroundings of locations” (Malpas 1999:30) and “implies a strong emotional tie, temporary or more long lasting, between a person and a particular physical location” (Sime 1986:50). I use ‘space’ here to refer to a particular place at a particular time.

Viljoen et al. make the point that “significant places acquire mythic proportions [...] that satisfy the deepest human yearnings even if only temporarily” (2004:21). If so, what deep yearnings are satisfied by the nostalgic ‘visits’ that are made to significant places in literature? I suspect that ‘visiting’ a space nostalgically, knowing that all space is socially produced, allows us to take an objective look at how that particular space is constructed, and thus what social power of influence it has. By returning and validating that space, keeping in mind that it is a construct, we can move beyond rigid perceptions or attitudes. In other words, we can look at the spaces for which we are nostalgic – with the eyes of the present moment, thus exercising double vision and gaining a new perspective. Walder says that “the more conscious we are of our own nostalgia, the more we reflect upon it, the more aware we may become of our history” (2011:9). Once it is accepted that identity is founded on something that is socially constructed, it can be accepted that identity is not fixed and can then be accordingly re-imagined.

With regard to people and spaces, then, we have found that in ‘revisiting’ a place that is nostalgically longed for, the influences inherent in that place can be (re)considered and the site can be viewed from a new perspective.

Having explained the link between nostalgia and postcolonial theory – and how the link manifests in literature with regard to people/characters, to trauma, and to places/spaces – I turn now to nostalgia’s manifestation and usefulness in South African literature.

Nostalgia: South African Literature

I mentioned earlier that nostalgia is prevalent as a social phenomenon in times of historical transition (Boym; Walder). I also commented that postcolonial themes predominate in contemporary South African literature and that many authors write nostalgically about the past. According to Medalie (2010:36), nostalgia is such a frequent presence in contemporary South African literature precisely because the country is in a historical period of transition.

After 1994, new writings of hope and optimism were anticipated, writings that would not be preoccupied with apartheid as predominant subject matter. However, according to Elleke Boehmer, post-apartheid writing has become a “space of persistent trauma and anguish”, a corpus of “stuttering repetition and the seeming reiteration of further sorrows” (2012:29), in which there is “a sense of continuation without development” (2012:40). Literary works are “irresolute” and “inconclusive”, often ending on a note of “frozen penultimate” (2012:39) or a “suspended time being” (2012:38). South African writers, it seems, have become ‘stuck’ on crisis, “addicted [...] to the adrenalin of crisis management”, unable to come to terms “with the lack or loss of apartheid as opposition” (2012:30); and, if not writing directly about apartheid, then the writing is about the crises that beset the country

immediately following apartheid's demise (HIV/AIDS, crime, xenophobia, etc.). South African literature emerges as an entity traumatised, prone to repetition compulsion, and tied to the subject category of trauma, which is (in part) due to the awareness-raising influence of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Debate on the country's trauma begun at the TRC,

was continued and consolidated in a range of significant publications, including memoirs, novels, and scholarly analyses [and has contributed] to the embedding within the discourse of contemporary South Africa of the category of trauma understood as psychic trace, and as captured in processes of re-membering. (Boehmer 2012:32)

But Boehmer questions whether the crisis narrative is effective or if, having reached “the point of approaching cliché status” (2012:36), we are now in need of a literature that needs to pay more attention to the present and the future: a “writing that suggests [...] that it is open to slow progression” (2012:44).

Perhaps South African literature can be seen to be ‘stuck’ in ‘crisis reiteration’ because of the approach it takes to trauma and crisis. Michela Borzaga questions whether Western psychiatric and cultural theories of trauma are adequate when dealing with trauma in a South African context. It is important to consider when “imposing Western models of trauma” (Borzaga 2012:69) that “[i]n Western psychology the individual comes first” (Krog et al. 2009:61) whereas in African societies the self is understood as a “self-in-community” (Krog et al.:60). Therefore, in South Africa, Borzaga suggests, we require a broader “vocabulary” that is not “stigmatizing or reductive” (2012:75) but that takes into account the “historical and cultural syncretisms as well as the everyday-ness of people’s lives and their unique psychic textures” (2012:75). It would be suitable, in context, to think of trauma not in linear sequences of events but rather as layered or stratified (2012:79-80), or as a “unified tangle” (2012:78).⁶

Like Boehmer, Vilashini Cooppan (2012) notes the influence that the TRC has had on narratives of trauma. Cooppan even identifies what she refers to as a “mimetic TRC literature” (2012:49). There is, Cooppan says, a South African literature that mimics the TRC as an “embedded narrative event” (49); a testimonial form that perhaps “fetishizes wounding narratives of pain, injury, and loss” (51). The critic suggests that what we now need is a “literature of affect” (Cooppan 2012:54): a “networked, multiple, rhizomatic structure flowing across bodies, identities, histories, and futures” (Cooppan 2012:54-55).⁷ In short, it is suggested that, in processing and dealing with traumatic histories/

⁶ A “neglected field of study is *post-traumatic growth* and the survival strategies creatively imagined and practised by people” (Krog et al.; qtd in Borzaga 2012:74; italics in original). Borzaga stresses the importance of considering trauma in terms of “entanglement” (Nuttall; qtd in Borzaga 2012:89); Sarah Nuttall (2009) regards such an approach to trauma to be “future inflected” (19).

⁷ ‘Affect’ can be described, as Ruth Leys explains, as a “non-conscious experience of intensity” (2012:8) that is “prior to ideology, intention, reason, meaning, and belief” (2012:9) or as a “pre-subjective force that operates independently of consciousness” (2012:7).

pasts/memories, a literature (or approach to literature) that elicits emotional responses, would be appropriate and helpful/useful.

*

In the chapters that follow, to reiterate, I explore eight contemporary postcolonial South African novels in order to identify instances of nostalgia and to analyse the impact of the nostalgic memories on/for the author, the character, and the reader. Exploring instances of nostalgia in literary texts prompts pertinent questions: ‘what has evoked the nostalgia?’; and ‘what is the object of the nostalgia?’ In researching these questions, other concepts such as ‘space and identity’, ‘trauma’, and ‘haunting’ – discussed above and commonly explored in postcolonial analysis – must be considered supplement analysis. In short, I use nostalgia in this postcolonial study as a primary analytical tool in conjunction with other postcolonial concepts that inform my analysis and aid in my investigation.

Chapter 3 – Etienne van Heerden’s *Ancestral Voices* and *30 Nights in Amsterdam*

The exploration of nostalgia in this chapter focusses on two novels by the Afrikaans writer, Etienne van Heerden, in their English translation: *Ancestral Voices* (1989) [*Toorberg* (1986)] and *30 Nights in Amsterdam* (2011) [*30 Nagte in Amsterdam* (2008)]. These are analysed to ascertain how his nostalgic treatment of the past complements an exploration of the anxieties of the present.⁸

Van Heerden’s work addresses anxieties about Afrikaner identity, past and present, and in relation to location, family, and community. In the two novels selected for this study, many of the characters are haunted by the past, to the point that they are emotionally and psychologically crippled and stuck, unable to develop and grow. But when faced with a crisis in the present, the characters question the past and confront what it is they yearn for or have yearned for. Van Heerden employs nostalgia in his representations of the past to address anxieties in the present, while his application of nostalgia, contrary to the stereotypical perception that nostalgia is only sentimental, is strategic and balanced. In both novels, nostalgic remembrances lead to sites of both trauma – that can then be acknowledged and attended to – and of reconciliation, with another person, with a place, or with the self. Nostalgia is harnessed, therefore, as a positive force and used as a tool to address the past, without denying its related trauma, in the search for identity, belonging, and wholeness.

The scope of this study restricts my analysis to two of Van Heerden’s novels. The 22-year time period between the publication of each novel has significance: *Ancestral Voices* was published in 1989 during apartheid-era South Africa, while *30 Nights in Amsterdam* was published in 2011 in what was now a democracy. Furthermore, the novels in their events have a reach of approximately 174 years, from around 1836 to 2010. During this period Afrikaner identity developed from an earlier, enclosed state of selective purpose to a more challenging global sense of its place in the world. The very titles of the novels signal a shift which I have briefly suggested: from the more localised ‘ancestral voices’ in the first novel, composed (albeit in a critical rendition) in the tradition of the Afrikaans plaasroman of the 1930s, to a more worldly perspective on the Afrikaans subject with roots beyond the borders of South Africa, in a Dutch-European inheritance.

Being an Afrikaner, Etienne van Heerden writes his novels in Afrikaans. Nevertheless, in this circumscribed project, I am concerned with his novels in English translation. To contextualize his work culturally I start by briefly discussing the ‘plaasroman’ (Afrikaans for ‘farm novel’) which is a prominent genre in Afrikaans literature.

⁸ Hereafter I will refer to the English editions/titles.

The Plaasroman in Afrikaans Literature

Afrikaans writing, from at least the time of the Great Trek that began in 1836, has sought to “develop an emergent Afrikaner sense of self” (Warnes 2009:72). An obvious way in which the Afrikaner cause could be supported and defined was through an “invocation of an idealized past” (Warnes 2009:72). Themes in Afrikaans literature emerged accordingly.

At the beginning of the twentieth century a dominant theme developed in response to the plight of the many failed farmers. Because of drought and modern capitalist farming practices, many small farmers were forced to leave their land and move into towns and cities in search of work as skilled and semi-skilled workers. They came to be known as ‘poor whites’, and writers responded to the ‘poor white’ phenomenon by developing literary themes – such as the relationship between farm and town, ideas of belonging and duty, and the “importance of the farm as foundational and sacred space” (Warnes 2009:73), that morphed into the genre of the plaasroman.

The plaasroman in its traditional form “emerged as a formal type in Afrikaans literature” (H Viljoen 2004:109). It developed as “a fictional elaboration of a cultural ontology based in Romantic conceptions of the relationship between land and identity” and it served to elaborate an “idealized cultural system of values” (Warnes 2009:74). D F Malherbe, Jochem van Bruggen, C M van den Heever, and Abraham H Jonker wrote about the conditions and effects of the Depression (1929-1932), the great drought (1932-1933), and the poverty and movement of farmers from country to city (A Coetzee 2000:4). Michael Chapman describes the plaasroman as a fiction that “yearns for the restoration, amid rural poverty, of lineal memory in patriarchal, familial ownership” (2003:192). The farm, as depicted in the plaasroman, is a “jealous, ancestral ground” and the farmers are seen as people obligated to the legacy and ghosts of their fathers, whereas the labourers are too often depicted as childish, drunken dependents. The capitalist city types, such as “the merchant, the Jew, the alien Englishman”, are cast as disruptive to the Afrikaner ideal. By the 1950s these characteristics had become the conventions of the plaasroman (Chapman 2003:192).

However, after 1948, as African nationalism and opposition to apartheid grew, the “problematic of race [interrupted] the self-contained world of Afrikaner nationalism” (Warnes 2009:76), and in literature the “cosy local realism” (van Wyk Louw; qtd in Warnes 2009:76) was challenged.⁹ The second wave of the plaasroman, or its renewal, came in the writings of authors such as Etienne Leroux, Anna M Louw, Karel Schoeman, Etienne van Heerden and Eben Venter (A Coetzee 2000:4). As Van Coller puts it, “[While the] initial plaasroman gave form and substance to Afrikaner nationalism, [t]he new plaasroman recognizes and highlights this role [...] and through exposing its ideological base, sets about subverting it” (2008:32). To differentiate, somewhat brutally, the earlier

⁹ The great Afrikaans poet N P van Wyk Louw would refer to this type of nationalism with some sarcasm, as “cosy local realism” (qtd in Warnes 2009:76).

plaasromans can be considered and distinguished as ‘traditional’ and the later plaasromans as ‘subversive’. Prinsloo similarly distinguishes between ‘normative’ and ‘contesting’ plaasromans: many plaasromans published after 1962 can be seen as ‘contesting’ because “the 1960s signalled the start of a postmodernist re-writing of the plaasroman tradition in which there was often, during the course of the sixties and up until the present, also a postcolonial reading of history” [my translation] (2006:38).¹⁰ Van Coller argues that in Afrikaans literature the plaasroman developed in stages: first as the dorpsroman¹¹ (village/town novel), then as the peri-urban or suburban novel, and finally as the city novel. However, he adds that Afrikaans literature has never “reconciled itself to the city” and neither has the Afrikaner, and one possible explanation is “a nostalgic yearning for a mythical agrarian hinterland” (Van Coller 2008:42). In noting the lasting appeal of the plaasroman, Chapman says that the “nostalgia for a mythic time when every Afrikaner was supposed to define his identity on the land” could be explained as “urban escapism” but, it could also “delineate deep-seated fears, in a time of ‘multiracial’ change, about the demise of Afrikanerdom as a unifying concept” (2003:192).

It is apparent, then, that the plaasroman genre has developed and changed in tandem with history but also that, while the approach may change, the basic conventions, themes, and concerns remain fairly resilient. The plaasroman addresses the yearnings of a people for ‘the farm’: a place, a time, a lifestyle, an identity. It is concerned with the relationship between people and places, with the trauma brought about by the breakdown/change of that relationship, and with the haunting responsibility of a legacy.

Plaasroman conventions have been recognised in many of Van Heerden’s novels and the nostalgia that Van Coller and Chapman mention could be an explanatory factor for the continued interest in his writing. However, representations of the deep-seated fear of change (to which Chapman alludes) could also be the reason why Van Heerden’s novels are appealing and accessible, both to the local and a broader world audience.

Brief Overview of Van Heerden’s Oeuvre

From 1978 to date, Van Heerden’s oeuvre extends over a period of four decades. This has been a time of great change and readjustment in South Africa, but also throughout the world. South Africa has moved from apartheid to democracy whilst the world at large has experienced social, political, and economic changes resulting from major historical events. Two such events are the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which symbolically marked the end of the Cold War, and the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, in the United States.

¹⁰ Die plaasroman vanaf die sestigerjare van die vorige eeu kan beskou word as die aanvang van ’n postmodernistiese herskrywing van the plaasromantradisie waarin daar ook met die verloop van die sestigerjare tot en met die hede dikwels ’n postkoloniale lees van die geskiedenis voorkom (Prinsloo 2006:38).

¹¹ ‘dorp’: village; townlet, small town (Pheiffer 2007:126).

Van Heerden's oeuvre comprises novels, short stories, poetry collections, a cabaret, literary theory, and essays, and he has edited and contributed to short story collections. Van Heerden's first novel, *Matoli*, was published in 1978, followed by a collection of poetry, *Obiter dictum* (1981). Thereafter, came a collection of short stories, *My Kubaan* (1983), and a *grensliteratuur* (border literature) novel, *Om te awol* (1984).

The novel *Toorberg* [tr. *Ancestral Voices* (1989)] with which we are concerned in this study was published in 1986.¹² The novel offers a broad meta-history of Afrikanerdom that includes aspects of mythology and themes, such as the taming of the landscape, battles with the wild beasts of the land, and the struggles encountered with the San/Bushmen and Xhosa. In this novel, characters rise from the dead in a magical realist mode of narrative characterised by Baldick as a "kind of modern fiction in which fabulous and fantastical events are included in a narrative that otherwise maintains the reliable tone of objective realistic report" (2008:194). This device is used again in *Die stoetmeester* (1993) [tr. *Leap Year* (1997)] and in *Kikoejoe* (1996) [tr. *Kikuyu* (1998)]. Another novel that features magical realism is *Die swye van Mario Salviati* (2000) [tr. *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati* (2002)], which has been described as closest to *Ancestral Voices* because of its supernatural occurrences and the dimming of the borders between past and present, and fact and fiction.

Other works – including *Liegfabriek* (1988) [tr. *Mad Dogs and Other Stories* (1992)], *Casspirs en Campari's: 'n historiese entertainment* (1991) [tr. *Casspirs and Camparis* (1993)], *Lied van die Boeings* (1998), *In stede van die liefde* (2005) [tr. *In Love's Place* (2013)], and *Asbesmiddag* (2007) – display a willingness to take an unflinching look at South Africa's complex reality. *Mad Dogs and Other Stories* is a collection of short prose pieces in which the modern Afrikaner is represented as taking stock of the complicated reality of South Africa (Terblanche 2010:6). Van Heerden's writing in this collection contrasts "disparate elements that confront one another" and there is a clash between reality and illusion (Terblanche 2010:5-6). *Casspirs and Camparis* is described as a documentary-type reminder of time past but, as Van Heerden assures us, although it is written in a realistic mode, it is not autobiographical (Terblanche 2010:6). The impression of "not feeling at home" in South Africa, along with the role of contemporary man in society, is explored in the cabaret *Lied van die Boeings* (Terblanche 2010:8). The novel *In Love's Place* blends urban and rural South African life by locating characters in Stellenbosch, Johannesburg, and Matjiesfontein while providing a picture of South African society that "does not succumb to sweet nostalgia and the glorifying of the transient past" [my translation] (Terblanche 2010:11).¹³ Van Heerden's political novel *Asbesmiddag* (2007) questions the uncertain place of the writer in the new political landscape. Following the writing of *Asbesmiddag*, Van Heerden set out to work on *30 Nagte in Amsterdam*, which he completed within six months.

¹² I will mention Afrikaans titles only once each, and will thereafter refer to the translated English title, where applicable.

¹³ "...nie verlei tot soet nostalgie en die verheerliking van die vergange verlede nie" (Terblanche 2010:11).

30 Nights in Amsterdam was published in English, in 2011; the original Afrikaans version appeared in 2008 as *30 Nagte in Amsterdam*. The novel, which deals with the complexities of Afrikaner and South African identity, is set in the farmland and small towns of the Karoo, and also beyond the South African borders, in the cosmopolitan city of Amsterdam. Van Heerden's characters, Henk and his aunt Zan, reunite in Amsterdam, where they reflect on their younger days in the Karoo and, through nostalgic recollection and traumatic recall, come to a clearer understanding of themselves, each other, and their past.

From this broad outline of his oeuvre, it is possible to see that Van Heerden's interest has been in the Afrikaner who, embroiled in current or recent social struggles, looks back at the past for clues left by history and memory.¹⁴ Van Heerden sees his oeuvre as interrelated and forming a whole:

My oeuvre is an assertion of my personality. Every book is a piece of furniture that I put in the room of my soul. Earlier books take their place as furniture too. The newer ones must start a conversation with the older pieces [...] Everything looks different when you carry it in. Every new book wants its place and wants to belong. When you enter the room, things must cohere. I am an interior decorator that keeps meddling with his inner room. [my translation] (qtd in Terblanche 2010:2)¹⁵

Although Van Heerden's work is concerned with the Afrikaners and their past, I propose that the themes Van Heerden addresses in his novels may be characterised as postcolonial: in Van Heerden's case, the Afrikaner's search for meaning and identity correlates with the search for collective meaning and identity in a greater South African and even global context.

Literary Reception of Van Heerden's Novels

Van Heerden's work has elicited a substantial amount of critical commentary. A focus on the critical reception of the novels alone provides comprehensive insight into the reach and concerns of his work, as I will indicate in reference to critical commentaries on his novels and short stories.

For my survey, I have favoured articles written in English – because my study is primarily focussed on Van Heerden's novels in English translation – but I have not altogether avoided literary criticism in Afrikaans. Taking a broad view, I have selected articles that focus on my two chosen novels and on the themes of identity, history, trauma, and space.

¹⁴ Since the commencement of this project, Van Heerden has published the Afrikaans-language novels, *Klimtol* (2013) and *Die wêreld van Charlie Oeng* (2017).

¹⁵ My oeuvre is 'n stelling van my persoonlikheid. Elke boek is 'n meubelstuk wat ek in die kamer van my gees neersit. Vorige boeke staan ook as meubels rond. Die nuwe ene moet 'n gesprek aanknoop met die ouer stukke. Hy laat my ouer meubels só en só. Als lyk anders wanneer jy hom indra. Elke nuwe boek wil staanplek hê en deel wees. As jy die kamer instap, moet dinge saamhang. Ek is 'n binnerversierder wat bly toring aan sy binnekamer (Van Heerden; qtd in Terblanche 2010:2).

Identity in Van Heerden's novels has been critically explored from a number of perspectives. The novels indicate that our world is "fleeting [and] insubstantial" (Heyns 1994:70) and investigate what happens to identity when social contexts change. Engaging with Afrikaans literature in general (including Van Heerden's *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati* and *Leap Year*), one study states that Afrikaner identity has been "brought into serious crisis [by the] explosions of the mythology behind Afrikaner nationalism" (van den Berg 2011:5). The same article also investigates the loss of the father figure and the subsequent loss of a healthy sense of masculinity in Afrikaner culture (which is also relevant for my study of *30 Nights in Amsterdam*).

Identity, naturally, has strong links with family and family history. One study of *Ancestral Voices* discusses the hybrid nature of an Afrikaans family (the Moolman family), which has whites and so-called 'Coloureds' in its family tree. The two sides of the family have to come to terms with each other during a major crisis. As Van Heerden has pointed out, "more than half of Afrikaans speakers are not white, but so-called coloured South Africans" (Van Heerden 2012). By presenting both Coloured and white Afrikaners confronting a problem together, *Ancestral Voices* is regarded as refiguring "the Afrikaner as one who investigates his crimes, who acknowledges his coloured offspring, and sheds his arrogant whiteness" (Wicomb 1998a:376).

Another study explores an "entire culture [that] has become estranged" (Irlam 2004:703). While arguing that, in Afrikaans literature, authors normally interrogate the past, the critic sees *Ancestral Voices* as an example of literature that seeks to provide some distance from "the abominations of the ancestors" (Van Heerden; qtd in Irlam 2004:703). The study goes on to cite *Ancestral Voices* as an example of Afrikaans literature that could be called "colonial gothic", as it deals with a lost past that refuses to be forgotten, and returns in a way that appears 'strange' – 'strange' because, in the novel, the boundaries between the living and the dead are removed (Irlam 2004:703). The return of a forgotten past in this strange and haunting way implies that traumatic memories have been submerged or subverted. This paradigm is also addressed in a study that examines the elements of magical realism: in *Ancestral Voices*, the spectral elements stemming from old Afrikaans tales of ghosts (Warnes 2011:125). Many of the characters in *Ancestral Voices* are in fact dead and function in the form of spectres who take on roles of living people. As regards magical realism, the novel is likened to Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Warnes 2011:125). Just as the Buendía family in *One Hundred Years* are bound to the village of Macondo, so the Moolmans in *Ancestral Voices* are bound to Toorberg – the mountain, the farm, and the village. And in regard to time, "the story moves backward and forward in time, with forebears taking part in the events, much as the writing of García Márquez" (Toerien 1987:484). As far as magical realism is concerned, some critics see a progressive change in *30 Nights in Amsterdam*. The magical realism (as related to trauma) of the

earlier novels is seen as giving way in the later novel to a “more sober, but at the same time also ironic and humorous, touch” [my translation] (Human 2008:3).¹⁶

With *30 Nights in Amsterdam*, Van Heerden’s ‘people’ continue the search for identity. As the title suggests, the search for identity in *30 Nights in Amsterdam* involves a visit to Amsterdam. The novel is set in the Karoo and in Amsterdam, and the geographical journey that the protagonist undertakes “runs parallel to a psychological or inner journey of self-discovery and self-disclosure” [my translation] (Human 2008:2).¹⁷ On this journey, seen from the perspective of a middle-aged white Afrikaner man, an “idiosyncratic family history” [my translation]¹⁸ is explored and is found to be bound up with the “history of the white Afrikaner in South Africa and Africa” [my translation] (Human 2008:2).¹⁹

Identity is always linked to history, and in the search for identity the temptation is to look back: Van Coller’s (2008) survey “affirms that Afrikaans literature at large has documented the history of the Afrikaner” and he mentions Van Heerden’s *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati* in this regard. History in relation to literature is explored in another article which states that *Casspirs and Camparis* “fills in the dark areas [...] of the history of the eighties in South Africa, but also flirts with the supplementation and contradiction of official history” (L Viljoen 1993:3). With regard to earlier history and a search for identity, Van Heerden’s *Ancestral Voices* is seen as returning to the farm novel convention, being regarded as having a hopeful approach to the future and to reconciliation (Warnes 2009).

Looking at South African history includes looking back at not only Dutch and British settler colonialism, but also at apartheid and the Border War.²⁰ Van Heerden’s *grensliteratuur*, particularly the pairing of the short stories “My Cuban” (1983) and “My Afrikaner” (1988), “constitute[s] the first steps towards the fictional imagining of an ethical reciprocity” (Warnes 2009:79). Such works are also regarded as being “among the few representative literary texts that reflect critically on the consequences of South Africa’s involvement in Angola during the Cold War” (Popescu 2008:92).

Interrogations of the past inevitably lead to the unearthing of trauma, which in turn leads to remorse, confession, retrospection, and questions of complicity. Critics have examined how Van Heerden’s novels address trauma and its consequences. *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati* is an example of a novel trying to “come to terms with a past that now has to be seen from a different perspective” (van den Berg 2011:4). Likewise, the powerless narrator in *Leap Year* is seen as a metaphor of “the

¹⁶ “meer sobere, dog tergelykertyd ook ironiese en humoriestiese, aanslag” (Human 2008:3).

¹⁷ “loop parallel aan ’n psigologiese of innerlike reis van selfontdekking en selfopenbaring” (Human 2008:2).

¹⁸ “idiosynkratese familiegeskiedenis” (Human 2008:2).

¹⁹ “geskiedenis van die wit Afrikaner in Suid-Afrika en Afrika” (Human 2008:2).

²⁰ “The term ‘Border War’ or *Grensoorlog* [was] assigned to the conflict waged in Angola/Namibia [...] during the 1970s and 1980s” (Baines 2008:2).

Afrikaner writer's struggle for moral credibility in the midst of his insight into the limitations of his contribution towards the creation of the new South Africa" (van den Berg 2011:4). In the same vein, complicity, guilt, and betrayal are noted in the novel *Kikuyu*, which is set on a holiday farm in the Karoo (Heyns 2000).

Many studies on Van Heerden's work address the identity of the Afrikaner as linked to space and place (Terblanche 2010; Van Coller 2008; Warnes 2009). Also discussed is the sense of magical realism that the eerie, haunting landscape of the Karoo incites in people (Warnes 2009). The landscape is central to novels such as *Ancestral Voices*, *Leap Year*, *Kikuyu* and *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati*, and Van Heerden is quoted as saying that "the Karoo is the great protagonist in my work. It comes from my background and where I grew up" [my translation] (Terblanche 2010:9).²¹ The movement of the Afrikaner between farm and city, and how Afrikaans literature reflects that movement, is often the focus of interest, especially in connection with novels such as *Mario Salviati* (Van Coller, 2008:34) and *Ancestral Voices* (Warnes, 2009).

As I have already mentioned, identity in relation to a place is a theme explored in the genre of the plaasroman, and *Ancestral Voices* is as an eloquent example of plaasroman (Warnes 2009:79). An investigation of the novel will establish how Van Heerden, whilst using a literary form (the plaasroman) that has traditionally "obscure[d...] power relations" (Warnes 2011:121), also quite explicitly exposes power relations embedded in the relationships between people and land. An in-depth analysis will also detail certain myths that have arisen about the Afrikaner's attachment to the land and explain how Van Heerden draws "on the resources of the genre in order to critique from within its cultural and political implications" (Warnes 2011:124).

In addition to geographical and psychological journeys, the novel also recounts "emotional migrations" and confrontations with traumas of the past as the characters "retrospectively travel to the landscape of the past, to ultimately make sense of, and be liberated from, the dark secrets of the past" [my translation] (Nel 2010:166).²² In addressing the traumas suffered, the author extends the link between identity and space to include the body as space (Nel 2010:171-178). The body is shown to be a place of resistance and rebellion, as for example the body of Zan in *30 Nights in Amsterdam*: "Indeed, her body becomes a social, historical and ideological construct, and a third space of cultural and political protest" [my translation] (Nel 2010:177).²³

²¹ "die Karoo is die groot protagonis in my werk. Dit kom maar uit my agtergrond en waar ek grootgeword het" (Terblanche 2010:9).

²² "terugskouend na die landskap van die verlede reis, om uiteindelik sin te maak en bevry te word van die donker geheime van die verlede" (Nel 2010:166).

²³ "Haar liggaam word inderdaad 'n sosiale, historiese en ideologiese konstruk, en a derde ruimte van kulturele en politieke protes" (Nel 2010:177).

Other critical texts debate the merits of Van Heerden's aesthetics and comment on how he has blended "therapeutic" and aesthetic approaches (John 2010).²⁴ In *30 Nights in Amsterdam*, the "idea of personal healing through 'narrative' [...] is uniquely combined with [...] the aesthetic, with art" (John 2010:192). Similarly, other critics have discussed the role of imagination, artist, and writer in relation to *30 Nights* (Human 2008:6; Nel 2010:169).

Van Heerden's explorations of the past as therapeutic and/or reconciliatory are also present in *Ancestral Voices*. On the one hand, *Ancestral Voices* is regarded as a pessimistic novel that "subverts the tradition of the Afrikaans farm novel by trying to exorcise Afrikaner guilt [and that] leaves the reader with little hope for the future" (L Viljoen 1993:21). On the other hand, it has been asserted that, ultimately, the focus of *Ancestral Voices* is on reconciliation, even though the search for truth has been inconclusive (Wicomb 1998). Yet another critic is struck by *Ancestral Voices* as being "a useful text for a study of the heritage and disposition of the Afrikaner" (Freed 1992:3) saying that the novel seems to "brood on history" by looking at the past and the present in a way that leaves her looking forward to Van Heerden's future writing about the future of the Afrikaner. I refer to Warnes (2011:13) once again in this regard, who said that *Ancestral Voices* offers "an alternative set of possibilities" with its reconciliatory conclusion, and that by presenting exclusion as a sin, Van Heerden's novel is an "important turning point" for both the plaasroman and Afrikaans literature.

*

In conclusion, Van Heerden's novels are concerned with the condition of being an Afrikaner and have inspired critics to explore his treatment of identity, history, trauma, and their relationship to space. As we have seen, his work represents aspects of the earliest days of Afrikanerdom in a continual trajectory into the present, without shying away from difficult aspects of that history (from tackling, for example, the way land was acquired by Afrikaners or their involvement in an unpopular war). This brief survey corroborates Van Heerden's earlier comments about his oeuvre: that it is made up of 'pieces' that 'converse' with one another.

It is apparent that, although Van Heerden's work has been studied from many angles, little work has been conducted in English regarding his novels or their English translations. Also, I did not detect any work on nostalgia, or specifically on postcolonial nostalgia, in connection with Van Heerden – issues on which the following sections of this chapter will focus.

²⁴ John's 'therapeutic approach' borrows from psychological terminology and is a pragmatic proposition.

Ancestral Voices

Ancestral Voices (1989) is an English translation (by Malcolm Hacksley) of the original Afrikaans novel, *Toorberg* (1986). Van Heerden's "family saga" (Kannemeyer 1993:136) tells the story of a family situated in the isolated farmlands of the Karoo in the early 1900s. A magistrate is sent to the area on commission to investigate the death of a child who a year previously had fallen into a disused borehole. The magistrate's investigation reveals how the dilemma of the trapped child forces the fragmented family to collaborate with one another. Noah, the child, is the focal point of the family gathered at the well and, in turn, their gathering situates the assembled family as the focal point of the novel.

By depicting a farm and a family that form an isolated, closed unit – and which is also the source of potential conflict – Van Heerden employs conventions of the traditional plaasroman (Coetzee 2000:11). *Ancestral Voices*, as Van Coller says, "certainly is a plaasroman as it tells of generations of devotion and attachment to the land, labour and hereditary succession" [my translation] (1995:198).²⁵ Van Heerden is quoted as saying, however, that the novel should not be called a plaasroman; rather, he says, it is a reaction to plaasromans such as those by C M van den Heever – one in which he takes a new look at that world (in Van Coller 1995:198).²⁶ Earlier, in my introduction to this chapter, I described the emergence of the plaasroman as a genre that has developed from a traditional (or normative) form to a more modern (self-referential) form, and noted that plaasroman conventions have been identified in Van Heerden's novels. My analysis of this novel considers how, in a 'postcolonial' turn, it displays elements of both the traditional plaasroman and the modern/self-referential plaasroman in subversive features such as giving voice to the previously voiceless, highlighting the relationship between the central and peripheral configurations, and in exploring hybridity and liminality and the trauma of dislocation. I foreground the exploration of cultural identity and diversity, the recourse to mimicry and essentialism, and the use of magical realism – sometimes referred to as "colonial gothic" (Newman; qtd in Edwards 2008:120) – that enables exploration of recollections of a past that is too traumatic for words.

The novel's title itself suggests a diversity of voices and perspectives in using the plural form: *Ancestral Voices*. The novel reaches to an ancestry as far back as the beginning of the Great Trek, presenting the origins of the Afrikaner nation, or the Afrikaner founding myth, as the formative background of the contemporary Moolman family. The Moolman family, as presented in the opening of the novel, has farmed at Toorberg since the first, pioneering Abel Moolman discovered a natural spring on the mountain, obtained title deeds for the vast stretch of land surrounding it (that he

²⁵ "...dit is beslis 'n plaasroman wat vertel van geslagte se verknogtheid aan die grond, arbeid en erfopvolging" (Van Coller 1995:198).

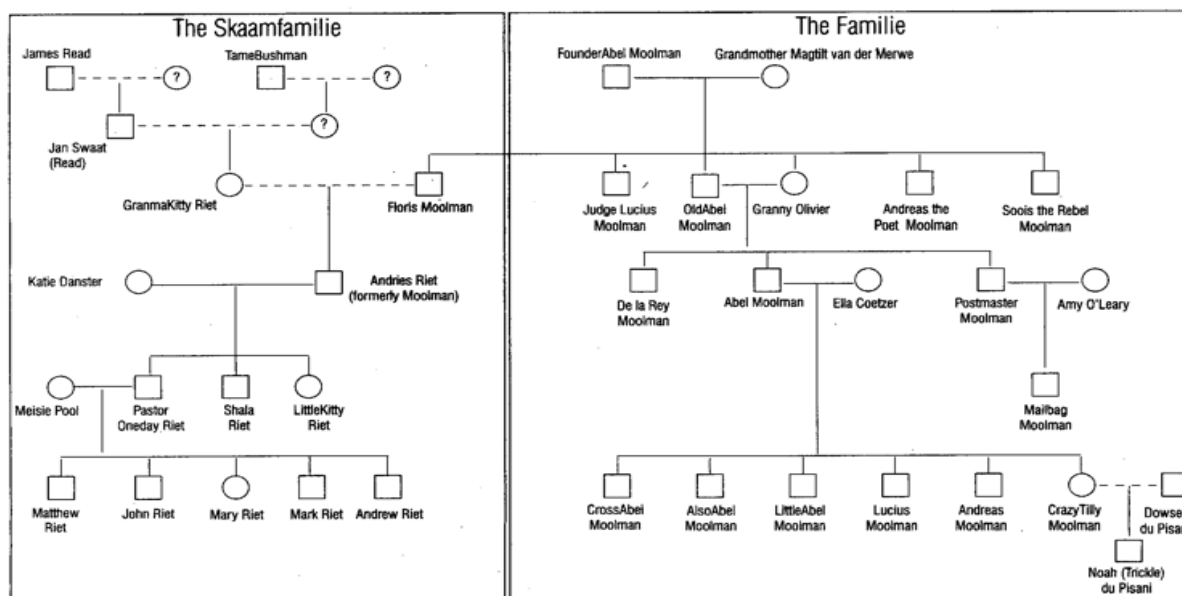
²⁶ Rialette Wiehahn (1995) considers *Toorberg* to have a "multidimensional and evasive nature" and discusses it, in turn, as plaasroman, family saga, detective story, and postmodern novel.

demarcated himself), and developed what he conceived of as his own, ancestral farm. This first Abel Moolman, FounderAbel, is depicted, in the tradition of the early Afrikaans plaasroman, as a founding father who pays for the farm not only in money but also “in blood, sweat and tears [by] hack[ing] it out of primeval bush [and] defend[ing] it against barbarians” (Coetzee 1988:85). Subsequently, the farm is passed on from one generation of Moolman to the next. The novel opens with the farm in the care of the third Abel Moolman and his son CrossAbel, the fourth Abel, who is poised to take over. In this respect, the elements of the traditional plaasroman are recognisable – the founder, the white Afrikaner male, the land, the farm, and the hereditary succession – but the novel also incorporates other levels, other discourses, other ‘ancestral voices’. Whereas the traditional plaasroman would be restricted to the single narrative of the white, male Afrikaner Moolman, this modern/contesting plaasroman incorporates the additional voices and narratives of marginal characters and groups, including those of the San/Bushman, the Malay, the Riets, the rebellious white characters who refuse to fit the patriarchal ‘mould’, and even the voices of the dead, the ghosts of Toorberg.

To illustrate the diversity (and number) of voices, and the divide between them – between those voices that would be audible in a traditional plaasroman and those that can be heard in a subversive plaasroman – it is helpful here to consult the chart/family tree that is included in the novel (and reproduced below).

The family tree is clearly divided into two main branches, namely the ‘Familie’ and the ‘Skaamfamilie’. The ‘Familie’ is the white Moolman family and the ‘Skaamfamilie’ is the Coloured Riet family. Although the two branches of the family are clearly connected through (white) Floris Moolman and his union with (Coloured) Kitty Riet, there is such a strong division of custom and prejudice between the two branches that, on the chart, they are framed in separate blocks with different headings.

Included with the Coloured Riets, under the heading of the ‘skaamfamilie’ – as can be seen on the chart – are TameBushman and Jan Swaat. These are the two men (a ‘Bushman’/Khoisan and a Coloured man) who, together with FounderAbel, discovered and founded Toorberg. Jan Swaat’s line reaches back to James Read, an English missionary who Jan Swaat claims was his father. It is from an adaptation of ‘Read’ that the name ‘Riet’ has developed. The son of Floris Moolman and Kitty Riet, Andries, is born and christened ‘Moolman’, but officially changes his name to ‘Riet’ (on the strength of his maternal link to Jan Swaat and James Read) and, from this point on, the family is clearly divided into the white Moolman branch and the Coloured Riet branch.



Family tree from *Ancestral Voices*

There is a further division within the white, Moolman branch of the family. Those who do not conform to the ideal of patriarchal masculinity are rejected, so that there is a group of ‘white renegades’ who become known as the ‘step family’. They are also marginal voices that would not be given prominence in the discourse of the traditional plaasroman. The group includes Judge Lucius Moolman, Andreas the Poet Moolman, and Soois the Rebel Moolman. (Floris Moolman is included on the Coloured ‘Riet’ section of the chart because, following the discovery of Kitty Riet’s pregnancy by him, he is chased off the farm and leaves the district.) In the generation that follows, the white renegades include De la Rey Moolman and Postmaster Moolman. (See family tree.)

Further to the divide between the (white) Moolmans and the (Coloured) Riets, and the subdivision within the Moolman family, there is also a division between the living and the dead. Van Heerden employs elements of the magical realism that has become part of the postcolonial vocabulary. Just as magical realism attempts to mingle current with older traditions, so the ghosts of Toorberg mingle with the living in a natural, unobtrusive manner, adding dimensions of remembrance, even nostalgia, to the novel. These subversive characters cannot rest in peace after death because of the tug of the past and unresolved conflicts.

These ‘other’ marginal voices – that would not have been foregrounded in the traditional plaasroman – are critical, dissenting, and reflective and, in postcolonial approaches, are heard at the level of discourse as equal to, and interactive with, the voices of the more central characters. Van Heerden’s initial impulse to gaze back to the traditional plaasroman scene has produced the main lineage of the Moolman family – the masculine, patriarchal family leaders – as the mainstream voices. His reflection on that traditional scene has produced the subversive and marginal voices of the Coloured Riets, the ‘white rebel’ Moolmans, the ‘Bushmen’/Khoisan, and the ghosts.

My aim is to identify the postcolonial force of longing and nostalgia, as outlined earlier. I also reflect on the search for identity in this novel, which disrupts the core conventions of the traditional plaasroman because its subversive voices, especially in their nostalgic recall, allow for ambivalence, fragmentation, and – almost paradoxically – new possibilities within the genre of the plaasroman.

The traditional plaasroman is in essence a nostalgic genre, confined to the past and harking back to an earlier time of supposed simplicity and purity in which the farm reveals itself as a “good, idyllic space – religious, mythical, patriarchal yet meaningful through lived experience, through joy in labour, and especially through the sense of passing away of time and life” (Viljoen 2004:113). Such a condition of nostalgia, however, is distinct from Van Heerden’s use of nostalgia. We return to Boym’s typologies of restorative and reflective nostalgia. Whereas the traditional plaasroman would be an example of restorative nostalgia in that it seeks to restore, textually, that ‘good, idyllic space’, Van Heerden’s novel challenges many such assumptions. The nostalgic plaasroman, like more traditional senses of nostalgia, “tantalizes us with its fundamental ambivalence; it is about the repetition of the unrepeatable, materialisation of the immaterial” (Boym 2001:xvii). In this novel, Van Heerden has turned the plaasroman conventions away from such restorative nostalgia towards reflective nostalgia – or, in Medalie’s (2010) terminology, towards a more “evolved nostalgia” – in order to explore the themes of identity and belonging, responsibility, and accountability. Medalie refers to a “sophisticated and trenchant form of nostalgia [that] enables one to understand better the complexity of the relationship between past and present, as well as the interwoven nature of utopian and dystopian impulses” (2010:37). Van Heerden uses nostalgia strategically, acknowledging sites of nostalgia as sometimes also being sites of trauma and/or reconciliation. While the novel acknowledges the nostalgic and persistent lure of the traditional farm, this novelist does not simply re-visit that space in search of a golden era; he revisits it to reflect, self-referentially, on the very temptations of such a return. As noted earlier, Van Heerden introduces subversive elements and marginal voices in an attempt to understand a sense of displacement in the present. These self-referential elements are also features of postcolonial writing. Yet, because the novel focusses on the pain, ambivalence, and longing inherent in the plaasroman – by utilizing nostalgia – Van Heerden tells a local story in a globally recognisable ‘nostalgic language’. Because, as a “global epidemic” and “symptom of our age” – Boym’s terms (2001) – nostalgia has a global reach. The local touches the global.

What follows is an analysis of the nostalgic elements of *Ancestral Voices* in relation, first, to the characters, and, second, to places. I seek to trace instances of nostalgia and examine their application and meaning as either restorative or reflective. Corresponding sites of possible trauma and/or reconciliation are examined in the process, as I gauge what nostalgia reveals not only about the past but also about the anxieties of the present day (i.e. the times in which Van Heerden writes this novel).

Nostalgia in the Novel: Characters

I look first at nostalgic perceptions about the typical patriarch (FounderAbel) and the attempts of successive generations of Abels to emulate their founder. I then explore the subversive perspective of the rebellious male characters wishing to break away from traditional patriarchal roles. Thereafter, I discuss the longings that result from a hybrid and peripheral position and highlight the nostalgic feelings (both restorative and reflective) about the founding of Toorberg – which, in terms of the Afrikaner ‘founding myth’, introduces the issue of race.

The White Moolman Family: Tradition and Subversive Voices

As would be the case in the traditional plaasroman, FounderAbel, the original founder of Toorberg farm, epitomises “the insular patriarchal culture of the Boer farm” (Coetzee 1988:63). He fills that central role in *Ancestral Voices*. FounderAbel is the man who develops the farm and hands it on through the generations from one ‘Abel’ to the next. The way he is represented supports an “invocation of an idealised past” (Warnes 2009:72). He serves as a role model for the subsequent farmers of Toorberg; he is the ancestor whose example they are meant to follow.

To be successful, each Abel must follow in FounderAbel’s footsteps. “ ‘There were few men who were better Afrikaners than FounderAbel [...] He drove out the Xhosa and Bushmen, and with his tame [soldier] at his side, he cleared this part of the country for succeeding generations,’ ” explains his grandson’s wife, Ella, who goes on to assert that, “ ‘None of today’s Afrikaners are better than he was’ ” (215). FounderAbel is a man who, according to Katie Danster/Riet, “ ‘learnt to love the soil’ ” (6) and who “shot and ploughed and chopped and built” Toorberg farm (7). He made provision in his will for the “inalienable right [of every Moolman man and woman] to a share in the produce of the farm” (25), Ella notes, and the ghost of his wife, Magtilt, asserts that, “[f]or sheer manliness, none would ever be able to outdo [him]” (34). This nostalgic version of FounderAbel in which he is consistently revered could be seen as an example of ‘fetishistic nostalgia’. As Hook has said, “the fetish is that magical object revered by a given society because it creates a sense of order and control in a frightening world while holding a given belief structure in place” (2012:231). FounderAbel in this form is the masculine prototype of the Moolman family and those who do not live up to his example are rejected and become dejected. When it comes to choosing a successor and heir FounderAbel can choose only one of his five sons. He chooses his third son, OldAbel, to carry on the role of patriarch, rejecting the others for various reasons such as their unacceptable relationships with women (Floris Moolman with the Coloured Kitty Riet), for practising law (Judge Lucius Moolman is seen as a ‘city’ man), or for their poetic and rebellious natures (Andreas and Soois Moolman). OldAbel, in turn, follows his father’s example and in his older age chooses one of his sons, another Abel, whilst rejecting sons de la Rey and Postmaster. (See family tree.)

FounderAbel’s presence fills a nostalgic longing for a strong protector who represents a particular way of life. His successors experience the same sense of longing and seek to emulate FounderAbel and to

restore their perceptions of who he was, and who (they believe) they should be as well. But although hereditary succession and the handing down of a legacy from father to son are traditionally viewed as an honour and a privilege, there is another perspective which reveals that hereditary succession can also be experienced as a traumatic burden. Van Heerden reflects on the difficulties and pain that this attempt at emulation causes those who are restoratively nostalgic for FounderAbel. OldAbel (the second Abel) and Abel (the third) struggle to live up to expectations that they should conscientiously follow FounderAbel's example. "It was the burden of his heavy calling," OldAbel felt, "that had exhausted [him] so early in life. He was the one who from his youth had to tame this stubborn soil. He was the one who had to pray for rain" (282-3). When the spring water began to dwindle, his wife, Granny Olivier, saw his fear that " 'the farm [was] going to dry out under [his] feet' [...] as though he was personally to blame for the subterranean water drying up" (275-76). OldAbel's son, Abel (the third Abel), recalls how he receives "repeated visitations from [the ghosts of] OldAbel and FounderAbel, seated solemnly in the easy chairs on the other side of the writing desk" (293). They pointedly ask him, " 'where are you taking the patrimony? Are you farming successfully, like your fathers – or are you failing?' " (293). CrossAbel (the fourth generation Abel) is haunted not only by the three generations before him, as he is tormented by the same restless energy that drove FounderAbel, but also by the trauma of his time in the national/apartheid army, patrolling in the townships. It is as if the patriarchal legacy and responsibility have become increasingly burdensome with each generation. These men abide by the restoratively nostalgic memory of the founder of Toorberg farm and strive to emulate him. But, by doing so, and driven by a restoratively nostalgic view, they remain shackled to the past and to FounderAbel's vision for the farm; thus, in doggedly trying to repeat his achievements, they become mere imitators of someone else's dreams. Yet they do not rebel against FounderAbel's legacy. Rather, "the repeated stress on the role of ancestors in 'subduing' and 'taming' the land is experienced as a strategy of appropriating, akin to post-colonial expansion." (Coetzee; qtd in Van Coller 2008:32).

So, the successive Abels, who are initially seen as being the fortunate successors of the white Afrikaner Moolman legacy, are shown instead to be men weighed down by the heavy responsibility of past tradition that is thrust upon them. They are trapped and emotionally debilitated; the memory of the great founding Afrikaner is as much a restorative memory as it is a haunting memory (a memory that traumatises by the weight of impossible expectations).

In addition to the succession of Abels – the chosen sons for the hereditary line, who all strive to restore FounderAbel's vision – there are the rejected sons, the renegades. FounderAbel's rejected sons include Floris Moolman, the wanderer; Judge Lucius Moolman, the man of the law; Andreas Moolman, the poet; and Soois Moolman, the rebel. They are the sons to whom FounderAbel would not entrust the farm. These are characters who, in a traditional plaasroman, would, in all likelihood not be given a voice.

Van Heerden foregrounds these subversive, eccentric, and marginal characters, however, all of whom challenge the traditional discourses, and this in spite of the fact that they at the same time long for a sense of belonging and validation as Afrikaners. These are ambivalent characters who reflect on the pain of longing because they pine after something they have rejected. First of all they refuse the stereotypical ideal for themselves – they refuse to mimic the essentialist notion of the Afrikaner man – only to emerge as marginal ‘others’; to be ultimately rejected as ‘other’. Although the idealised perception of the Afrikaner man does not fit in with their own sense of self, paradoxically, to complete their sense of self, they long for a sense of identity as Afrikaners – for a sense of belonging to community and family. While they do not want to restore the patriarchal past, they do want to make sense of why they long for the past. In this way, nostalgia reveals itself to be a site of trauma, haunting, and a search for identity. In their longing for the family and farm, for their identity as Afrikaners and as Moolmans, they are drawn perpetually to dwell on the pain of having been rejected.

One of the rejected sons is Andreas (the poet) Moolman, fourth son of Founder Abel Moolman and Grandmother Magtild Moolman. From an early age Andreas does not comply with the traditional ideal of masculinity. He questions and challenges the beliefs and norms of his family and community, saying, for example, that “[g]oing to church is an underestimation of God” (117) and expressing himself in art, rather than through the rough play of farm boys.²⁷ He begins to sculpt with clay that he finds at the mouth of the spring, showing early signs of artistic inclination. His education and artistic temperament takes him away from Toorberg and he accepts, and is accepted by, an alternative city lifestyle among English soldiers. His father banishes him when he writes heroic ballads favouring the English, telling him he must “[n]ever again set [his] turncoat feet on the native soil of [his] fathers” (119). The separation is complete. Yet, although Andreas knows that “his leaving Toorberg had been inevitable” (118), he never completely accepts his banishment. He occasionally “catch[es] the sharp scent of dew and early morning, and then suddenly the ravines of the Toorberg [...] crack open deep within him” (119). Although he has rejected the Toorberg ideology, and Toorberg has rejected him, he is perpetually and painfully drawn back to the family farm.

Andreas’s older brother, Judge Lucius, is also a rejected son. Judge Lucius is the second son, whom Founder Abel describes as “the clever one, [who] had picked up too much knowledge for his own good in the city” (137). The enclosed world of Toorberg rejects Judge Lucius as a man of the law because at Toorberg the opinion is that “[o]ur district has always known what to do about its own sins. We deal with them ourselves” (16). In Founder Abel’s eyes, “the farm [is] a clearly defined space that bars intrusion and provides a relative independence where the owner’s voice is law” (Coetzee; qtd in Van Coller 2008:3). In answering the balanced and fair view of the law, rather than simply standing squarely on the side of Toorberg Judge Lucius is regarded as being as much a ‘turncoat’ as Andreas

²⁷ Like another outsider, the character Waldo, in Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1983).

the poet is for writing in support of the English. But Lucius, even though he is successful in law and “[h]is years at the Bar and on the Bench had brought him recognition and renown”, feels unfulfilled and “[h]alf-ashamed” because “the right to leave his footprints on the farm of his birth was denied him” (181).

The examples of rejected Judge Lucius Moolman and Andreas (the poet) Moolman serve to illustrate the difference between the longings of the rebels/renegeades and those of the mainstream ‘Abel’ Moolmans. The restorative nostalgia of the generations of Abels does not allow them to grow or develop, for they simply perpetuate the beliefs and lifestyle of their ancestor – whilst the longing of the renegeades, Lucius and Andreas, focussed as it is on the pain of their longing, allows for reflection and integration. Upon reflection they come to the awareness that what they long for is associated with trauma. To identify themselves as Afrikaners, they will have to re-imagine what it means to be an Afrikaner. Thus the concept of the Afrikaner will have to expand if it is to integrate each of their identities as ‘other’. Van Heerden has created these ‘unacceptable’ brothers/sons, therefore, as a provocation of the tradition/identity of the Afrikaner man. They are the subversive voices that challenge the restorative ideal. Such a restorative ideal is further challenged by the Coloured Riet family, who introduce to the novel the problematic of race.

Floris Moolman: In-Between the (White) Moolmans and the (Coloured) Riets

The Riets, as mentioned, are the Coloured branch of the family and are also known as the ‘shame family’. (The distinct separation between the two families is clearly indicated on the chart of the family tree (see the family tree) and the epithet, ‘shame family’, infers that the Coloured branch is peripheral to the central, white Moolman family.) As such, the Riets’s voices are subversive and challenging. As Warnes puts it, “[t]he Skaamfamilie [shame family] can [...] be read metonymically to stand in for Afrikanerdom’s racial others” (2011:122).

The Coloured Riet family is linked to the Moolman family by another of FounderAbel’s sons, Floris Moolman, who has had a relationship with Kitty Riet. Miscegenation is unacceptable to FounderAbel and he rejects Floris, driving him out of the Moolman family and farm upon learning of his ‘forbidden’ relationship and Kitty’s resultant pregnancy. FounderAbel asks, “‘Have you no respect for your own kind, Floris Moolman?’” (229), implying that Floris has betrayed the homogeneous centre – his ‘own kind’ – by engaging with the marginal ‘other’. Furthermore, by questioning Floris’s respect for his own kind, FounderAbel suggests that the ‘other’ is always inferior and degrading to the ‘superior’ centre. When Floris does not defend himself he asks, “‘What? Are you a coward too?’” (229), thereby also questioning Floris’s masculinity.

FounderAbel humiliatingly thrashes Floris with a whip in the farmyard and Floris flees the farm to live the life of a wanderer. “Floris never return[s]” (230), but neither does he ever forget the trauma of his past or where he comes from, because “these were things he would never be able to shake off”

(206). He longs to return home and to be 'Floris Moolman' again. His longing is a restorative nostalgia, though, because he can imagine only one way to be Floris Moolman, and that is as a Moolman of and on Toorberg farm. Whereas his brothers rebelliously retain their individuality and long only for the integration of their identities as Afrikaners, Floris – physically and psychologically scarred by his father's whipping – suffers a severe loss of identity. He assumes a false name and, as he travels, initiates gossip with strangers only to hear news of his family. "Time and again he denied his identity just to be able to hear something about Floris Moolman from someone, anyone – just to feel that he was somebody, something more than a flinching dodger driving a rickety government coach from outspan to outspan" (207). His trauma is all encompassing and blots out any other perspectives on life. Also, by clinging to his nostalgia for restoration of his identity as a Moolman, and by rejecting the possibility of alternative versions of himself (and therefore any possibility of inclusion in the Riet family) he perpetuates the cycle of rejection in never meeting or acknowledging his own son, Andries, born to Kitty Riet of the 'shame family'.

Rejected by the Moolmans, and rejecting the Riets, Floris Moolman places himself 'in-between' the two families. He is the link between the two families (through his short-lived relationship with Kitty Riet) but he, himself, becomes a peripheral figure, forever circling, but avoiding, the farm and family as he travels. The legacy that he leaves for his abandoned son, Andries, corresponds to the dilemma of finding one's own identity in relation to the Moolman and Riet families.

The Coloured Riet Family: Listening to Ancestral Voices, Hearing Different Things

Andries, the son of Floris Moolman and Kitty Riet, begins life as a Moolman – but in name only – and ends life as a Riet. While his mother lies dying, Andries goes to Pretoria using his and his wife's life-savings to change his name from 'Moolman' to 'Riet', thus hoping to bury his traumatic past together with his mother. On his return he tells his wife, " 'I was christened a Moolman, but now I'm a Riet. I've got a brown name now, my own name' " (85). He does not tell his mother, Kitty Riet, that he has changed his name because of the pride she takes in her deluded sense of affiliation with the Moolmans. Andries allows her to die "still dreaming that she had left behind a clan of Moolmans who would, together with the white Moolmans, the sons of Abel, enter eternity with the descendants of Floris" (89).

Kitty Riet, like FounderAbel, is acutely aware of the social imbalance of the relationship that links the two families. But whereas FounderAbel is concerned that the connection between the families is degrading to 'his kind', Kitty sees it, in reverse, as enriching for 'her kind' because her subaltern condition is so firmly embedded in her psyche. Regardless of the trauma she suffers as a result of her relationship with Floris – Floris's rejection of her and their son – she fondly remembers "her love for the young Floris Moolman of the white tribe" (88) and is proud of her son's lineage. Her restorative nostalgia is for "the only love of her life" (89); "she cherished her dreams" till the day she died (89).

Andries, however, son of Kitty and Floris, is tormented by the connection between the two branches of his family. His 'hybridity' as the child of a Coloured mother and white father confuses him, as does his sense of liminality: he does not know with which aspect of his lineage to identify. Andries feels the direct conflict of being 'in-between'. He is rejected by his white family and his father, and given conflicting messages by his mother, Kitty. She tells him he is " 'a stolen child' " (88) who has been " 'cast off like a skin' " (88), but also that he should " 'remember to bear [him]self with pride' " (88) and that he should never walk with his eyes cast down. He vows on the day of his mother's funeral – the day that turns into a celebration of his new name – that "Toorberg would yet know the pride of the sons of Riet" (89).

In his search for identity, Andries Riet reflects on the past. Although he is nostalgic and longs for dignity and a sense of identity, he is able to acknowledge the traumatic consequences of miscegenation in a racist society, a society in which you are either white or brown (which, in his case, would be either a Moolman or a Riet). Having reflected on the past and acknowledged his pain, he makes a decisive choice for the future and, in an attempt to exercise his own agency, or his power to intervene, he rejects his Moolman heritage by adopting the name of 'Riet'. This is ironic, because having reflected on his past, in his attempt to return to a time before the Moolmans, Andries has accepted the restoratively nostalgic view of John Read, the white missionary – who Jan Swaat claims was his father and therefore Andries's great-grandfather (see family tree) – as a pious (white) missionary, and has reached the conclusion that " 'that's the family that I want to belong to' " (85).

In his ambivalent search for meaning in his family's past, Andries experiences both 'restorative' *and* 'reflective' nostalgia. (As I have suggested, Boym's typologies of 'restorative' and 'reflective' nostalgia are helpful in understanding manifestations of nostalgia: its source, impact, and consequences.) From Andries Riet's example, it is evident that both reflective and restorative nostalgia can operate within one consciousness, and that nostalgia is not an absolute or limited/limiting concept. Andries reflects on his past, acknowledging both his longing and pain – especially his longing for his father. " 'But, MaKitty [...] is Pa Floris never coming home again?' " (88), he asks as a child. When he realizes that the answer is no, his nostalgia narrows to a 'restorative' longing because ultimately he rejects and denies his Moolman lineage and focusses on a more distant past, namely the memory of James Read the missionary, his white ancestor.

Andries Riet does not resolve these issues of identity and dignity in his own lifetime, but expresses hope that his dreams may be realised by his sons: " '[N]either I, nor my children, will ever again sit under a window sill and howl like dogs when one of the Abels dies' " (86-7). Naming his son 'Oneday', Andries indicates his hope for the future: "It would be through his children that he spoke, he decided" (87). Oneday acknowledges his father's hope in a rallying speech (or sermon, rather): " 'My earthly father [...] vowed at my birth that my name should be Oneday. Because my father, Andries

Riet of the Stiefveld, said at my birth that one day the day would come [...]. One day is today. Jesus Christ is with us, to liberate us, today!’ ” (313-14).

Oneday Riet might share his father’s angry view of the past, but his mother, Katie Danster/Riet, has a more conservative view of the issue of lineage. Despite her marginal situation, Katie’s view is ‘restoratively’ nostalgic. She seeks to sustain the past in its white patriarchal line, even though her position is one of subjugation and hardship. She tells stories to her grandchildren that glorify the ‘founding father’ – FounderAbel – as their great-grandfather and patriarchal leader. In tracing the genealogical links of her children to each of the three founders, Katie tells them: “ ‘your great-great-grandfather FounderAbel learnt to love the soil’ ” (6); and appears to take pride in linking her children to the patriarchal founder. “ ‘She is still one of the old generation. She is still proud of the Moolman blood’ ” (130-31), Oneday tells the Magistrate. From Katie’s point of view, however, their claim on the land is justified through their link with the founder, the owner, the patriarch. She cannot conceive of them (her family and/or the Coloured community) as having a claim to the land in their own right, so ingrained is her subservience to FounderAbel, the white Afrikaner farmer, and his successors. At the evening fire, Katie tells her grandchildren the story of the founding of Toorberg:

The story of water [...] was the story of the Moolmans. High up in the Toorberg, the Eye, the source of the now dried-up spring, had been discovered by FounderAbel himself, as he came trekking through on his stallion, with his packhorse and his mounted bondsman Jan Swaat behind, and his tracker, TameBushman, leashed to his stirrup. (4)

Katie identifies the three men who found the source of water on the mountain – FounderAbel, Jan Swaat, and TameBushman; the three men responsible for the ‘discovery’ and founding of Toorberg. They name the space Toorberg and become irrevocably linked to it, even though FounderAbel’s claim usurps the claim of the two ‘non-white’ founders.

Katie’s nostalgic view nevertheless sees the three men (Jan Swaat, TameBushman and FounderAbel) working together, in dignity. Her restorative nostalgia seeks to re-establish a harmonious, dignified co-existence of white and brown family members within the community. This is why she is dissatisfied with the divide in the extended Moolman and Riet family and is disturbed by her sons’ discontent and anger, which she does not understand. Katie tells her grandchildren stories to convey to this younger generation a sense of pride in the common ancestors. She clings to her nostalgic view in the hope of capturing the (perceived) spirit of togetherness to take them (her family and community) beyond the troubled present and into a better future. Her storytelling is an example of how, in multigenerational homes, “(grand)mothers’ engagement with the younger generation often erase[s] or silence[s] conflictual histories and, instead, articulate[s] nostalgic connections with a more distant or remote past” (Frankish & Bradbury 2012:300). This is what Katie Danster/Riet’s stories appear to be doing, but they are not always interpreted or accepted in the way that she intends them to be understood. In the opening scenes of the novel, she tells the story of the discovery of water “while Shala [her son] listened in morose silence” (6). Shala and Oneday have grown up with Katie’s nostalgic accounts but

also with the accounts of, for example, their bitter father, Andries Riet, and they have formed their own interpretation. While Katie is nostalgic for the past in a 'restorative' manner, her sons, Shala and Oneday are, instead, haunted by the past; their nostalgic reflection focusses on (the pain of) longing, which includes traumatic memory.

Oneday and Shala are haunted by the degradation, indignity, and unjust treatment that their brown forebears endured (at the hands of the white Moolmans), and how that has impacted on their lives. They are obsessed by the past, by the founding of Toorberg, and long to right the perceived imbalances of that past. In this respect, it is interesting to note that whereas the plot of the novel is focalized through twenty-one characters, neither of the brown forebears – neither Jan Swaat nor TameBushman – is among them. Their stories must be told by others, by Oneday and Shala Riet, who, following their father Andries Riet's example, feel it is their responsibility to speak on behalf of TameBushman and Jan Swaat, and in doing so to speak up for themselves too.

Oneday, instead of seeing Jan Swaat and FounderAbel as partners in a common mission to found a farm, tells the magistrate, " 'Jan Swaat, my great-grandfather, lived like a dog under FounderAbel, and died like one when FounderAbel died' " (131). He points out to Meisie Pool, his wife, on a visit to the source of the spring, that

[h]ere [...] Grandpa Jan Swaat and TameBushman lay and rested. They were the ones, the two of them, who brought FounderAbel here. [...] But who's got the title deeds today? And who is stuck out on the Stiefveld with a plot of prickly-pears and a goat-pen and a few rabbits? The Riets, here, the Moolmans there! (235-36)

It is Oneday's dissatisfaction with the present (with the disparities between the Moolmans and the Riets, as well as with the broader social wrongs and injustices) that keeps his attention fixed on the injustices/traumas of the past, on what he sees as the source of current problems. Dissatisfaction with the present and hope for the future is where the similarities lie between Oneday and his mother's views, and what motivates both of their explorations of the past. Both look to the past in order to be guided by the 'ancestral voices', but seemingly they hear different predictions.

Ancestral Voices: Spectral Voices

The 'ancestral voices' 'show up' – they appear and are heard – in various ways: stories are told about them, artefacts bear symbolic memory of them, their names are bestowed on various successors in honour of them, and their rituals are mimicked. But most prominently, the ancestors speak in the form of ghosts returning to the current scene.

Earlier I discussed how haunting can be used as a literary device to articulate trauma that is beyond words. The spectral, in literature, is composed of a curious mix of "presence/absence" (Punter 2000:90); it is concerned with the "gaps" and "secrets" of the past (Abraham and Torok; qtd in Punter 2000:63) – the gaps that haunt us and the ghosts that return to fill in those empty spaces. In *Ancestral Voices* Van Heerden endeavours to retrieve those parts of a collective memory that have been

forgotten or have never been known. Abraham and Torok suggest that there is a “psychic space different from the unconscious, a location that is not a location but whose existence is felt only as an insistent pressure from an otherwise absent or unattributable source” (qtd in Punter 2002:263), and they refer to this space as a “‘crypt’ [...] where the secrets of our parents and grandparents are buried” (qtd Punter 2002:263). Even though these secrets and memories are not our own, they have a force or an influence; their absence is a presence in the form of a void, because, in Freud’s words, “nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away, and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one” (qtd in Punter 2002:263). In other words, there is a space for something that did (and therefore still does) exist.

In *Ancestral Voices*, Van Heerden gives the dead of Toorberg a presence through the spectral device of integrating the voices of the dead and the living.²⁸ Ancestors, long dead – both Moolmans and Riets – gather at the borehole together with the living to ponder the problem of the trapped child and the chain of events that has brought them to this point: at this gathering, “[t]he ghosts are granted full subjectivity – their senses are functional, they remember, they are capable of emotion” (Warnes 2011:127). Van Heerden’s ghosts create a sense of circularity for the history of Toorberg and of the two divided families; the living and the dead are perpetually returning to the past – and from the past – to try to make sense of the present as they encircle the borehole and the problems that it encapsulates.

The novel’s nostalgic return to the past, then, can be attributed to the characters’ uncanny feelings in the present. The ‘uncanny’ or *Unheimlich* is “that which is unfamiliar – or more literally, unhomely – in the familiar or homely [...] the archetype of which is the ghost or zombie [and] which recurs in the place where it is not expected” (Buchanan 2010:476). The returning ghosts in Toorberg are uncanny in the sense that they have returned to a place that was once familiar to them, but is now unfamiliar because time has moved on, and Toorberg has changed. Their feelings of unfamiliarity mirror the living characters’ feelings because the living, too, feel an uncanniness (or feeling of not being ‘at home’) which prompts their nostalgic return to the past.

One of the returning ghosts is Floris Moolman. Earlier, I discussed Floris Moolman as the figure who links the Moolman and Riet families and who becomes a peripheral figure in the process. Floris never returns to Toorberg during his lifetime – following his physical and emotional thrashing – but he does return after his death and is amongst the ghosts gathered with the living at the mouth of the borehole. Here, his thoughts take a reflective turn:

²⁸ *Ancestral Voices* has been compared to Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967) for its use of magical realism. However, recent studies (for example, Alberts 2006) have explored the concept of a South African form of magical realism, derived from Afrikaans folktales and oral narratives, which is independent from the magical realism of West Africa and Latin America. Similarly, Gaylard (2005) explores magical realist characters in African writing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

I can wander at will here, as though at last it was mine too. I have to tread warily, of course, because I have not earned a grave in the family plot. But I have returned, like all the Moolmans, because my descendants [the Riets], too, are here – even if all they have inherited is the Stiefveld, and even if they are bitter and rejected. They are still here; they can still wake up in the morning and look up at the crown of Toorberg and think: We belong here. (210-11)

In contrast to his ‘restorative’ nostalgic view during life (that there was only one way for him to be a Moolman), he reflects in death (we understand that he has died some time ago) on his position as a Moolman and acknowledges his descendants in the Riet family. He talks tentatively at first of not ‘earning’ a right to burial in the farm’s family plot and says it is as if Toorberg was his (but not quite). He is assertive, though, when he claims that this is the place where he (and his own kind) must and should be, that he and they belong here. Floris, through the device of haunting, shifts between life and death, and returns (from death) to Toorberg with a changed perspective. In retrospect, the narrating ‘I’ can be contrasted with that of the experiencing ‘I’, which means in other words that the character has the benefit of a ‘double perspective’ or of hindsight. A return to the past is essential for a better understanding of the present because “such events as these, such personal and historical traumas, can never be recounted in linear fashion, they can never be considered [as simply] consigned to an untroubled or untroubling past” (Punter 2002:67). As for Floris, he is now able to reflect on the longing he felt, during life, for his lost identity as a Moolman of Toorberg, and on the trauma of rejection that haunted him for the rest of his life. By revisiting, as a ghost, both the site of his trauma and his longing, Floris Moolman is now able to integrate both into a fuller, more layered picture of his past, thus reconciling and extending his conception of himself as a Moolman, and of his family/descendants as being, at the same time, Moolmans and Riets. (The irony is that, had he been able mentally to do so while alive, he might have avoided the painful legacy that he left for his son Andries.)

Floris Moolman, in effect, has been given an “afterlife”, a life in the “aftermath”; in other words, he is “living after” his life and death (Punter 2000:62). Punter suggests that the idea of “living in ruins and rubble [is] to be living a life which cannot but be haunted by the spectres of failed projects” (2000:62). The failed projects to which Van Heerden alludes in *Ancestral Voices* are those of the Moolman family and farmstead and, by extension, the project of a homogeneous Afrikaner nationalism. In contrast to a frozen interpretation, postcolonialism (as well as postmodernism and poststructuralism)

are all formulations of the ‘after’, of what comes ‘after’; at the same time, however, they necessarily conjure up, make uncannily to appear before us, the very phenomena they have, in a different sense, surpassed, they prolong the life of their predecessors – unnaturally, some might say – giving them the status of spirits haunting the apparently purged landscape of the contemporary. (Punter 2000:62)

The effect this has in Van Heerden’s novel is that the spectral, in addition to allowing a double perspective and a reflection on the past, also enables the ghost-like continuity of characters in the present and future in a way that strikes a credible note. As Warnes comments, “what Van Heerden is

doing [in *Ancestral Voices*] is drawing on longstanding local literary resources in order to represent a worldview, a way of seeing that makes place for the dead within the world of the living” (2011:126). Andries Riet, for example, almost forgets that he himself is a ghost as he reaches out to touch Katie Danster/Riet, his widow (91). The penchant of magical realism for lending an appearance of ordinariness to the extraordinary allows for the depiction of nostalgia in life and beyond, because it suggests that it is feasible for the characters to continue to grow in understanding and life. For Andries Riet, the “release which death had brought him was still unsatisfactory” (85), and he remains haunted by the question that Katie had asked him when he returned from Pretoria after buying a new name, “‘What have you brought back, An’ries?’” (85). Although he had gone away to change his name and reject his white/Moolman heritage, he brought back with him a name only; he did not bring back any peace of mind, despite the change of name. As his ambivalence deepens, he still – as a ghost – has more questions than answers, he continues to search for clarity.

Andries’s regret mirrors FounderAbel’s – the latter also a ghost at the borehole. FounderAbel is frustrated at not being able to intervene in the crisis: “[H]e was bursting to frighten the hell out of the lifeless bunch gathered round the hole” (136), thus belying his claim that “there is serenity in all things” (139). Even in his ghostly form, FounderAbel does not display any serenity: he is still judgemental and restless, and believes that “the earth of Toorberg would never yield up what it had once taken unto itself” (143). He cannot conceive of change. Whereas Andries Riet, as a ghost, continues to search for clarity, FounderAbel, as the ghost of a typical patriarch, is obdurate in his patriarchal voice and presence. He remains as constant as Toorberg mountain within the landscape, a touchstone against which the other characters can be measured.

The narrative is focalized through at least eight ghosts, including Floris Moolman, Andries Riet and FounderAbel Moolman. In addition, there are several ghosts whose presences are witnessed, but who do not speak. Yet other ghosts are unseen but leave signs of their visits: for example, a bloodstain appears on the wall on the commemoration of a death, and inexplicable footprints appear in the vegetable garden. Katie Danster/Riet believes that she has premonitions of death by seeing people in ghost-like form before they have died, and in a similar vein, the rock paintings in the cave on Toorberg suggest a haunting trace of previous inhabitants. These spectres indicate a palimpsest of trauma at Toorberg: the nostalgic evocation of the Moolman and Riet farmstead leads us to a site with many layers of trauma, so that we can experience the parts of the story that have not previously been told, but must be acknowledged to complete the picture. Floris Moolman’s story, for example, must be told in order that Andries Riet be understood. Andries Riet’s story must be told in order that Oneday Riet be understood, and so on. With a clearer articulation of the past comes a clearer understanding and acceptance of the present and a clearer vision of the future, because “the process of articulation [can] enable the individual and the community to heal and move on” (Edwards 2008:138).

In tracing the nostalgic longings in this story, it is apparent that the characters' relations with the past affect relations with the present and, therefore, with the future. At the beginning of this section on nostalgia and characters, I drew attention to the strong division between the two sides of the family – the Moolmans and the Riets – as plainly marked on the family tree. It appears, from following each family's developments through the generations, that strong and decisive beginnings do not guarantee a strong and decisive continuity. On the (white) Moolman side of the family – the central figures in the narrative – the family has well-defined origins and the aspiration of a strong lineage. However, with each generation the emulation of the founding father becomes an increasingly heavy burden for those who attempt to repeat past lives and patterns of behaviour. The more the Moolmans strive to retain their sense of identity as defined in the past, the weaker the family line becomes, culminating in a string of still-born babies: the children of Abel (the third) and Ella Moolman. These babies are the ghosts of the future, a future that will not materialise and that cannot be.²⁹

On the other side of the family, the (Coloured) Riets have scattered origins and cannot decisively trace these origins. In their family there is much rumination about identity, but the focus is on who they want to be in the present and who they wish to become in the future, rather than on who they were in the past. With each generation, the Riet family's sense of identity – unlike the Moolmans' – becomes stronger and more clearly defined, and culminates in a brood of healthy children who thrive, much like the family's herd of goats, on the rugged landscape of their home. These contrasting examples of the Moolman and Riet families' development indicate that, through reflection, various unearthed/recuperated aspects of the past can strengthen a sense of identity with which to face the future, whilst, in contrast, attempts to restore the past will inevitably founder and stunt development.

*

Although the overview of the families has shown that one family, as a unit, has gradually weakened, whilst the other has gained in strength, this is not presented as an opposition. Within each family there are individuals who seek unproblematically to restore the past and individuals who critically reflect on the past and incorporate trauma into their reminiscences. In addition, some characters are presented, ambiguously, as harbouring both restorative and reflective longings for the past. In this way Van Heerden has employed nostalgia to reveal complexity rather than simple polarisation. He has utilised what Walder would call “the ‘tough aesthetic’ of postcolonial nostalgias [because] an approach to postcolonial nostalgia that captures this kind of complexity [is] tough, and [...] nuanced” (2011:17). Its societal reverberations, now explicitly articulated, are immense: a South Africa moving through

²⁹ It is a bizarrely Shakespearean reminder of Macbeth's doomed line, of a life of sound and fury ultimately destined for extinction.

trauma to a landscape defined no longer by white Afrikanerdom, but by a diversified, ‘Coloured’, or at least a mixed-race, cultural future.

Nostalgia in the Novel: Places

A nostalgic mood, as mentioned earlier, is established in the very titles of the novel and its translation. The English title, *Ancestral Voices*, focusses on people (whom I discussed in the previous section), while *Toorberg*, in the original Afrikaans, focusses attention on places as having considerable importance in the novel. Toorberg is the name of the mountain, the village, and the farm, and connotations of magic and spells in the word ‘toor’ suggest a quality beyond mere geographical marking, which supports the idea that space is not seen as static or devoid of influence.³⁰

In the previous section – on nostalgia in relation to people – I discussed how central voices are challenged and contested by marginal voices. In this section – on nostalgia in relation to places – I examine Van Heerden’s nostalgic evocation of the Karoo landscape and farm. But rather than simply revisiting those traditional places, he expands on the domain of the traditional plaasroman in order to break new ground, as it were. Van Heerden offers a multi-faceted perspective: he approaches place and space from the characters’ own viewpoints but he also explores interconnected relationships that some of the characters experience with their natural environment, and this in contrast to the disconnection or alienation experienced by others. To consider the natural environment as an active ‘player’ is to enter the domain of environmentalism, in which the ‘extra-human’ is “indissolubly interwoven with the human past, present, and [...] future” (Ashcroft et al. 2007:71). Environmentalism, so understood, is another postcolonial concept that Van Heerden explores alongside displacement and dislocation, ownership and belonging, and the connection between place and identity.

Although “place is [...] associated with habits, particularity, and fairly stable characteristics” (Su 2005:26), while some consider that “all social relations are organized spatially” (Massey; qtd in Su 2005:21), we must also consider that “a particular place has multiple and shifting associations” (Su 2005:29) and that the “apparent stability” of social space, according to Lefebvre (qtd in Wegner 2002:182), is “short lived and contingent”. Nostalgia, then, “does not necessarily lead to regressive attitudes, but can in certain instances enable characters and readers alike to revise their perceptions of the past in two complementary senses” (Su 2005:7): to ‘fix it’ either by securing it more firmly in the imagination, or by revising or repairing it (in Su 2005:7).

³⁰ The word ‘toor’ means: “bewitch, put a spell on, jinx; practice witchcraft; conjure, juggle; charm, enchant” (Pheiffer 2007:622).

Nostalgia often focusses on particular spaces. It is, to reiterate, commonly associated with homesickness, a longing for home, a longing for a place of belonging. Van Heerden depicts just such a place of longing and belonging in *Ancestral Voices*, at least from the patriarchal/Moolman perspective. The landscape is recognisable in South African and Afrikaans literature: the wide-open spaces of the Karoo and its lonely and isolated farmlands. Van Heerden *secures* such a landscape prior to *revising* its centrality by acknowledging and including within it previously unacknowledged marginal perspectives.³¹ The Coloured Riet family, for example, qualify the authority of the Moolman patriarchy.

In the following subsections I explore Van Heerden's treatment of people's relationships with space: the pioneers' feelings while traversing the wilderness; their attitudes towards the mountain as either a gift of nature or a place of power and control. I consider the farmstead from a restoratively nostalgic point of view as an idyllic space, and alternatively as a site of trauma; and finally I consider the houses and homes of Toorberg which may be felt either as protective shells or as memorials to earlier times and people.³²

The Wilderness: Traversing Pre-Existing Space / Discovering Virgin Territory

Ancestral Voices reaches back as far as the period of the Great Trek (which began in 1836) to tell the story of Founder Abel's journey through the wilderness, with his wife, Magtilt, that culminates in their arrival at Toorberg. The landscape is initially portrayed, by storytellers such as Katie Danster/Riet, as being a vast and empty space, a place that Founder Abel has the courage and foresight to traverse, together with his faithful helpers, Jan Swaat and Tame Bushman, and where his efforts are rewarded in the discovery of a spring on the magical mountain of Toorberg.

This is the typical nostalgic Afrikaner founding myth, typically told in the plaasroman as the nostalgic story of a beginning. The view that "nostalgia [...] is essentially history without guilt [and] heritage is something that suffuses us with pride rather than with shame" (Kammen; qtd in Boym 2001:xiv) could apply to *Ancestral Voices* were its narrative confined to the story of the central characters and their relationship to the landscape, and were the hardships in the novel glossed over as a series of obstacles to be overcome by the actions of the 'heroic pioneer'. But Van Heerden qualifies such accounts by introducing alternative perspectives, thereby providing a counter discourse to the pioneer experience.

For Founder Abel's wife, Magtilt, for example, the trek is not an exciting adventure into a land of opportunity and freedom. For her, it is a series of "savage days of encircled wagons, sick children and

³¹ This is a landscape that Rayda Jacobs also explores in her novels *Eyes of the Sky* (1996) and *The Slave Book* (1998). I discuss her treatment of Karoo/Cape interior spaces in a later chapter that focusses on *The Slave Book* in particular.

³² Paul's (1988) dissertation, *Functions of the Physical Space in 'Toorberg'*, similarly distinguishes three topographical regions in the novel – the mountain, the farm, and the district – and discusses the symbolism in and of each region.

commando expeditions against black impis” (31). Although – as some remember – during the day the trekkers are surrounded by herds of game “as far as the eye can see” (32) in the wide-open spaces of the Karoo, that image provides only a ‘screen-memory’ or ‘snapshot’ picture as per Hook’s psychoanalytic reconsiderations of nostalgia (2012). For Hook, a screen memory is one in which “a particular feature has been exaggerated so as to lock out a less acceptable memory” (2012:234). On closer inspection, though, we see that, at night, the silence and darkness is so imposing that “eventually [...] Magtilt wanted to scream her fear out loud, so the whole wilderness would hear and come and claim her” (32). Seen through her eyes, this wilderness is not a place of adventurous opportunity; rather, it is a place of dislocation where she feels unwelcome, foreign, and exposed.

Contrary to Magtilt, TameBushman appears, initially, to be at home in the vast, dark spaces. “On moonlit nights he would squat on his haunches, rocking back and forth under the moon. Sometimes he would light a fire and dance round and round” in what appears to be a dance of freedom and communion with the moon and the earth (33). But TameBushman originates from a now hunted and displaced people, as we are reminded when, for example, FounderAbel “fire[s] on a small band of Bushmen gathering honey under an overhanging cliff” (5). So we see that because of TameBushman’s displaced condition he is seeking comfort in ancient ritual – with his dance – which becomes an attempt to survive through the recollection of a sense of freedom, happiness, and security.

The vast and beautiful spaces of the Karoo, which are initially presented as a restoratively nostalgic site of freedom and opportunity, are therefore seen also, through the eyes of Magtilt and TameBushman, as a site of trauma – of loneliness, fear, displacement, and abuse of power. Neither Magtilt nor TameBushman are ‘at home’ in this environment; nor is this landscape merely a blank canvas, as attested by TameBushman’s kin who are “fired on” (5), and the impis who pose a constant threat to the pioneers. By nostalgically re-visiting the site of the Trek and incorporating its painful recollections, Van Heerden complicates any myth of discovery. This Karoo is not simply the domain of the pioneer who is the first to stake his claim. Rather, the space has been “reconceived as both a historical and geographical-spatial project”; there has been a “dissolution and reorganization of the environments” (Soja; qtd in Wegner 2002:181).

For the pioneers, though, whether experienced as a site of freedom and opportunity or as site of trauma and hardship, the wilderness is a liminal space. As FounderAbel and Magtilt leave the Cape Colony, heading into the interior in search of freedom and a new home, it is a liminal space that they enter: between homes and also between identities.

The Mountain: Accepting Natural Gifts / Exerting Power and Control

After trekking through the wilderness, FounderAbel and Magtilt (together with Jan Swaat and TameBushman) find what they can call their home when they arrive at the mountain with its spring. FounderAbel names the large and imposing mountain ‘Toorberg’ because “he could not fully

understand the strange enchantment of this world” (6), inferring from the beginning that this is a special place which appeals not only to their practical needs, but also to their spiritual and emotional senses, and that the mountain and its immediate surrounds is a world unto itself. They feel compelled to settle there and immediately form a relationship with their new home.

Symbolically, then, Toorberg mountain is the central point of the action. It is on the mountain where the new inhabitants drill for water and where (much later) Noah, the child, falls into the borehole. The farm, the village, and the houses and homes are positioned in relation to the mountain, which is also central to each of the character’s lives. The mountain is constantly referred to as the characters habitually orientate themselves in relation to its physical presence. This is evident, for example, when Katie Danster/Riet, in the opening scene, sets out at first light, “just as the mist was curling down past the heels of the Toorberg and the wild geese were starting to cry out to one another” (1). The closing scene presents a similar picture of Katie Danster/Riet and the wild geese who, “crying [...] flew over her head, dived through the wind and swung away into the white mist that was tumbling down over the head of the Toorberg” (344). The human and the natural world are granted a close correspondence. Whatever has happened between the first and last page of the novel – or in the lives of the people at Toorberg – has not altered the mountain. It appears constant and eternal, in stark contrast to the evanescence of humanity.

Nostalgia for the mountain permeates the novel. It is a place unmarked by time, and suggests a reassuring, identifiable and recognizable world of its own. Again, the nostalgic instances in the novel that relate to the mountain are both restorative *and* reflective. Initial nostalgia relates to its ‘discovery’. FounderAbel, following TameBushman’s lead, finds the spring on the mountain. He “looked out over the Valley below and resolved: he would apply to the nearest landdrost for a deed of title to this land. There in the groin of the Toorberg, FounderAbel pitched camp and planned his farm” (5). In this decisive moment, Toorberg becomes the Moolman home. This moment is decisive also because it is at this point that the ideas of ownership and belonging diverge. FounderAbel’s sense of belonging is based on ownership and control. For others, such as Jan Swaat and TameBushman, a sense of belonging is based on communion with the mountain as a nurturing space, and acceptance of its natural gifts (most importantly water, but also shelter). The mountain and the spring are subsequently incorporated into the farm’s boundaries. That means that FounderAbel, legally and officially, owns the mountain and the spring as part of the farm. Yet, although he owns the water’s point of origin, he cannot control the water. As the water slowly dries up for successive generations, their attempts at control lead to arrogance and pride and their eventual weakening and downfall. Ultimately, it is the desperate attempt to find water by drilling that leads to child Noah’s accident and to the gathering of the entire family at the borehole.

So, although the mountain looms large, it is water that is life-giving. It is the search for water that leads them to Toorberg, and water that keeps them at Toorberg. “The symbolic meanings of water

may be reduced to three main areas. It is a source of life, a vehicle for cleansing, and a centre of regeneration” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:1081), whilst mountains are seen as numinous places which – when viewed from below – “stand against the horizon like world axes” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:680), reaching up to the heavens so that the top of a mountain is where heaven and earth meet. Toorberg together with its water can be considered metaphysically, therefore, as mystical and God-given, not only a geographical landmark. Although all the characters relate to the mountain as a physical presence, it is their attitudes towards the mountain and the water as *metaphysically* central to their lives that differentiates them. While they all feel a sense of belonging to Toorberg, for some that sense of belonging is based on ownership and control, whilst for others it is intuitively based on acceptance and communion.

Katie Danster/Riet, for example, acknowledges that TameBushman’s sensitivity to his natural environment led to the discovery of water on Toorberg when she recalls that “‘they say TameBushman had smelt the water four days to the south, eighty miles away’ ” (5); Dowser DuPisani, talking about his search for water on Toorberg years later, grants that it is the earth that decides whether or not – or when and where – to offer up its precious gift. As he points out, “‘somewhere there were streams of bubbling water, but they were keeping hidden, as though the earth was shy’ ” (258). When Dowser DuPisani tells of his plans to teach Noah to dowse, he acknowledges the inherent skill and intuition that is required: “‘I wanted to teach him how to dowse. I could see he had the feeling for it [...] even when he was standing up, he was listening to the water under the ground’ ” (68), he says. These are intuitive characters who accept what the mountain offers and respect their interconnected relationship with their environment – with nature – as they strive to live in harmony with it.

FounderAbel has a close relationship with the land, but does not see himself in partnership with it. Rather, he sees himself as controlling and managing the land. He tells his son that “‘water as sweet as this comes straight from God Himself – we have a divine calling in this place’ ” (282), but his immediate reaction is to get title deeds to the land and to plan and build his farm. Although he acknowledges that Toorberg is God-given and that their mission there is a spiritual one, the ‘we’ that he refers to as having a divine calling is confined to himself and his sons, in other words, to the core, the Moolman family. His imagination does not allow for ‘others’.

But there *are* ‘others’. Van Heerden, as we have seen, introduces marginal characters and explores their relationships with the mountain. The reflectively nostalgic aspects of this novel consider that belonging, in an emotional, spiritual and psychological sense, has broad implications, and affects all the characters. All the people who live, or have lived at Toorberg, feel a sense of belonging and kinship with the mountain. Just as Katie Danster/Riet does in the opening lines of the novel, many other characters habitually orientate themselves using the mountain as point of reference. For example, Ella Moolman on a routine morning visit to her herb garden, “looked up for a moment at the wild

geese, crying as they circled overhead above the homestead before flying back into the mist shrouding the crown of the Toorberg” (19), whilst Amy O’Leary, in the village, “looked up at the Toorberg and noticed a shroud of mist covering the peak” (51) when opening the curtain at breakfast time. On the night that the child, Noah, gets stuck in the borehole, “there was a golden moon above the Toorberg” (155) which Oneday Riet observed as he walks home. The ghost of Floris Moolman sums up the sentiment of belonging – using the mountain as a point of reference in terms of location and time – when he says that his family “‘can still wake up in the morning and look up at the crown of Toorberg and think: We belong here’” (211).

In relation to the mountain, Van Heerden has conveyed a sense of longing that surpasses the restrictions of ownership and legality. Rather, various characters (both central and marginal) have an emotional, spiritual, and psychological attachment to place. Such representations of connection, or disconnection, between people and spaces are a feature of postcolonial writing. The question of who belongs to a place, and why, is asked over and above the question of ownership and political right/might. These questions are pertinent to many in the world of today and “there also has been in recent years more and more attention given to the ways that diverse subaltern publics are able to ‘divert and re-appropriate’ dominated spaces” (Wegner 2002:185). Nostalgia allows the individual to relive and validate a sense of self by revisiting a space (either physically or imaginatively) because “a return to one’s region of origin is mostly a return to memories” (Viljoen et al. 2004:7).

In short, for those who settle around Toorberg, the mountain is perceived to have a metaphysical connection to Nature/God, stronger than – or perhaps overriding – its social, political, or legal connection to humankind or society. In contrast, the farmstead is a space firmly under the control of people, society, and ideology. The farm, a natural space demarcated and controlled by man, can even be considered a buffer between the natural (for example, wilderness) and the man-made (for example, houses) – between the ‘outside’ and the ‘inside’.

The Farmstead: Reflecting on Longing / Restoring an Idyllic Space

The observation that “[t]he farm is an icon of Afrikaner identity symbolizing a heroic struggle against the wilderness” (Viljoen et al. 2004:10) holds true for FounderAbel’s struggle to create Toorberg farm while the following four generations of Moolmans attempt to make their mark and forge an identity. “In Afrikaans literature, the farm has had a symbolic power for many decades. In early fiction, it was a psychological home, a marker of the identity of the Afrikaner” (van der Merwe 2004:125). The farm is thus central to the plaasroman and, in this novel, is the seat of the Moolman family; it presents a closed and homogeneous environment. Such observations apply to FounderAbel at least, who, after the discovery of the spring on the mountain, creates a kind of Garden of Eden. He considers the farm to be God-given and his responsibility that of a steward. In return for his hard work and sacrifice FounderAbel receives from God – as he believes – a life on this piece of land that he can pass on from generation to generation. Of his efforts, Katie Danster/Riet recounts that, “within three years,

FounderAbel had shot and ploughed and chopped and built till Toorberg Farm was the pride of the frontier” (7). In the tradition of the plaasroman, once the founder has ‘married’ the land and established an identity in relation to the land, the symbiotic relationship must be sustained. Three generations of Abel Moolmans follow in FounderAbel’s footsteps to farm Toorberg, a bountiful and yielding place of “ ‘divine calling’ ” (282).

Van Heerden, accordingly, takes the reader of *Ancestral Voices* on a nostalgic visit to this idealised version of the Karoo farm, the “good, idyllic space” (Viljoen 2004:113). This initial view of the farm as an Eden-like haven fulfils a longing for the idyll and is an example of restorative nostalgia as expressed by characters such as Katie Danster/Riet and Floris Moolman. Floris, like Katie, expresses a nostalgia for Toorberg that seeks to restore the farm as an idyllic space even as, in the qualificatory hints of the narrative, we begin to acknowledge that such a perception is misguided. Floris’s longing for Toorberg, the farm from which he has been banished, reveals a hopeless longing for a place that cannot define his identity. His wandering (following his banishment) is driven by “his yearning for farmland and cattle and the hot veld sun on his back” (210) because, by recalling those sensations, Floris Moolman returns to a time and place of happiness and, at least in his imagination, of belonging. He does not reflect on the trauma that is associated with his banishment from the family farm; he simply wishes to restore his early relationship to the farm.

In addition to such a restorative view of the idyllic farm space, however, Van Heerden introduces the counter-balance of reflective nostalgia in order to remind us of the punishment and rejection that are also attached to the concept of the farm. He contemplates what effect the construct of ‘the farm’ has, as both physical and mental presence, on those who do not submit to its ideology. Apart from its simplicity and purity, and the idyllic life the farm provides (close to the land, to nature, and to God), the farm is also the site of trauma. To the ancestral line, the farm might be seen to reward hard work, sacrifice, and duty, to provide for all the members of the extended family – because, according to FounderAbel’s will “every Moolman woman and every Moolman man who did not himself farm on Toorberg had an inalienable right to share in the produce of the farm” (25). But the farm is also seen to punish and reject the deviance of those who do not comply with FounderAbel’s patterns of behaviour. When Andreas Moolman, for example, is disgraced (for being a ‘traitor’ in composing a poem for the English Queen), we read that “Toorberg turned its back on Andreas Moolman” (119); and, when the ghosts of Magtilt and FounderAbel visit the borehole when the boy, Noah, is trapped in its shaft, they know “what the living did not: that the earth of Toorberg would never yield up what it had once taken unto itself” (143).

The idea of the land taking control of the people, entrapping them by their self-imposed sense of duty, is illustrated by the relationship among FounderAbel’s sons. To his heirs, the farm is a crippling burden of responsibility. For the renegade sons who leave the farm, there is a lifelong restlessness and sense of displacement and loss because their sense of identity is dependent on the farm. Whether they

stay or go, the farm exerts a strong influence and control over their sense of self. For other marginal characters, the farm is also a site of dislocation and displacement. The Riets, for example, have been “exiled into poverty onto a dusty, barren, isolated part of the farm because of their skin colour” (Warnes 2009:80). In addition, particularly for Shala and Oneday Riet – who are conscious of their mixed-race identity and who strongly identify with their San/‘Bushman’ lineage – there is a feeling of displacement in response to the historical treatment and displacement of San/‘Bushmen’ in the area. In response, when Shala Riet routinely takes his herd of goats up onto the mountain for grazing, he looks down on the valley and the farm and dreams of a bygone era when “hunting was free” (76). He imagines that the San/‘Bushman’ paintings in the cave come to life “and the brown herds of antelope with the tiny hunters after them rush out through the mouth of the cave [...] and swarm into the Valley below” (76). As a marginal character, Shala is set in contrast to his nostalgic imaginings of historical events, thus confirming Wegner’s claim that although “we think of [space] as a reified thing [it is, rather,] an open-ended, conflicted and contradictory process, a process in which we as agents continuously intervene” (2002:182). The space that Shala Riet inhabits has the power to marginalize him because of the socio-political implications in/of that space. Shala Riet is, therefore, nostalgic for the place that he inhabits – the farm – but at another time: a time of a different socio-political circumstance. His brother, Oneday Riet, has similar intimations. He too longs for Toorberg in an earlier time: the time of the founding of the farm, because he longs to grant equal status to the three founding fathers, the white, the Coloured, and the San/‘Bushman’.

It is apparent, therefore, that reflective nostalgia allows us, as readers, to consider spaces from different perspectives (central and peripheral), but also to consider spaces in different times and, as such, as involving different, even contrasting, social constructs. Space is, indeed, not static. In *Ancestral Voices*, Van Heerden’s narrative succumbs to the temptation of a nostalgic visit to the traditional Karoo farm; but, once there, nostalgic reflection intrudes to alert the reader to the alternative perspectives: the peripheral spaces of those who, in the traditional plaasroman, would be marginal characters, if they appeared as presences at all. In this ‘self-referential’ plaasroman, however, not only are the bountiful areas of the farm surveyed, but also the arid areas; not only is the privilege of custodianship considered, but also the debilitating burden. By reflecting on the farm, almost simultaneously, as a longed-for home and as a site of trauma, a more detailed and complex picture can emerge. When considering the farm-as-home through others’ eyes, an alternative home – and, therefore, an alternative identity – can be envisioned because “if social and cultural spaces [...] are indeed the product of human actions, then there is the possibility of our reconstituting human spaces, and hence human being-in-the-world as well” (Wegner 2002:185).

The House: A Shelter for Solitude and Daydreams / A Memorial for the Dead

Within the spaces that I have discussed – the wilderness, the mountain, and the farm – there are also private shelters: houses and homes. In *Ancestral Voices*, Van Heerden nostalgically portrays several

houses and homes as sheltering spaces. There is merit in their exploration because, as Hein Viljoen et al. suggest,

[i]n searching for identity and a place to belong, rather than returning to the region of your heart, another reaction might be to take shelter in your own little corner of the world, your own little shell. A house is in this regard the essence of inhabited space – the place we call home shelters us and forms a kind of shell for our solitude and our daydreams. (2004:9)

By visiting in turn the Toorberg farmstead, Katie Danster/Riet's cottage, and the San/Bushman cave, I ask: are these homes 'sheltering corners of the world' which allow for 'solitude and daydreams', or are they simply memorials to times and people past? In other words, I seek to pinpoint the nostalgic allure of each of these spaces – as instances of either restorative or reflective nostalgia – and what that reveals about our contemporary attitudes to 'home'.

As a representation of 'home', the Toorberg homestead is the quintessential farmhouse. It is big, imposing and easily visible in the area. After battling the wilderness, and giving of his material, physical, and spiritual self to found the farm, Founder Abel – as he himself wishes to believe – built this house for his wife, Magtilt. Later he claims that "[i]t was for her [...] that he had tamed this land, so that she would be able to lie in a proper bed when the birth-pangs were upon her" (136).

However, not only does he build a comfortable shelter from the elements, he also builds a 'spoghuis'; a house to show off his wonderful success, wealth, and power.³³ The house, as viewed from the perspective of the narrative present, reveals a solid, traceable history. Alterations or additions are traceable to late family members, while pictures and artefacts are referred to by their original owner's name. With "the dour ancestral portraits on the walls; the walking sticks in the umbrella-stand in the hall, some with a patina produced by hands long since crumbled into dust; the attic like a collective memory accumulating the flotsam of generations", the house has a "shrine-like ambience" (147). It represents safety and continuity, a 'sheltering corner of the world'. But is this a house or a home? Ella Moolman, the current 'woman of the house', "[would often] simply wander through the house, from room to room, moving a piece of furniture here, straightening a picture there, running her hand across a curtain or plumping up a cushion" (33). We see Ella staring wistfully out of the window and waiting expectantly for a spectral visitation. She is lonely and alone within this imposing space; even though a multitude of servants hover peripherally, there is little interaction. The impression is that Ella fills the role of housekeeper, or of curator in a museum in honour of the Moolman family, which is headed up by the Moolman patriarch. The house is the site of power that in turn highlights the imbalance of power in the family and the community. An example of this imbalance of power is evident from the behaviour of one of the rejected Moolman brothers – rejected for having married a Catholic woman –

³³ The Afrikaans word 'spog' means to "boast, brag, show off" (Pheiffer 2007:572); therefore a 'spoghuis' is a 'show house' or a house to show-off with.

Postmaster, who is haunted by his family/childhood home. He gazes up at the Moolman farmstead through his brother's binoculars with a "yearning so palpable" (55) it gives him 'gooseflesh'. His longing for home is entirely focussed on the Moolman farmstead as a 'memorial'.

Also seen from a distance is the nostalgic picture of the Riet family's cottage. However, Van Heerden presents more than just a sentimental picture, as the view is balanced against the hardships and discomforts that become apparent on closer inspection. The Riets on the Stiefveld are nostalgically pictured as living "in the distance across the Valley" where, as Katie Danster/Riet walks home, she can see "a wisp of smoke curling up out of the chimney of her little house" (12). In a traditional tale of *plaasroman*, a glimpse of the smoke curling out of the chimney from across the valley would signify an inner contentment, supplying a simplistically nostalgic vision. Van Heerden, however, disturbs such expectations by also exposing the reader to the smoky, dusty interior, which explains Katie's chest problems and the children's perpetually runny noses. We witness the hasty sweeping up of ash when the magistrate visits, the dragging in of benches to sit on, and the "path [that] became too stony, littered with too many broken bottles" to allow access to the magistrate's car. The cosy scene, which the wisp of smoke seen from across the valley suggests, is a nostalgic "screen memory" (Hook 2012:234), which cannot be sustained on closer inspection. This is actually a hard environment in which we see a family eking out its existence on a piece of wasteland. Neither are human relationships within this house easy: the women are at odds with one another; and, as discussed earlier, Katie has a very different understanding of the past and the present than do her two sons, Shala and Oneday Riet. The cottage, if the somewhat sentimental tone has any meaning here, is the site of a disjointed family.

The final 'home' on which I focus is the cave: a shelter that offers the nostalgic promise of security in a pre-Christian reminder of human origin. "As the archetype of the maternal womb, caverns feature in myths of origin, rebirth and initiation from many cultures" (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:167). Shala and Oneday Riet often retreat to the cave on the mountain which, in the past, was inhabited, visited or used by "a small band of Bushmen" (5) who scattered when Founder Abel "fired" (5) on them three days after his arrival. "From this vantage point [Shala and Oneday] could look out over the whole of Toorberg and watch [and they] saw [...] observed [...] noticed" (75-76) all the activity in the village and on the farm below them in the manner of gods, or, similarly, of omniscient narrators. This was also where they "pretended" (76) and imagined different lives. Although this is not a house or a home in which any of the characters live, it is a safe place of solitude and intimacy, a spiritual home to which Shala and Oneday, intermittently, retreat. Perhaps, as mythology suggests, it is for them a "locale of identity formation, [a place where] the process of psychological internalization through which the individual reaches maturity and achieves a fixed identity" (Chevalier 1996:171) can occur. The nostalgic tug of the cave (as a space) is for a place at a time when ownership did not define belonging; when there was enough space and shelter for all and when there was co-existence among humans, animals, and nature. This home, the cave, is a natural shelter, a womb-like space that will

endure despite the evanescence of the human experience and it, therefore, symbolizes birth, rebirth and hope.

*

For an analysis of Van Heerden's treatment of space in *Ancestral Voices*, nostalgia has proved to be a valuable tool. I consider Van Heerden's choice of spatial context to be nostalgic – he is drawn to the spaces of early Afrikaner nationalism – but to be nostalgic in both a positive and negative light. Van Heerden is revealed, in a qualificatory manner, to have not simply reconstituted that space, the space of the traditional plaasroman, but to have reflected on longing by opening the space to several, sometimes conflicting, perspectives. A historical myth of origin has been questioned implicitly and modified; the longing for ownership has been revealed to be less than a destiny; idyllic pictures have been exposed as one dimensional, barely concealing their trauma; and it has become apparent that houses are not always homes and homes are not always houses. As with the exploration of nostalgia in relation to people, nostalgia in relation to places also cannot be confined to oppositions. Just as central and marginal spaces inspire feelings of both restorative and reflective nostalgias, so both central and marginal characters experience longing for places and identities that bring them no ultimate peace of mind.

If the relationship between reflective and restorative nostalgia is shot through with ambiguity, then this double-edged concept is an apt summarizing metaphor of the novel, *Ancestral Voices*; it is apt both in the local and global application, the issue of 'home and exile' being central for current concerns in what is referred to, internationally, as postcolonial literature.

In the next section, I explore aspects of postcolonial nostalgia, again both in its local and global application, in another of Van Heerden's novels, *30 Nights in Amsterdam*.

30 Nights in Amsterdam

30 Nights in Amsterdam (2011) is the English translation – by Michiel Heyns – of Van Heerden's original Afrikaans novel *30 Nagte in Amsterdam* (2008). Like *Ancestral Voices*, this novel is set in the Karoo and focusses on a farming family, the De Melkers. The steady demise of the family is recounted, retrospectively, through the recollections of two family members, Zan de Melker and her nephew Henk de Melker, both broken people in search of their respective identities, who, after years

of estrangement, reunite in Amsterdam.³⁴ In contrast to *Ancestral Voices* (1989), *30 Nights in Amsterdam*, published 22 years later, moves beyond the confines of the farm, as the novel extends from the towns and cities of the Eastern Cape to a greater South Africa, and, as the title suggests, eventually to the Dutch and cosmopolitan city of Amsterdam. As in *Toorberg* (the original title of *Ancestral Voices*), the very title of this novel foreshadows themes pertaining to relationships with place. Including the name of the city, Amsterdam, in the title suggests that a prominent idea will be a broadening of the Afrikaner outlook, which is examined in the novel by looking out at the world from the dusty Karoo landscape while also looking back at it – from ‘out there’ – for a new perspective. In addition, the title focus on ‘30 Nights’ introduces the concept of time, hinting that ‘looking back’ applies both to viewing one place from the perspective of another and to looking back at one period of time from the vantage point of another.

The De Melker family on whom the story focusses have farmed in the Karoo for generations as neighbours of the Moolmans of Toorberg, the latter being the family and farm introduced in *Ancestral Voices*. The De Melkers, furthermore, have familial links with the Moolmans. It is mentioned that Soois Moolman, a character in *Ancestral Voices*, is the uncle of MaOlivier, a character in *30 Nights* (431). There are several other intertextual references to *Ancestral Voices* throughout this novel, particularly to the mountain and region called Toorberg (238; 239; 262; 280; 326; 412), but also to the character/family Du Pisani (191), confirming Van Heerden’s statement that his oeuvre is interrelated and forms a whole, and that new texts in his oeuvre “start a conversation with the older pieces” (Terblanche 2010:2).³⁵ It is safe to say, therefore, that the De Melkers and their community are of similar stock and tradition to the people/characters of *Ancestral Voices* and, as part of the same community, are subject to similar social and ideological influences. After reading *Ancestral Voices*, Lynne Freed commented that “it would be fascinating to have Mr Van Heerden’s version of what comes next for his people” (1992:3). In *30 Nights* we are given one such version: several generations later, the issues that in *Ancestral Voices* concerned the Moolmans as white Afrikaners have been developed and now confront the De Melkers. In *30 Nights*, the contemporary setting is post-1990 democratic South Africa. Read together, these two novels form a trajectory of interrelated themes and motifs – from the beginning of the earlier novel to the end of the later novel.³⁶

³⁴ Zan de Melker is the daughter of the nameless patriarchal figure and his wife Granny/MaOlivier. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to Henk de Melker as ‘Henk’ or ‘Henk de Melker’ – the other character in the novel who is also named Henk is his father who, to avoid confusion, I will refer to as Henk (Senior).

³⁵ The intertextuality of *30 Nights in Amsterdam* with other texts of Van Heerden’s oeuvre – particularly *Ancestral Voices* – and with Afrikaans literature in general, has been examined by Anker (2009:242). An earlier study discussing the intertextuality of Van Heerden’s texts, by De Beer (1991), is also relevant if we bear in mind that *30 Nights in Amsterdam* is intertextually linked to *Ancestral Voices*.

³⁶ Whereas the trajectory of *Ancestral Voices* stretches from the Great Trek to approximately the 1950s, *30 Nights in Amsterdam* reaches in memory back to the 1940s-1960s, from the vantage point of the 2000s, so that the time span of the two novels overlaps somewhat. More generally, as mentioned earlier, *Ancestral Voices* was

As in *Ancestral Voices*, in *30 Nights* the search for identity is central to the novel's purpose: Van Heerden's Afrikaner is now forced to explore an identity that is no longer automatically supported or defined by land ownership. Changing socio-political circumstances, together with an inability to sustain hereditary succession, have loosened the white male's exclusive hold on land in South Africa. The search for identity, therefore, extends to include the question of who, or what, a South African is, and indeed how people everywhere re-define their identity in the changing world of today. Amsterdam, as we shall see, signifies not only a global cityscape but, ironically, links the Afrikaner back to his/her roots, beyond even the founding myth of the Great Trek to a kind of ancestral collusion in an earlier Dutch colonial adventure in Africa.

As with *Ancestral Voices*, *30 Nights in Amsterdam* has a multitude of characters. Attention is focussed, however, primarily on two main persons, Zan de Melker (also known as Susan or Xan) and her nephew, Henk de Melker. Focalisation in the novel's fifty-eight chapters is divided between these two characters as they recount and consider – from the perspective of the new millennium in the 2000s – their formative years in the home of the De Melker matriarch, Granny/MaOlivier.³⁷ The action, which encompasses the reminiscences of Zan and Henk, is provoked by a letter from Zan's lawyer – one Grotius, in Amsterdam – to Henk in the Karoo. Henk is informed that his aunt (Zan), whom he has not seen for approximately forty years, has died and left her estate to him on the condition that he travel to Amsterdam to view and/or accept the terms of the will. In fact, as we learn later, Zan has not died but is terminally ill. With Grotius as go-between, she intervenes in Henk's life by luring him to Amsterdam under false pretensions. The purpose, it turns out, is to attempt reconciliation with her nephew. The juxtaposition of the nostalgic and traumatic recollections of Henk and Zan results in startling revisions of their memories – revisions which dispel any singular view of what it is to be an Afrikaner in the modern world. The double perspective thus created compares and combines two people's accounts of their lives then and now. In addition, there is the double perspective from far and near as we travel between the Karoo and Amsterdam in a journey into the characters' respective memories.

In this light I shall examine Van Heerden's response to forms of nostalgia in the novel with regard to places and spaces. Van Heerden's characters imaginatively visit the Karoo in South Africa – its landscape, farm, town and city – while they venture abroad to the European city of Amsterdam. As Viljoen et al. observe,

space in literature, as in life, is never just an empty, neutral extension but rather a place that has been named, demarcated, allocated. It is a place that gets its meaning from

written and published during the apartheid years, while *30 Nights in Amsterdam* was written and published after the end of apartheid.

³⁷ The De Melker matriarch is referred to in the novel as GrannyOlivier (as Henk de Melker's grandmother) or MaOlivier (as Zan de Melker's mother). For the sake of clarity I will refer to her as Granny/MaOlivier.

human experience, and memories from relations between people. It is often a stage where human desires and interests clash. (2004:3)

But before discussing nostalgia and space I need first to consider nostalgia in regard to the characters.

Nostalgia in the Novel: Characters

Place, of course, is granted significance through people. Before turning to a metonymic Amsterdam I shall therefore focus on the characters whose lives constitute Van Heerden's move, in effect, from the collective identity of 'Afrikanerdom' (as in the older tradition) to a more fluid identity of the Afrikaans individual. As such a move suggests, the concept of the plaasroman – initially questioned in *Ancestral Voices* – almost ceases to be an anchoring point of reference. 'Almost', however, is the operative word: there is no simple turn from the Karoo of Afrikaner ancestry to the free space of Amsterdam. The character who most obviously, perhaps symbolically, links the older tradition to a younger generation is Granny/MaOlivier.

Granny/MaOlivier: Clinging to 'Truth' and Tradition

In Granny/MaOlivier, Van Heerden presents a strong and traditional Afrikaner woman. Traditionally, the Afrikaner woman is portrayed in the plaasroman "essentially as a housewife, usually unhappy, and as having little to do with the forming of a national ideology" [my translation] (Coetzee 2000:77); instead, it was the "patriarch who spoke" [my translation] (Coetzee 2000:77).^{38 39} The De Melkers, however, no longer have a patriarch. Granny/MaOlivier is a widow who has moved from the family farm to a house in town, leaving the farm in the hands of the son and heir, Henk (Senior), who does not have the necessary strong skills of leadership.⁴⁰ Granny/MaOlivier oversees the family trust (as an enterprise) from her imposing desk at her house in town. Although she could capably manage the farm herself, she considers herself simply to be a guardian while she waits for either Henk (Senior) to "get a grip" (Van Heerden, 2011b:145) on himself or for Henk, her grandson, to mature and take up the reins.⁴¹

As he did in *Ancestral Voices*, Van Heerden has introduced a subversive figure into the plaasroman: in this case a prominent female character who is central not only to the family, but also to the farm as a commercial enterprise – a female character who stands in as the substitute patriarch within the structure of the novel. Van Heerden has nostalgically created a hardworking and devout woman devoted to family and 'volk', but one who is shown to have considerable and unusual capabilities. Zan

³⁸ "Daarbenewens is die vrou hoofsaaklik huisvrou, en gewoonlik ongelukkig; maar aan die vorming van 'n volksideologie het sy weinig deel gehad" (Coetzee 2000:77).

³⁹ "Dit was die patriarg wat gepraat het..." (Coetzee 2000:77).

⁴⁰ Henk (Senior) is MaOlivier's son. His son (and therefore Granny/MaOlivier's grandson) is Henk, the novel's protagonist.

⁴¹ Henceforth, in quoting from *30 Nights in Amsterdam* I shall note only the page number.

de Melker, her daughter, points out that “‘MaOlivier’s word is law’” (326) and that she “‘knows about farming; she’s ram breeder number one’” (276). The character, Granny/MaOlivier herself, however, is not convinced of her own strengths. Although she has taken the lead in farming and family matters and is most knowledgeable as farmer and breeder of sheep, she sees herself only as the “‘guardian of the Substantiality’” (27). Even though she is an atypically strong woman, Granny/MaOlivier is nostalgic for the patriarchal past to be restored. She longs to restore the farm to its former glory, and restore “‘the De Melkers [...] once again [to] where they belong and always did’” (219); she longs for the restoration of the patriarch. Physically, there is no central patriarchal figure; all the characters are peripheral (according to the structure of the traditional *plaasroman*), but “‘grandfather De Melker [...] had a strong influence [...] even though he was no longer there’” (271). He could be considered to be a spectral representation of a central figure, a presence that haunts Granny/MaOlivier’s memories. Granny/MaOlivier tells Henk that “[t]here are many challenges ahead for the Afrikaner’” (218), thus indicating that her nostalgia is a “defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals”, which – according to Boym – is when “nostalgia inevitably reappears” (2001:xiv).

While Granny/MaOlivier attempts to restore the arrangements that have worked in the past, and with which she is familiar and comfortable, she also attempts to manipulate others. For example, she bullies her son, Henk (Senior). Even though he is floundering and battling with depression, she implores him to “get a grip on [him]self or give up the farm”, while at the same time pointing out that he “should look well after what [he has been] given in trust, for the next generation” (145). On the other hand she overprotects and restricts her daughter, Zan. Though neither at school nor employed, Zan, who suffers from epilepsy, is not taught anything useful and is not given a productive role in either the running of the household or the farm/business. Furthermore, Granny/MaOlivier sends prospective suitors away without Zan’s knowledge, saying that “[Zan’s] mental equilibrium [...] was to be preserved at any price” (345). Granny/MaOlivier’s other daughter (sister to Henk (Senior) and Zan) is overlooked entirely. MaOlivier refers to her as the “Pretoria sister” (145) – we never learn her name – and instead consults with her daughter’s husband on farm and family matters. Henk, her youngest grandson (the son of Henk Senior) is her last hope of a successor to take the place of her late husband and she overbearingly attempts to mould him into the man she wants (and needs) him to be by overseeing every aspect of his life. So strong is her conviction that the past can be restored, that she denies herself the happiness of a second marriage because, she says, it would be “[a] betrayal of Oupa, always such a proud man” (192). Henk (as a child), standing behind a curtain, overhears her “[decline] the old man’s proposal in tears: ‘I can’t just leave them in the lurch. I cannot abandon them’” (432).

Granny/MaOlivier, being ‘restoratively’ nostalgic, believes that she is being faithful to “truth and tradition” (Boym 2001:xviii). But her endeavours to control people and events in her “attempt [at] a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home” (Boym 2001:xviii) do not have the desired effects. Her

son, Henk (Senior), instead of becoming the next patriarchal leader of the family farm, suffers a mental breakdown and has to be hospitalised. Her daughter, Zan, does not comply either because she does not succumb to the quiet life that her mother wants for her. On the contrary, Zan rebels dramatically and eventually disappears from the Karoo region. In the meantime, the younger Henk, Granny/MaOlivier's grandson, quietly slips into a life of obscurity, away from the role she had expected him to assume. Eventually, when Granny/MaOlivier dies (alone) in her rose garden at her house in Graaff-Reinet, her son-in-law takes over the farm, thus ending the De Melker authority over the land. It appears, then, that not only has she not achieved what she intended – she has not restored the former patriarchal order – but she has also obstructed her own potential and foiled alternative futures for the family and the family farm. The effects of her need to restore the past, and of her attempts to mould her children and grandchildren, has instead left Henk and Zan with unresolved questions regarding their identity and their place in the world. Both are stunted: they know what they *do not* want, but are unable to imagine what they *do* want.

By clinging to tradition and what she believes to be the 'truth', Granny/MaOlivier has neither allowed herself to develop and grow nor has she nurtured the younger generations. Henk and Zan, as I discuss next, chafe against the pre-conceived roles that they are expected to fill, while experiencing psychological difficulties in the process of their maturation. Their traumatic memories, however, are eventually confronted, and through 'reflective nostalgia' each comes to a point of integration, reconciliation, and emotional growth.

Henk de Melker: Haunted by Trauma / Emerging from his Crypt

The novel opens by introducing Henk de Melker, a forty-seven-year-old museum assistant, who "considers himself a simple man, a man who asks for little from life and gives little in return" (3). He lives a monastic life: "[T]he last time he touched a woman's skin blazes more fiercely in his memory with each passing year" (3), and, tucked away from society, he has effectively retreated from life. He works on his monographs about obscure historical people and quells the loneliness "that grips him on Saturday afternoons" (37) by drinking beer and driving out to "where the plains open out around him" (37). He has underachieved to the point that no one bothers him. But he does not allow thoughts of the past to intrude on his life, believing instead that "he's got everything neatly sorted here in [the Karoo] now" (5). As Boym has it, "for some, nostalgia [is] a taboo" and this could apply to Henk de Melker. He seems to share the "predicament of Lot's wife, a fear that looking back might paralyze [him] forever, turning [him] into a pillar of salt, a pitiful monument to [his] own grief" (Boym 2001:xv). This lifeless existence, however, hints at unresolved trauma, raising inevitable questions about what he is retreating from. Henk's withdrawal suggests that he is living in the "aftermath" of a significant event, perhaps an event that was unpleasant, overwhelming, and/or traumatic; perhaps he is living in the aftermath of what Punter would describe a "failed project" (2000:62).

The letter Henk receives from the lawyer Grotius – informing him of Zan’s death and requesting that he travel to Amsterdam to view/claim her ‘estate’ – arrives to explode Henk’s carefully constructed existence. Even though he has resolved that “[h]e won’t allow those years to crowd clamouring into his head again [that] it’s over, forever, [and] he’s shaken it off” (5), he is provoked by the letter and is suddenly confronted with thoughts of the past. As mentioned earlier, “repression always leads to a return of the repressed” (Bhabha; qtd in Edwards 2008:127), and traumas that have been forgotten will not stay forgotten; they will assert themselves in one way or another, often through nostalgia or haunting. Henk’s office in the museum has the grave of a little boy in its corner, where “the minister and his wife buried their little son” (114). Such is the extent of Henk’s retreat and loneliness that “the simple stone [marking the grave] gives him the feeling of family” (116). But shortly before Grotius’s letter arrives Henk has an emotional and tearful reaction to a phrase that he has read in the advice column of a newspaper: “be tender with the little boy you once were” (116). In response, he considers his feelings about the grave in his office: “[T]hat’s how you’ve buried yourself, your childhood. That’s you lying there” (116), he admits to himself, suggesting that the ghosts of his past, of himself as a boy, are provoking profound reflection and recognition.

On receipt of the letter he is stunned into realizing that life has continued outside of his narrow sphere of existence; that his Aunt Zan, whom he had not thought about in years, has been living a life despite his lack of interest in her, and that, by extension, there is a world full of life outside the limits of his meagre world. The stirring of his curiosity and subsequent feelings of becoming “haunted by his childhood” (116) hint at a stifled desire to live a fully engaged life. A sense of loss – which Punter identifies as a recurrent feature of the postcolonial condition (2000:130) – seems to surround Henk because, although he is not dead, he seems to have lost his purpose in life and has been merely existing. Now, thoughts of Zan being “vividly before him” (7) suggest that the “apparently purged landscape of the contemporary” (Punter 2000:62) – in Henk’s life, the apparently sanitised mental spaces that Henk inhabits – is the site of submerged trauma, foreshadowing the revelations to follow. In other words, Henk’s uneventful life – life pared down to a simple routine of sparse interaction and lack of emotional involvement – is not ‘neutral’ but, rather, an apparent tranquillity that masks an unresolved inner disturbance. Suppressed memory will resurface in one way or another, though, often in the form of haunting, and as a result Henk’s life has many spectral elements; trauma has led him into a spectral realm. Nevertheless, his repressed memories will also be stirred by nostalgia. Although he is not, initially, nostalgic himself, nostalgia will play a role in his awakening. It is Zan’s nostalgia, as we will learn later, that prompts the lawyer’s involvement that, in turn, will be the catalyst to disturb Henk’s apparently placid existence. But what has caused Henk to retreat from life?

Astutely, Zan explains the life that Granny/MaOlivier envisaged for Henk:

[F]irst team rugby, lieutenant in the defence force, then studies at Maties or Kovsies, postgraduate and university rugby. Student council and chairman of the National Party, of

course Rapportryer and SCA member. Then Henkie comes home and he's the shining star of Graaff-Reinet, who knows, he could be lawyer or even dominee. (219)

However, Henk has not become such a person, the person who Granny/MaOlivier wanted (or needed) him to be. His rebellion against Granny/MaOlivier's plans for him – as in the case of the renegade sons and brothers in *Ancestral Voices* – takes the form of his doing nothing and becoming no-one. On one of her surreptitious visits to South Africa, Zan observes the shell of a man that Henk has become; she witnesses a “failed project” (Punter, 2000:62). Although he has evaded the rigid role that Granny/MaOlivier wanted for him, Henk has failed to find a purposeful or satisfying alternative role, and, furthermore, has lost sight of the person he was in childhood. Zan is nostalgic for the adventurous and curious little boy Henk once was. Nostalgia for that little boy, the boy whom Zan remembers, and whom he admits he has buried, “wells up in Henk” (60) when he arrives in Amsterdam. Initially, he is struck by the stark contrasts between the city and the Karoo. The feeling of homesickness, however, is not for the Karoo he has just left, but for the Karoo of an earlier time, the time that he shared with Zan when they were growing up in Granny/MaOlivier's household. Henk has suppressed these recollections because they had threatened to lead directly to traumatic memories of guilt, loss, and loneliness. Spectral occurrences become more insistent when he arrives in Amsterdam: in the evening of his arrival at the Amsterdam apartment where he will stay during his visit, he falls into a deep and troubled sleep, “the sleep of the dead” (65). Although he lives on the fourth floor of an apartment block, he is awoken by a man outside the window. “‘How...? Is the man floating?’” (64), he wonders, but the man is part of a work crew scraping a giant poster from the sides of the building, and when the man confesses that he is afraid, Henk prepares a bowl of coffee for him. Later that night, Henk ‘sees’ Zan walking towards him down the deserted street, “shimmering” and “radiant” (66), even though he, at this point, believes that she is dead. But, in addition to these spectral sightings, now, away from the Karoo, it is feelings of nostalgia that paradoxically well up in him. His heightened sense of urgency is provoked possibly because he is faced with the choice as set out in Zan's ‘will’: to either relocate permanently to Amsterdam and inherit her house or return to his current life in the Karoo. Henk is, therefore, compelled to confront who he has become and to (re)consider what he now wants in life.

I have mentioned that a combination of Henk's hauntedness and Zan's nostalgia is at play in Henk's ‘awakening’. These two characters – Henk and Zan – can be considered in tandem in their search for identity and meaning, but they could also be considered as binary opposites of each other. Either way, it is because of their reunion and interaction that they arrive at greater insights; and it is in the spaces between them, as well as in the double perspective of the combined memories, that an integrated ‘truth’ can be found. “‘In this city [Amsterdam] I am closer to the things that I was consciously trying to live away from in [the Karoo]’” (284), Henk notes. He is faced with profound insights into his past and his family – insights of which he had been unaware before arriving in Amsterdam. Henk acquires painful information during his time in Holland, both from Grotius and, later, from Zan herself

(following their reconciliation, when it is revealed that she is not in fact dead). Some of the information that he acquires in Amsterdam, though painful, ultimately liberates him from the unnecessary guilt that he has assumed, thus changing the way in which he sees things and the way he feels. For example, he had believed that he was somehow implicated in Zan's disappearance, not realizing that it was in fact her own choices and traumatic experiences that led to her flight. The traumas that have haunted Henk – apart from the weight of expectation placed on him by Granny/MaOlivier, and his misplaced guilt regarding Zan's disappearance – concern his father's ill health and sudden death, the family tensions and the failing of the family farm, his isolation as a loner at school, his fear of Zan and her epilepsy, and his fears for his own mental health. Much of his anguish arises from a lack of information and understanding – from gaps in the story of his youth. He is haunted, therefore, by misplaced feelings of guilt and fear. As Abraham and Torok have said, "What haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others" (qtd in Punter 2000:63). By reuniting with Zan and reflecting on the painful past, therefore, the secrets are told, the gaps are filled, and consequently Henk's hauntedness recedes and his traumatic memories are gradually assimilated and integrated into his life.

Once Henk has begun to deal with his traumatic memories he is increasingly able to acknowledge and incorporate pleasantly nostalgic memories. And as he sheds the burden of trauma and assumed guilt his attitude towards his work and towards creativity improves.⁴² He had intended to write a factual account of the life of Cornelius van Gogh, brother of the famous artist, Vincent van Gogh; Cornelius as the obscure brother, mirrors Henk's sense of himself. His workmanlike engagement with Cornelius becomes an increasingly creative project: "A fantasy seizes him" (382) as his imagination begins to fill in the gaps that research and public record cannot. He begins to qualify his rigid ideas about truth and fact – "Is it true? 'I don't care,' Henk says out loud. 'I'll make it true'" (438) – and instead he reaches intuitively for potential and possibility in his research of the lesser known Van Gogh, almost as if he were researching his own alter ego. Eventually, he applies the same intuitive approach to scrutinising his own life, past and present, to envisaging alternative understandings of his present, his past, and even his future. " 'I'm going to bring Cornelius van Gogh to life. I'm going to make him get up out of his grave, and myself too in the process; I'm going to get up out of my child's grave. I! Henk de Melker!' " (438). This awakening of Henk's imagination and enthusiasm is perhaps what Zan had envisioned. Grotius tells Henk, " '[Zan] wanted to force you out of your country. She wanted to force you to reflection' " (272), and it seems that by the end of the novel she has succeeded. His reflectively nostalgic and traumatic memories start blending as he allows them to develop and come to the forefront of his consciousness; his disparate memories begin to cohere as he increasingly learns to reconcile himself to his choices.

⁴² The role of the artist's imagination and the process of remembering are discussed by Human (2008:6) with regard to *30 Nights in Amsterdam*, and by Nel (2010:169), who discusses Henk de Melker's developing creativity and imagination with regard to his writing.

In Henk de Melker, Van Heerden has created a character who struggles to find an alternative Afrikaner identity for himself, an identity different from that prescribed for him by the ‘ancestral’ ideas of his family, with its nostalgia for “a single plot of national identity” (Boym 2001:xviii). Rather, Henk is symbolic of today’s Afrikaner – or is it Afrikaans person – who does not adhere to a prescription in matters of identity because “to speak of ‘Afrikaners’ is to assume an imagined community that nowadays indicates a diversity rather than a unity” (Viljoen et al. 2004:4). In Henk, Van Heerden has illustrated how spectral provocations of trauma together with the evocations of nostalgia – which, for Henk, were prompted by Zan – can help one reflect on the past in a way that fosters emotional growth and an understanding of the diversity not just of an Afrikaner identity but of a human identity.

Zan de Melker: The Ambivalence of Human Longing

Zan de Melker’s nostalgia provides the impetus for the action of the novel. As she nears the end of her life, in her suffering from cancer, she can no longer ignore the nostalgia that has haunted her since her arrival in Amsterdam forty years earlier.

Zan de Melker is not in Amsterdam by choice. Through a series of events (in the 1960s) she was forced into exile there as a young woman. While living with her mother in the town of Graaff-Reinet, this young woman’s rebellious nature – manifest in her notorious eccentricity – was exploited by members of a political resistance group that named itself the Sobukwe Cell. Consequently Zan was co-opted into joining them in the resistance/freedom struggle against the apartheid regime. (The cell members believed that – because of her well-known eccentricity – she would be useful as a messenger and runner between town and township, without raising undue suspicion.) Zan became involved, as part of the activities of the Cell, in two murders and a plan to bomb electricity pylons and railway lines. When the police and security forces (and her brother, Henk Senior), became aware of her involvement, she was spirited away by the ‘movement’, placed in hiding in a safe house in Cape Town and after that transported to Amsterdam.

In the years that follow – contrary to Henk’s initial instinct to deny any nostalgic recall – Zan is always painfully aware of her longings. It was on arrival in Amsterdam that she first felt an intense longing for home. We see, for example, that Chapter 41 is focalized by Zan de Melker in first-person narration, and the word ‘longing’ is used twenty-five times within six pages. She longs for people, places, buildings, and animals – in short, for everything that has been familiar and dear – but she questions the ambivalence of her longings. How is it possible that she can long so strongly for a home she has rejected and against which she has rebelled: “a longing for a lost home set in a politically

problematic space and time” (Dlamini 2010:152)?⁴³ Hers is a reflective nostalgia that “dwells on the ambivalence of human longing and belonging” (Boym 2001:xviii); it is the nostalgia typically experienced by the exile who is “at once homesick and sick of home [...] a survivalist aesthetic of estrangement and longing” (Boym 2001:xix).

Zan longs for her home in the Karoo of her youth, for her mother MaOlivier and the rest of the family, and for Katie the maid, but most importantly her nostalgia focusses on Henk as she knew him then as a child. Unbeknown to Henk, Zan surreptitiously returned to South Africa on two occasions during the forty years of her exile and observed him in his quiet existence in the museum. Seeing him as an adult – “sitting there so stingily in [his] little corner [his] pen crawling across the paper as if nothing could perturb [him]” (418-19) – makes her mourn for the bright young boy whom she knew when they were growing up, the boy whom she tormented but who was the only person who, she felt, understood her. She now contacts Henk, indirectly, and tricks him into leaving the Karoo and travelling to Amsterdam, because she wants to ‘resurrect’ the Henk who has become ‘buried’; she wants to provoke him into the reflection necessary for healing. Her connection with him is also her final attempt to connect with her past and with her family. As Boym has said, quoting Joseph Brodsky, “what drives [the exile] is not a ‘nostalgia for the old country,’ but an attempt to revisit the world of [their] parents that had once included [them]” (2001:295). Similarly, by connecting with Henk, Zan attempts to connect with the family that once included her. This attempt could perhaps be seen as an example of ‘restorative’ nostalgia, as Zan seeks to restore the family within which she had once felt a strong sense of belonging. But in her attempts to reconnect with that lost family, Zan finally contemplates not only her nostalgic memories, but also her own traumatic memories, as well as her anger. By contacting Henk, a process of deeper reflection is initiated and Zan is thus driven by her nostalgia to the sites of her traumas.

It appears that Zan’s nostalgia parallels Henk’s nostalgia – for the feeling of belonging as a family trio with Granny/MaOlivier. I have already discussed Granny/MaOlivier’s attitude towards the two young people in her care: her expectations of them in her own need to restore the order of her past. With her traditional outlook influenced by her role as a woman, Granny/MaOlivier had applied the same limiting standards to her daughter. Zan has therefore been subject to triple constraints: the ‘rules’ of a land-owning, Afrikaner farming family, and of a Karoo town community, and the strictures of the Dutch Reformed Church. (Zan was also cloyingly over-protected because she suffered from epilepsy.) Unlike Granny/MaOlivier, Zan was unable to accept all these social constraints and she rebelled in dramatic, explosive fashion, even to the point of taking advantage of her epilepsy as an excuse to run

⁴³ Jacob Dlamini’s book, *Native Nostalgia* (2010), consists of “fragments, shards of memory through which [he] examine[s] indirectly what it means to be nostalgic for a past generally considered to have been a dark chapter of South Africa’s history” (2010:22).

wild. “‘I lied to MaOlivier that I was taking my pills,’” she tells Henk, “‘Then my mind broke its banks. Then the wildcat came out, the hellraiser raised hell, the bats flew out of the belfry’” (417-18).

But for what is she nostalgic? For what does she long? For her brother, for her mother’s caged bird, for familiar food, for Katie (their housemaid), for the gardener, for landmarks like the school’s creaking flag pole, for the Dominee and the Doctor, for her sister-in-law, Dorrit, for the dog in the neighbour’s yard, for the postman on his bicycle. Mostly she longs for her mother, MaOlivier (333-35). All these memories constitute her ‘family’. She is nostalgic for these members of the community, even though they constrained her spirit – at a time before she had realised the full consequences of their stifling hold on her. She imagines a conversation with her brother in which she asks him, “‘Boet, do you remember MaOlivier back then? Tender her touch, careful her voice of admonition, her hands soft as the cheeks of peaches and her flavour the fragrance of apricots when she comes to say goodnight. Boet, what wore us down so?’” (354). Her brother, Henk (Senior), of course cannot answer her because he is dead, and she, in Amsterdam, has no one who can understand her. When she “expound[s] [her] longing” (337), people simply look at her with incomprehension.

Her anger at not being accepted for who she was has shaped her fight against all forms of authority and manifested itself in various forms of rebellion: “‘Angry. Angry. Do you understand? My body was my slogan, my battle cry. With my body I was angry’” (417). Zan uses her body to express her rage towards herself and her world – for example, through reckless sexual encounters. Her body, though, ultimately gives in, as all mortal bodies must, and now she is old and riddled with cancer. Van Heerden has defamiliarised Zan’s body by focusing on the ugly and deformed to highlight feelings of dissatisfaction and of uncanniness. Memories of physical tenderness – Granny/MaOlivier’s tender touch and soft skin (354); Henk softly stroking her face when she suffered a fit of epilepsy at the prizegiving (54); the touch of her lover, Wehmeyer (29) – are sharply contrasted with her crude descriptions of bodily fluids and smells, with her sexual exploits, with her traumatic memories of witnessing the assassination of Wehmeyer (26-8), and her condoning the murder of her own brother (316). Van Heerden, as I have noted, utilises spectral elements to articulate trauma beyond language – in his explicit introduction of ghosts as characters in *Ancestral Voices* and in the more subtle, yet equally suggestive, hauntings that Henk experiences in *30 Nights in Amsterdam*. These ghosts and hauntings serve to ‘defamiliarise’ the realistic dimension, causing the reader to see “afresh [because] habitual perception is disrupted” (Baldick 2008:83). Similarly, the author seeks to represent trauma that is beyond words by presentation of the body as deformed and abject (Zan’s epilepsy, her terminal cancer) in the Kristevan sense. According to Julia Kristeva (1982), bodies and things are perceived as abject when they inspire profound ambivalence: on the one hand, morbid attraction, on the other, irrational loathing and revulsion.

The condition of the abject – both physical and psychological – is explicitly manifest in the character Zan de Melker. Zan’s physical decay operates, of course, as an analogy of her psychological trauma.

She inhabits a female body, which means not only that her experience has been restricted by the Afrikaner tradition but also that her difficulties have been compounded by the exploitation of women within that tradition. Furthermore, she has been cosseted by her mother and has been intellectually stifled and become bored because – as an epileptic – she has not been given any useful occupation. In addition, she is exploited (for example, by members of the Sobukwe cell) because of her strangeness, which, again, is symbolically reinforced in the physical manifestation of her epilepsy. The major traumas that she suffers, though, do not concern her own body; they concern the bodies of her lover, Wehmeyer, and her brother, Henk (Senior).

Zan suffers the horrific experience of witnessing the disposal (immolation) of Wehmeyer's assassinated body. (Wehmeyer had been her friend and lover, and it was Wehmeyer who had persuaded her to join the resistance cell. However, for reasons undisclosed to the reader, Wehmeyer is later regarded as an errant member of the resistance cell and is executed.) In addition to Wehmeyer's death, Zan also carries with her the guilt of her involvement in her brother's murder. (When Henk (Senior) threatened to alert the authorities to the activities of the Cell, Zan had endorsed his elimination.) In witnessing the ease with which the bodies of Wehmeyer and Henk (Senior) are discarded, Zan witnesses the fragility of the human body, and in response she effectively disconnects herself from the feelings of her own body, regarding it as object because her body is symbolically the seat of immense trauma.

Zan seeks now (in the narrative present) to return to a time before her innocence was quashed, to a time of potential before she was consumed with anger. She longs to return to a time of 'what if'. One of the earliest recollections that she shares with Henk is their common interest in Vincent van Gogh. Zan found some comfort, as a young woman, to learn that this artist had been a fellow sufferer of epilepsy: "This Vincent also had seizures, just like me!" (186). In trying to describe the "overwhelming sensation" of an imminent seizure, she explains that "only real artists knew it" (20), artists such as "Vincent van Gogh [when he] create[d] his yellow café" (20). She notes that, unlike her experience of epilepsy, Vincent's eccentricity is celebrated. His brightly coloured art endorses her view of the world, just as, for Henk, Vincent van Gogh's brother Cornelius van Gogh (we learn, surprisingly, that Cornelius visited South Africa) mirrors his own obscurity. By reconnecting with Henk, Zan reconnects with her past as she seeks to validate and heal it.⁴⁴ She cannot reclaim, recreate or restore the past because nostalgia, which "tantalizes us with its fundamental ambivalence [...] is about the repetition of the unrepeatable, [the] materialization of the immaterial" (Boym 2001:xvii). But, ultimately, through her nostalgic recall and her reflection, she can acknowledge her earlier view of the world – a view of heightened awareness that mirrors the creativity of Vincent van Gogh.

⁴⁴ John (2010:193) discusses how Zan's healing is directly linked to Henk's healing.

Zan's nostalgia does not suggest a wallowing in sentiment, nor is Van Heerden's treatment here "glib [or] unambitious" as Medalie claims is the case with the majority of nostalgic texts (2010:37). Medalie admires, rather, an "evolved nostalgia" that enables a better understanding of "the relationship between past and present" and of the entanglement of "utopian and dystopian impulses" (2010:37). Zan's nostalgic recall could likewise be described as 'evolved' as its focus is not exclusively on her pleasant memories; instead it offers her a chance to reconnect with her trauma and her thwarted potential, to form an integrated, healed and whole memory. By considering 'what if' together with 'what is', she can move on from MaOlivier's prescription for her, and towards a greater wholeness – a wholeness that MaOlivier had denied in herself but was ultimately unable to crush in Zan. By reflecting on both her longings and her pain, Zan engages with the ambivalence of her longing. She begins to understand how it is possible to long for the home she has rejected. She is nostalgic for her earlier self, for the ghost of the self she had left behind.

*

With regard to nostalgia and characters, then, Van Heerden has, in *30 Nights in Amsterdam*, presented instances of both 'restorative' and 'reflective' nostalgia. As with *Ancestral Voices*, the distinctions between the two are not always clearly defined. While Granny/MaOlivier aligns herself strongly with the past and is restoratively nostalgic, for Zan and Henk de Melker, the line between restorative and reflective nostalgia is sometimes blurred. Their feelings of longing are ambivalent; they find that reflecting on the positive and negative aspects of the past allows for the healing of past traumas. How great an influence the places of the past have on such processes must also be reflected on, and I therefore explore nostalgia in relation to place in the next subsection.

Nostalgia in the Novel: Places

The title, *30 Nights in Amsterdam*, immediately introduces the concepts of place and space by incorporating the name of the city of Amsterdam, while the first chapter introduces another space, a quiet Karoo town in South Africa. The first two lines of the novel inform us that a "letter from Amsterdam [...] arrives in the early afternoon" (1) thereby creating an immediate link between the two places. Furthermore, Van Heerden includes two maps in the novel: one is a regional map of the Eastern Cape, featuring the area where the De Melker family lived and farmed (and which, as intertextual reference, includes Toorberg in its markings), and the other is a map of the inner city of Amsterdam.

The letter from Amsterdam that arrives for Henk in the opening scene of the novel forges a link between Amsterdam and the Karoo, and between Zan and Henk de Melker. Henk has been unaware of

Zan's whereabouts since her mysterious disappearance from Graaff-Reinet (the Karoo town where, as children, they had lived with Granny/MaOlivier). The shock of the news about Zan's supposed death, together with the invitation to travel outside of South Africa, provides Henk with the impetus for a re-evaluation of his life and encourages him to broaden his outlook beyond the boundaries of his immediate surroundings.

After many years abroad, Zan's nostalgic desire to re-connect with her home has prompted her to take the action of leaving her estate (including her house in Amsterdam) to Henk, her last surviving De Melker relative. It seems that she is not able, even after decades without any contact with him, to die without that last connection being re-established; she cannot sever her ties completely. Henk takes up the invitation, or challenge, to travel to Amsterdam and, over the course of fifty-eight chapters – and thirty nights – he and Zan (who eventually reveals herself to be paradoxically not yet, not quite dead) explore their memories of the shared spaces of the Karoo, prompted as much by each other as by the contrasting spaces of Amsterdam.

Dealing with space, Van Heerden has in this novel again utilised conventions of the traditional *plaasroman*. He explores, for example, the relationship between farm and town, the idea of belonging and duty, and the “importance of the farm as foundational and sacred space” (Warnes 2009:73). Van Heerden's novel is however a subversive form of the *plaasroman*, and in *30 Nights in Amsterdam* he has developed and subverted the traditional conventions even further than he did in *Ancestral Voices*. The link to the farm is now more distant and tentative: the main characters, although they share ownership of a farm and are closely associated with it, no longer live on the farm and eventually lose their hold on it altogether after Zan disappears and “[Henk] and his mother [are] manoeuvred out of the De Melker Trust” (369). So, although in *30 Nights in Amsterdam* Van Heerden has introduced the farm in its nostalgic guise as a significant space, along with marginal/subversive spaces as he did in *Ancestral Voices*, he has broadened the view further still by intruding South Africa into Europe in an exploration of the nostalgic relationship between space and identity.

Van Heerden begins his journey to the Karoo by introducing the reader to Henk de Melker, an insignificant, forty-seven-year-old museum assistant living in a contemporary Karoo town. The museum, where he quietly works as assistant and as a writer of pamphlets about obscure historical personalities, is positioned above the town, on a hillside. Henk watches, from the deep shade of the museum's passageway, as the postman labours up the gravel road on his bicycle in the heat of the day, and when he fetches the postman a glass of water “[t]he echo of his footsteps sounds hollow and forlorn” (2). The museum is a building that stands apart from the village, which has “quiet, deserted streets” (2) – a quietness that is emphasised when the sound of the postman's “bicycle chain plinks tinnily against the mudguard, and gravel chips sputter up” (2). The stultifying atmosphere of the museum is enhanced when the “gong of the grandfather clock judders” (5) and “[n]othing stirs” (5), while the gardener lies fast asleep in the shade of a tree and Henk “gazes out of the window” (5); this

is a lifeless scene. The postman leaves a letter though, and that letter – bringing news of Aunt Zan’s death – penetrates the quiet, lifeless ‘crypt’ of Henk’s shrunken world so that “all of a sudden Aunt Zan is vividly before him” (7).

As I have noted, Zan has faked her death to get Henk to travel to Amsterdam, thus awakening him from his somnolence. On arrival in Amsterdam, Henk finds that “‘[i]t’s impossible not to notice contrasts,’ ” (265) and for every observation he makes about Amsterdam, he has a counter-image of the Karoo: “Nostalgia wells up in Henk” (60). For the first time in years he thinks about his home, his surroundings – past and present – and his relationship to them. Thoughts of the comfortable, familiar, and secure home and office that he has recently vacated are less prominent, though, than his nostalgic recollections of the Karoo spaces that his Aunt Zan and he shared during his childhood. He remembers the same place (the Karoo) but at a different time: namely, the nostalgic space of his youth, as a time of belonging and happiness.

So we arrive at a point where Zan’s life and Henk’s life intersect and where their ‘spaces’ intersect (they are both in Amsterdam and are both looking back at the Karoo home/space that they have come from). As their stories and recollections unfold – in the equal sharing of focalisation and chapters – Van Heerden takes the reader on a nostalgic journey to the places that have informed their identities, the spaces that evoke their nostalgia. I will now explore those spaces – the Karoo farmland/landscape, and the house in Graaff-Reinet – while discussing the relevance of Amsterdam as their newly found point of reference. In considering selected instances of nostalgia in *30 Nights in Amsterdam* – differentiating between ‘restorative’ and ‘reflective’ examples – we may also ponder the implications of nostalgia for the novel as a postcolonial text and its relevance for the local and global reader.

Nostalgia for the Karoo: Farm and Landscape

The Karoo farm, in a traditional plaasroman, is a central space and is nostalgically portrayed as an idyll. *30 Nights in Amsterdam*, with its plaasroman foundations, introduces the farm as the space that is central to the identity of the De Melker family. They define themselves as owners and stewards of the land and have passed the farm down from one generation to the next. However, the loosening of a single family’s grip on the land – as seen in *Ancestral Voices*, where the male line of the Moolman family disintegrated – is also seen as the plight of the De Melker family. The problem is greater for the De Melkers; there is no longer a strong patriarchal leader and they have but a tentative hold on the farm because it is being managed in a lacklustre manner by Henk (Senior) de Melker, the son and heir of Granny/MaOlivier. Henk (Senior), a man with mental health problems, does not command the respect of either his work force or the family. We have glimpses of the farm from the perspective of a neighbouring farmer who reports to Granny/MaOlivier that “the fences are slack and the lower pasture wasn’t sown this year” (145), and from a visitor who comments to Zan that “‘[t]he people look poverty stricken [...] doesn’t your brother buy clothes for the workers in this house?’ ” (151). Seen through these outsiders’ eyes, this farm is no idyllic space. Thus, although Van Heerden’s return to the

traditional farm in this self-critical version of the plaasroman is a nostalgic gesture, he ponders that the “farm is now a prime site of injustice and iniquity and a stage for the age-old struggle with the father” (Viljoen et al. 2004:10).

Henk (Senior), it would appear, has already lost his ‘struggle with the father’, as depression incapacitates him and he is unable to shoulder the weight of the patriarchal legacy. Granny/MaOlivier, Henk (Senior’s) mother, and the earlier patriarch’s widow, seeks to restore the farm to its former glory and manages to oversee all farming and family matters from her giant desk in her house in town. Following her husband’s death, she has removed herself from the farm to allow her son to take the leading role. But, as Henk (Senior) flounders, she pins her hopes on Henk her grandson – the son of Henk (Senior) and, therefore, the next in line as heir. She wishes to groom him for a role as successor, as farmer, and as prominent Afrikaner. Granny/MaOlivier has subscribed to the ideology that the farm is a man’s domain and that her role is one of temporary leadership, while she waits for Henk, in adulthood, to fill the role of her late husband: the strong Afrikaner man who will take up the patriarchal leadership role aligned with the land. Neither Granny/MaOlivier nor Henk (Senior) can conceive of alternative roles for themselves, as Afrikaners divorced from the farm. Although Henk (Senior) is not suitable as a farmer and leader, he must (he believes) assume that role even though it mentally and emotionally cripples him. Granny/MaOlivier, for her part, cannot and will not fully accept the leadership role; as a woman, neither will she take charge of the farm, even though she is capable of doing so.

Granny/MaOlivier and Henk (Senior) are bound to the social ‘rules’ of the farm space, which they accept as familiar and understandable. However, the socio-political influences affecting the farm have changed, so that, in effect, they are now living in a changed/different social space while trying to apply outdated behaviours and beliefs. Consequently, they long for earlier times in their desire for the restoration of order and control. They seek to restore the farm to what it once was; there is longing for a different temporal space (the same place, the same farm, but at a different time). There is potential for the De Melkers to change with the times – MaOlivier could be the farmer, Henk (Senior) could give up the farming, hand the responsibility to someone else, and choose a different occupation for himself – but they are locked into their ‘restoratively’ nostalgic ideals. They do not realise that space “is both a *production*, shaped through a diverse range of social processes and human interventions, and a *force* that, in turn, influences, directs and delimits possibilities of action and ways of being in the world” (Wegner 2002:181). In other words, they do not realise that the relationship between people and spaces is one between two active parties, and that it has the potential to create close, symbiotic bonds.

Similarly, Zan and Henk de Melker, each in their way, feel out of place in the traditional farm space. But – unlike Henk (Senior) and Granny/MaOlivier – they do not accept the authoritarian forces of the farm. Instead, they disconnect themselves from the farm: Zan completely deserts the area; Henk settles

in a neighbouring village and lives in obscurity. Although they cannot live according to the farm's prescriptions, they do not know how to live differently. They are renegade characters and – similarly to the character, Floris Moolman, in *Ancestral Voices* – they realise that they do not inhabit the old patterns. But, at the same time, they do not know how to be De Melkers away from the farm, how to be a different kind of De Melker. Now, as they meet in Amsterdam, much later in life, Zan and Henk reflect on both their warmly nostalgic and painfully traumatic memories, in attempting to form an integrated picture of the farm as a space that is not simply an idyll (as in Granny/MaOlivier's restorative view), but a complex and an ambivalent site.

Henk has several fond memories of the farm – for example, of riding with his father on the tractor (51). But the farm also elicits feelings of guilt and disloyalty, as when he drives to the Boland with his mother, and “feels a strange loyalty to the world they've come from. He feels that he shouldn't allow himself to be enthralled by this lovely Boland. He feels as if he is betraying his father, who dotes on the Karoo mountain world” (49). He also has feelings of trepidation, for example, when his mother quarrels with his grandmother (192). Additionally, he senses the oppressive nosiness of the neighbours when his mother, Dorrit, waits until late at night before she makes any private telephone calls, for fear of eavesdroppers on the party line. After arguing with Granny/MaOlivier one night, for example, she sees the neighbours' lights burning and says, “‘They've been listening in. They got up when they heard the ping. They heard every word. Tomorrow the whole district will be jabbering' ” (191).

Zan's feelings towards the place, the farm, and authority are similarly ambivalent. She struggles to reconcile the outside world to that of the family farm, as she struggles to understand where and when she should reject or accept authority. In her everyday life in Graaff-Reinet, she constantly challenges the authority of her mother, the dominee, the doctor, and society in general. On the farm, she displays a similar disdain for authority when she is placed in a position of authority herself. She is left temporarily in charge of the farm while her brother, Henk (Senior), visits the hospital. Nonetheless, she struggles to maintain her role as caretaker: she dances naked around the house in full sight of the farm workers, and thwarts the hierarchy by taking the tractor driver/foreman as a lover. However, when she unexpectedly receives a visit from Cecil Dimaggio – the leader of the Sobukwe Cell, the resistance group to which she has been co-opted – she is outraged that he has invaded the 'sacred space' of the De Melker farm. She is “‘angry really pissed off when the swank-car of Cecil Dimaggio stops in the brother's yard, the family farm the Substantiality-soil' [and mentally addressing Dimaggio, she says] ‘you don't belong here in the yard of my brother? Surely not? Not?’ ” (148-49). She cannot accept his apparent challenge to the authority of the farm as a De Melker stronghold. It would appear that, particularly on the farm, the boundaries of authority, which she constantly tests and resists give her, simultaneously, a sense of security. Within the boundaries of the farm a separate set of rules apply, and Zan's secret activities as a member of the resistance cell, to her mind, belong to the world beyond the boundaries of the farm. When Dimaggio crosses into the demarcated space of the

farm, therefore, she is confused and afraid. Much as she loathes the patriarchal legacy, she will defend it fiercely when an outsider dares trespass.

We see that there are strong bonds between the characters and the Karoo farmlands, strong feelings of longing and belonging. However, it is the nature of the relationships that differ. As in *Ancestral Voices*, there is also, in *30 Nights in Amsterdam*, a tension between ideas of ownership and belonging.⁴⁵ In *30 Nights*, it is again when associated with the farm that the sense of belonging manifests itself in differing ways in the various characters. While Granny/MaOlivier and her son, Henk (Senior), feel a sense of belonging precisely *because* they are landowners, for Henk and Zan belonging is based on spiritual and emotional identification. When Henk and Zan identify themselves with place, they do so with a wider sense of symbolic belonging to the landscape, the area, the town or the house in which they grew up. Zan's medicine bottles (in the cupboard in Amsterdam), for example, are all labelled with the name of rivers, regions, and streets of the Karoo (209); Henk remembers how he sat and read and recited lists of birds and animals to Zan when she was deep in medicated sleep after an epileptic fit (420); and Zan makes peace with life in Amsterdam when she takes a bicycle ride to the outskirts of the city and shouts "the names of buck of birds of the little lizards [...] call[s] the mountains by name [...] call[s] for the rivers and the names of farms'" (425).

With regard to their own place in relation to those spaces and markers, Zan says, "I'm a De Melker of Graaff-Reinet'" (325), while Henk declares, "I am Henk de Melker. Henk of the Great Karoo'" (436), and, in the final scene of the novel, Zan calls them, collectively, "'kudus of the Camdeboo!' [and says], 'so we dance, together we dance, we, the last of the De Melkers of Somerset Street [in Graaff-Reinet]'" (444). Intriguingly they do not identify themselves with the family farm but rather with the family name, De Melker, and with the region, the landscape; this self-identification suggests a spiritual, emotional attachment and sense of belonging to the spaces of the Karoo landscape, rather than a proprietorial attachment based on ownership, power, and control over the farmland. (It is interesting to note at this point that although there is emphasis placed on the names of places and geographical markers, the De Melker farm itself is not named in the novel but simply referred to as "the farm".) So, although Henk and Zan were taught that their identities depended on the farm, they could never embrace the farm as identity marker. In the alternative spaces of Amsterdam, they allow themselves to be themselves, to imagine whatever version of themselves they wish to emulate. In effect, it is in Amsterdam – with the clarity of distance – that they 'find' themselves (or, at least, different versions of themselves) only to transfer those 'selves' back to the Karoo. Not to the farm, however, but to Granny/MaOlivier's house in town.

⁴⁵ An instance of such a tension in *Ancestral Voices* is when FounderAbel plans *his* farm at the mouth of the spring on the Toorberg mountain – coupling his sense of belonging with ownership, power, and control. By contrast TameBushman and Jan Swaat accept the spring as a gift from nature and are able to live symbiotically with the land.

The House and Home: Proof or Illusion of Stability

After the death of her husband, Granny/MaOlivier moved to the Graaff-Reinet house, leaving the responsibility of the farm to her son and heir, Henk (Senior). Her grandchild, Henk, comes to live with her and Zan when Henk (Senior), his father, suffers a series of nervous breakdowns. The trio – Granny/MaOlivier, Zan and Henk – form a family group. The house in the town is thus fixed in the minds of both Zan and Henk as their home. As Bachelard says, “a house constitutes a body of images that give mankind proof or illusions of stability” (qtd in Viljoen et al., 2004:9). This is why the house in town is the central space of their lives and a place of (perceived) belonging and security.

In the narrative present, both Henk and Zan feel adrift and without a sense of belonging. Both have persistent, nostalgic recollections of the house in which they lived in Graaff-Reinet. For them, “the house is a potent emblem of belonging” (Viljoen et al. 2004:1) and, because “a sense of self seems to require a sense of belonging at least somewhere, even if temporarily” (Viljoen et al. 2004:20), each represents to the other a witness of their time spent there: namely, proof in that time and place that they did, indeed, belong ‘somewhere, even if temporarily’. When they meet approximately forty years later in their exile in Amsterdam, they form a ‘private’ diaspora of De Melkers, and, as such, can validate each other. As Ashcroft has it, “the place of the diasporic person’s ‘belonging’ may have little to do with spatial location, but be situated in family, community, in those symbolic features which constitute a shared culture, a shared ethnicity or system of belief, including nostalgia for a distant homeland” (qtd in Viljoen et al. 2004:16).

Henk recalls fondly that, in that ‘distant homeland’, he was once nurtured, that food was plentiful, served on time and produced specially to his taste; for example, he ate porridge “on which Katie always sprinkle[d] some biltong shavings [h]oney spoon[ed] in and a sliced banana” (73). He also remembers that he was encouraged to concentrate on his school work; and that he had a room of his own, where he could store his treasures, read, and dream. Years later, “[h]e longs for the creaking old house with its wide stoeps, surrounded by tidy gravel garden paths and the garden beds [...] all laid out geometrically to Granny Olivier’s hand” (110-11).

Zan recalls the quiet, the order, and the sanctity of her glass room, which held her collection of vases. Their reminiscences, however, are not all pleasant. Zan’s nostalgia, which awakens Henk’s recollections, also resurrects traumatic memories. Henk remembers the tension in the house, how everyone waited for Zan’s next epileptic ‘turn’ – his fear of Zan, not only of her epilepsy, but also “of her silences, of the way in which she would dawdle indecisively in the dark passage” (15). While he remembers his attempts to befriend Zan, to be affectionate and helpful, he remembers how she violently rejected him (for example, she bit at him at a school prize-giving (54) and attacked him in the yard when he burnt a bug (127)). Furthermore, in this house he was separated from his parents and was aware of tensions between his grandmother and his mother; he was aware that his father was

unwell; he felt the pressure to succeed in school and the weight of the family's expectation of him to be the next strong De Melker man. But, he was bullied at school, a loner with no friends.

Henk's recollections, therefore, are ambivalent because his place of belonging is also, ultimately, the place of his rejection. Similarly, Zan's nostalgia for the house in Graaff-Reinet masks the trauma associated with it, which began with the expectations placed on her as a young Afrikaner woman of 'good family'. The restrictions and over-protection were exacerbated by her epileptic condition. For her, the house in Graaff-Reinet was a domestic jail, and its inhabitants, including the many servants, were the warders (watchers) from whom she sought to escape.

Now in Amsterdam, both Henk and Zan eschew Zan's new house, which is beautiful, comfortable, and solidly conventional in a way that echoes Granny/MaOlivier's house in Graaff-Reinet. Their avoidance indicates that neither of them seeks to restore a past home, but rather to reminisce about it. Henk is living day-by-day (in Amsterdam) in an apartment, which he has dubbed 'the nest'. He neither sticks to a strict time schedule nor keeps his usual rules of tidiness and order as he does in his semi-monastic existence at home. In addition, he is introduced to an alternative type of home together with Zan, when he visits the 'Amsterdam trio' (a group of people close to Zan) in an abandoned loft, where they have set up a temporary home, and where they are seemingly secure and content in one another's company.⁴⁶

Reflecting on their nostalgic and traumatic memories allows Henk and Zan to feel a retrospective sense of belonging, even though they now realise that the house in Graaff-Reinet was less of a home than they had believed it to be. As Bachelard says, "the places we call home are shell-like in the way that they protect our solitude and our 'spaces of intimacy'" (qtd in Viljoen et al. 2004:9), whereas the Graaff-Reinet house is where their 'spaces of intimacy' – their core/authentic selves – were rejected for not being the 'Afrikaner' versions of themselves that had been prescribed by the older tradition. These 'pre-selves', or ghosts of themselves, the selves that hold their potential, are what prompt their nostalgia, what haunt them. Henk and Zan seek to retrieve their authentic selves from the house in Graaff-Reinet, and Amsterdam has given them the clarity of distance required for sustained reflection.

Amsterdam and the Karoo: Vantage Points and Founding Myths

In *30 Nights*, Henk and Zan orientate themselves, and each other, in relation to the Karoo as their point of reference – just as, in *Ancestral Voices*, characters orientate themselves in relation to the mountain, Toorberg. For example, Henk calls Zan "a deserter from the Karoo" (4), aligning her, first and foremost, with the Karoo, even though she has been away for forty years. Both Henk and Zan de Melker become nostalgic for the Karoo only after they have left the area and view the Karoo from

⁴⁶ The Amsterdam trio is a group of people affiliated with Zan: Manuel, a street musician and Zan's lover; Alphonse, a pickpocket; and Suri, a young beggar-girl. The loft is also the place where Zan chooses to spend her nights rather than in her permanent Amsterdam domicile.

their vantage point in Amsterdam, which affords geographical and temporal distance. As exiles (even if only temporarily) they have the “plurality of vision [that] gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions” (Said 2001:186); two images are superimposed: “of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life” (Boym 2001:xiv). They are able to view the Karoo, together with their memories, through fresh eyes. Their nostalgia is triggered by the sights, smells, and sounds of a city that contrasts sharply with the Karoo. “‘It’s impossible not to notice contrasts,’ ” Henk comments (265), highlighting the importance of these two separate but (in their minds) connected spaces for the novel.

Apart from providing a double perspective, the Karoo and Amsterdam form a series of binary oppositions: what Buchanan describes as “a pair of terms that, although opposed to one another, are necessarily bound together” (2010:59). Amsterdam is wet and rainy, an urban, crowded place that is noisy and unconstrained in its behaviour, its history visible in its architecture and monuments (32); it is also, as Henk comments, part of a nation of former colonisers. The Karoo, in direct opposition, is dry and dusty, a vast and sparsely populated area that is quiet and conservative, its past “not so physically visible” (32), but also a place formerly colonised. Binary oppositions, in turn, form interstitial spaces. As Ashcroft says, “It must be argued that the very domain of postcolonial theory is the region of ‘taboo’ – the very domain of overlap between these imperial binary oppositions” and, as Henk and Zan move between these two places (physically and imaginatively), it becomes apparent that there is an overlap between the two places/oppositions which forms “the area in which ambivalence, hybridity and complexity continually disrupt the certainties” (2007:20).

Such disruption is felt by both Henk and Zan de Melker. Although Zan has been longing for home for forty years, she chooses to force Henk into leaving the Karoo rather than return and confront him in the formative place of their younger lives. As Brodsky comments, “the more one travels, the more complex one’s sense of nostalgia becomes” (qtd in Boym 2001:288). Henk first experienced feelings of dislocation as a child when he travelled to the Boland with his mother and was torn between admiring the beauty of the area and feeling disloyal to the region of his father’s heart. Now, as an adult, his initial reaction on arrival in Amsterdam – “the domicile of his distant ancestors” (61) – is that “it’s love at first sight” (61), even though it elicits an almost immediate feeling of homesickness; and even though (and perhaps because) the city is different to what he has expected. “‘[W]here are the blond Dutchmen?’ ” (58), he asks, thus indicating his stereotypical, one-dimensional and perhaps anachronistic expectation of what Amsterdam should be. This is the beginning of his illumination that there are many manifestations of ‘the Dutchman’, just as there are many ways of being human, of being a man, and, therefore, of being an Afrikaner and even of being ‘Henk de Melker’. His view is reinforced later in the novel when the life and personality that he had imagined for Zan proves to be far from who and what she actually is and was. Zan’s relationship with Amsterdam has flourished over the years despite her longing for her homeland. It is interesting to note that when Zan makes her

surreptitious return trips to South Africa (in disguise), she is “homesick even for Amsterdam” (423). Her longing for the European city suggests, perhaps, that in Amsterdam she “gets closer to the seat of the ideas which inspired [her] all along” – which is how Joseph Brodsky described the experience of an exilic writer – and that her return to South Africa is, therefore, like “a second exile”, (Brodsky; qtd in Boym 2001:288-89). For Henk, the borders between home and away also become blurred when he realises that “‘[i]n this city [he is] closer to the things that [he] was consciously trying to live away from in [the Karoo]’ ” (284).

By allowing his characters to move beyond the Karoo – Henk and Zan move beyond South Africa to Europe, Amsterdam – Van Heerden, in *30 Nights*, paradoxically reaches further back than in *Ancestral Voices* into the history of the Afrikaner. On arriving in Amsterdam, Henk “recognises something of a memory harking back very far. For twelve generations his people have been settled in Africa. But now there is this primordial memory through which he wades. He is a Dutchman on a bicycle” (59). The founding myth of the Afrikaner was scrutinized in *Ancestral Voices* in an exploration of the Afrikaner as either a pioneer moving into the wilderness of South Africa as virgin territory, or an appropriator of already populated and inhabited areas. *30 Nights* takes the exploration of the founding myth further: by refuting the idea that the Afrikaner came into being in the Karoo (as if formed from the soil), the novel refers to an earlier origin, namely the Afrikaner’s historical connection to Europe (predominantly to Holland). In this novel the Afrikaner – represented by both Henk and Zan – moves from the past, through an African re-anchoring, into the future as a cosmopolitan citizen of the world, one looking outward to new spaces, peoples, and possibilities, and at the same time looking back into a distant history. This dual view lends a circularity to time and history, forming a full circle from Holland/Amsterdam to South Africa/Karoo and back to Amsterdam, and is indicative of the value of looking back in order to move forward. Henk’s comment that “‘We hate our own earths. Driven, we want to leave [...] But in the end we have to go back’ ” (382) concurs with the idea of a human need simultaneously to look back as we perpetually move forward into an uncertain future.

*

Nostalgia serves as an illuminating conceptual tool for analysing the treatment of space in *30 Nights in Amsterdam*, especially when the findings are compared with those that emerge from the similar analysis of *Ancestral Voices*. The comparison suggests a development in Van Heerden’s approach to place. In *Ancestral Voices*, places of longing yield to broader views and contrasting perspectives, as the focus remains inward, on the surroundings or the farm and Karoo, and on a particular community. In *30 Nights in Amsterdam* the gaze is directed outward: the novel travels beyond the confines of the Karoo farm and village to the cosmopolitan spaces of the European city of Amsterdam. Van Heerden moves his Afrikaner characters ever further away from the farm. The longing remains, however, and

30 Nights poses the question of why and how places can evoke feelings of nostalgia even after physical connection has been shattered. Through the perceptions of Henk, Zan, and Granny/MaOlivier, Van Heerden explores this ambivalence.

The contrasts between Amsterdam and the Karoo thus afford some clarity of distance, but they also provide interstitial spaces – typical in postcolonial writing – where ambivalence and ambiguity remain as potent forces. The characters have no strict polarity of feeling for the places they inhabit; rather, they have an affinity for both places. They experience positive and negative feelings for both Amsterdam and the Karoo.

Chapter 4 – Rayda Jacobs’s *The Slave Book and Joonie*

Like Etienne van Heerden, Rayda Jacobs is an author from the Cape region of South Africa, and she too writes about that part of the world, past and present. As a young woman, Jacobs was obliged by circumstances to leave South Africa, travelling to Canada (via England), where she spent the next twenty-seven years. Her experience in Canada was similar to that of the character Zan in Van Heerden’s novel *30 Nights in Amsterdam*, in that she became intensely homesick and remained homesick throughout her time there. Her writing reflects that longing for ‘home’ and the yearning for a sense of belonging. Nostalgic feelings often persist upon return to the longed-for place, and a prominent theme of Jacobs’s literary explorations is the ambivalence the migrant experiences in the current, former, and/or returned-to home. She explores the challenges that are inherent in the search for a sense of identity and belonging in South Africa’s multi-cultural society.

In her explorations, Jacobs looks to the past, reaching back to the last forty or fifty years of her own generation, and further back to the early history of the Cape. The two novels that I have chosen for this section of the project are concerned, respectively, with the history of slavery at the Cape and its subsequent repercussions on social relations approximately 150 years later. The slave narrative, originally an African-American form, is taken up in South African literature by authors such as Jacobs to “evince a unique South African strain of the slave narrative” (Wenzel 2004a:92), and is based on considerably fewer records than those available in other countries with a history of slavery (see Wenzel 2004a:94).⁴⁷ The South African slave narrative illuminates the close linkage between the arrival of enslaved people in the then Dutch-colonial Cape and the introduction of Islam in South Africa. Islam, as religion and culture, is a topic that Jacobs often explores, focusing on its historical origins and its place in contemporary South Africa, and sometimes placing emphasis on the relationships between the Muslim and non-Muslim.

Jacobs’s explorations of history provide the contexts, backgrounds, and origins of the challenges and difficulties faced by her characters in both her historical and her contemporary novels. Characters in her novels are portrayed as being “part of a fragmented and hybrid society; one in which racial, cultural and religious diversity coexists warily” (Roos 2005:48). This cultural hybridity and wary coexistence includes attitudes to, and uses of, language. The development of the Afrikaans language was influenced by, amongst other things, the relationship between the Malay slave and the Dutch settler. We are reminded here of Van Heerden’s comment that not all Afrikaners are white or of Dutch heritage: “more than half of Afrikaans speakers are not white, but so-called Coloured South Africans,

⁴⁷ David Johnson notes that “Cape slavery has been represented in South African literature during eras of colonialism, segregation, apartheid, and post-apartheid rule [and that] the contingent politics of each historical period mark the literature of Cape slavery. For example, literary works on slavery produced in the apartheid era typically end with the slave rebellions crushed by the white regime, whereas post-apartheid works end with individual slave characters achieving redemption” (2012:549).

descendants of slaves from the East and the Khoisan peoples of southern Africa” (Van Heerden 2012:4). As a ‘character’ in Jacobs’s autobiography, *Masquerade*, indignantly asks, “What Muslim doesn’t speak Afrikaans?” (2008:285). It is not surprising, then, that although Jacobs writes in English some of her novels feature Afrikaner and Afrikaans-speaking communities, nor that her novels in some ways appear to use conventions of the plaasroman-genre (albeit it in a radically revised form). In the previous chapter I discussed how Van Heerden’s plaasroman novels foreground characters who were previously denied agency in such novels. Jacobs writes about the same places and people featured in Van Heerden’s ‘new’ plaasromans, but she foregrounds different aspects of that world. It could perhaps be said that her novels, *Eyes of the Sky* and *The Slave Book*, run parallel to novels such as *Ancestral Voices* and other more traditional plaasromans. Her novels do not simply foreground the people who are ‘invisible’ in the traditional plaasroman, though. On the contrary, the stock plaasroman characters fade into the background as one-dimensional characters and ‘types’ in a form of role reversal. (So, if the Afrikaner is the ‘centre’ in the original plaasroman, then Jacobs’s novels do not simply ‘write back’ to the centre; rather, they take a fresh approach and write a new ‘centre’, pushing the formerly dominant white Afrikaner to the periphery.)

However, having commented on elements of the farm novel that relate to her work, it is important to note that her outlook is not confined to the farmlands of the Cape, for her writing has a broad temporal and geographic reach, as the following overview of her oeuvre illustrates.

Jacobs’s Oeuvre

Rayda Jacobs’s writing career spans twenty years (her first publication was in 1994) and includes short stories, novels, memoirs, autobiography, and film. Her first publication, *The Middle Children* (1994), is a collection of inter-connected short stories. Written and published while Jacobs was living in Canada, the stories have an autobiographical element. They chart the experiences of a young ‘Coloured’ girl’s life as an emigrant (or exile) and address themes of rejection, abandonment, and self-esteem, while the term ‘middle children’ is one that she uses “for South Africans of mixed descent” (Jacobs 2008:174).

Jacobs’s first novel, *Eyes of the Sky* (1996), was published a year after her return to Cape Town. It is set in the Cape interior in the 1800s and features the relationship between the pioneering Kloot family (white Afrikaners), the region’s Sonqua inhabitants, and the land. *Eyes of the Sky* won the Herman Charles Bosman prize in 1997. Her next novel, *The Slave Book* (1998), picks up the story twenty years later. Jacobs familiarised herself with South Africa’s history by writing *The Slave Book*, and her own roots became a lot clearer to her. (I focus on this novel in the next section.) *Sachs Street* (2001) is Jacobs’s third novel and is the last in the trilogy tracing the history of the fictional Kloot family. Like *The Middle Children*, it has a strong autobiographical element. *Sachs Street* is set in Cape Town in the

2010s, looking back to the protagonist's childhood in the 1950s. It foregrounds issues relating to the emotional lives and relationships of South African Muslim women such as interfaith relationships, marriage and divorce, and the forming of an identity within a diverse family and community.

Jacobs won the Herman Charles Bosman Prize again in 2004: this time, for the novel *Confessions of a Gambler* (2003), which also won the Sunday Times prize. The tensions that the contemporary Muslim woman experiences – tensions between a life of devotion to faith and an independent modern life – are addressed through the vehicle of a middle-aged woman who has the additional challenge of a gambling addiction. Returning to the short story genre, *Postcards from South Africa* (2004) is a collection described by the author as “vignettes of how life really is here in South Africa. Snippets. Snapshots. Hit-and-run pieces” (Meyring 2004:1).

The Mecca Diaries (2005) is a memoir describing Jacobs's experience of hajj, her pilgrimage to Mecca. Jacobs's writing regularly crosses and blurs the lines between biographical writing and fiction and, following the publication of the Mecca memoir, she published another novel, *My Father's Orchid* (2006). Although “entirely fictional”, it was written after she discovered that she had a Christian brother and it focusses on “themes of longing and abandonment” (Jacobs 2008:255). Returning to biographical writing, in 2008, Jacobs published her autobiography, *Masquerade: The Story of my Life* (2008), which recounts her move to Canada and her later return to South Africa.

For my investigation of nostalgia in Jacobs's writing, I focus on her most recent novel, *Joonie* (2011), in tandem with the novel mentioned earlier, *The Slave Book* (1998). *Joonie*, in its setting, moves between Cape Town (South Africa) and New York (USA). The narrator is Joonie, a woman in her 50s, exploring her past by utilising the double perspective of time (then and now) and place (her view of/from both Cape Town and New York). *Joonie's* characters are descendants of slaves and are, therefore, affected by the legacy of slavery as depicted in *The Slave Book*.

Literary Criticism

Jacobs's various books have generated much interest and critics often discuss her work in comparison with that of other authors. Her writings examining South Africa's slave history and early Cape society have generated particular comment, while her focus on the hybrid society that has developed from those earlier Cape inhabitants, as well as her novels' postcolonial themes relating to the search for identity, have also been of interest to researchers.

In what Maria Guestyn calls Jacobs's “historical fiction” (2013:ii), previously denied voices, according to Kathleen Green, “recuperate alternative pasts” (2004:4) that depict personal history

alongside social history.⁴⁸ Unlike many historical records of slavery that, according to Pumla Gqola, present “slaves as a singular undifferentiated mass” (2001:46), Jacobs in her novels uses historical records as a starting point, adding imaginative personal stories that fill in the gaps left by history (in general) and by the inefficiency of that historical record-keeping (in particular). Jacobs is motivated, according to Marita Wenzel, “to recall the past in assertion of her heritage and identity as a woman and former exile” (2004a:95). In doing so, she presents “a juxtaposition of exterior and interior spaces both of which allow for a mediation of subjectivity” (Guestyn 2013:55). Jacobs attempts what Green refers to as a “recuperat[ion of a] past that has been distorted by white historiography” and, in a search for identity, “she informs her [South African] readers of their cultural heritage” (2004:35).

In rewriting the slave narrative from a “retrospective stance”, says Wenzel (2004a:97), Jacobs’s work takes on a “testimonial quality” (Wenzel 2004a:92). It explores identity formation and construction, which Shamiega Chaudhari (2013) feels have been further complicated by the practice of ‘name stripping and renaming’ that was common in slavery. This practice also stripped away a sense of history, place, and culture. “Name stripping and identity stripping cannot be seen as separate” [my translation], Chaudhari continues (2013:34), and the reverberations of such trauma are felt generations later. Jacobs’s ‘slave narrative’ novel, as David Johnson describes *The Slave Book*, depicts slave characters who “journey from suffering under slavery to [...] redemption with emancipation” (2012:558). By ending the novel with a hopeful outcome after emancipation, Jacobs adheres to the trend of “post-apartheid literary works about slavery [that] tend towards the kinds of happy endings associated with the genres of comedy or romance” (Johnson 2012:558).

In her novels with a more contemporary setting, Jacobs’s negotiations with identity mix the autobiographical with the historical and factual. The novel, *Sachs Street*, is not presented as an autobiography, although Loren Kruger regards it as an example of how, “[i]n recent years [...] autobiography [...] has morphed into fictions that draw [on] autobiography, testimony and other modes of self-expression [and] which cannot be simply traced back to an original self” (2003:71). In keeping with the autobiographical tendencies of her writing there is Jacobs’s “recourse to a Muslim context” (2003:71). As Henriette Roos points out,

[a] recurring motif in [Jacobs’s] work is the life of the Muslim woman and (often single) mother – fully part of a modern (Westernised) South Africa in career and lifestyle, whilst simultaneously being intensely committed to Islam through family ties and religious beliefs. (2005:52-53)

Roos also draws attention to the way in which the characters in *Sachs Street* co-exist within the “fragmented, hybrid society” (2005:48) of their South African context.

⁴⁸ Guestyn (2013) examines *The Slave Book* in particular.

Whereas Roos focusses on ‘Islam and the Other’ (i.e., on the Muslim in greater society, as represented in Jacobs’s fiction), Jack Kearney instead foregrounds “Islamic belief and practice as represented *within* Muslim communities” (2006:142-43). He discusses Jacobs’s treatment of women’s rights in ‘Postcards from South Africa’ (2006:152-54) and he looks at her “effective yet simple” (2006:151) portrayal of the “Islamic belief in the precepts of justice and mercy” in contemporary South Africa as presented by *Confessions of a Gambler*.

Having acknowledged that much of Jacobs’s writing is partly autobiographical and often blurs the lines between biography and fiction, it is interesting to examine her choices of varying narrative voices to tell similar stories in works of different formats or genres. For example, Jacobs utilises more than one form of narration in her autobiography, *Masquerade* (and in some of her short stories) to address what Margaret Daymond refers to as the “balance in identity formation between reaching out and retreating inwards” (2011:162). Apart from first-person, past-tense narration she also, at intervals, uses third-person narration and the present tense. Using third-person with stories that have a “universalising claim” and that hint at a “continuing and shared world” (Daymond 2011:162) has the effect of the author ‘reaching out’. But she also uses this third-person mode for stories that are “self-differentiating, [that signal her] membership of a racial and/or religious group [...] which set her apart from her companions of the moment” (Daymond 2011:163). She uses this technique in *Masquerade* (which is biography) and in *The Middle Children* (which is fiction), telling the personal stories as fiction in both books. The effect is that she has “been able to stand aside and explore what might have remained unspeakable for her character and, at the same time, create contiguity for character and reader” (Daymond 2011:163).

The studies mentioned above indicate that Jacobs’s writing is anchored predominantly in the Cape region of South Africa. In *Joonie*, however, her latest novel to date, her protagonist ventures beyond the limits of Cape Town to New York (USA). Jacobs commented, in an interview with Daniel Lehman, that the novel is, “in a nutshell, about displacement” (2010:1). She explained that Joonie, the character, is a ‘Coloured’ girl and that the events that unfold in her life are a direct result of that heritage because “today can be a direct result of our past” (Lehman 2010:1). With *Joonie*, Jacobs continues to “open up ‘coloured’ bodies in literature for complex signification” just as she did, according to Gqola, in *The Slave Book* (2001:59). In another study concerned with the physical body, Jessica Murray (2011) refers to the entanglements between physical appearance (particularly of the oppressed) and gender, race, and class, this time in Jacobs’s novel, *My Father’s Orchid*.

*

As discussed above, the existing critical literature on Jacobs’s writing explores the historical and religious/spiritual bent of her novels. It also pays attention to her focus on women, particularly Muslim

women, finding their place in society in South Africa in both a historical and a contemporary setting. However, critics do not appear to have examined Jacobs's compelling nostalgic longing to connect with the roots of her identity. Critics have yet to investigate the persistence of the memories (whether remembered or submerged) that urge her excavations. In other words, critics have not yet examined why she revisits those particular times and places or how she approaches them.

Jacobs has said that *Joonie* is about dislocation, a theme that I intend to examine in both *Joonie* and *The Slave Book*. I aim to determine whether the characters' feelings of dislocation are rooted in a common cause; and I attempt to suggest an answer to the question of whether Jacobs's nostalgic urges are prompted by a persistent nudging of subverted traumatic memories (of her own and of her community and heritage). I intend to show that subverted traumas, which manifest in *Joonie*'s themes of dislocation, are a continuation of the traumas suffered in the contexts of *The Slave Book*. Ultimately, I seek to ascertain whether the utilisation of nostalgia assists in the resolution of those traumas.

Jacobs's writing has been described, on the one hand, as "cloyingly sentimental" and as "suffering somewhat from [a] rosy haze" but also, on the other hand, as "movingly unsentimental" (Kruger 2003:72). These contradictory interpretations point towards the complexities of the nostalgic representations in Jacobs's writing. Both novels have a bitter-sweet tone that could indicate that they are at a point where "the ego-comforts and protections of nostalgia are dissipated, at the point when nostalgia becomes less sweet, more troubling, more anxious [and, therefore, the novels' nostalgia] becomes useful to us" (Hook 2012:238). Bearing in mind Walder's assertion that the "rosy glow" of nostalgia is only "part of the story" (2011:3), I explore the evocative nature of Jacobs's writing to ascertain what this apparent nostalgia will uncover on closer inspection.

As mentioned before, my exploration extends to two of Jacobs's novels: *The Slave Book*, published in 1998, and *Joonie*, published in 2011. Although publication dates are only thirteen years apart, the temporal reach and setting of the novels is much broader. *The Slave Book* is set in the 1830s, the final years of slavery at the Cape Colony, while *Joonie* is set in the 1980s, and told from the perspective of the 2000s. Together, the novels can be said to chart the development, complexity, and historical reach of a particular group of South Africans – the 'Cape Coloured/Malay/Muslim' – and the unique challenges that affect them. Jacobs contemplates current nostalgic longings for the recent and more distant past in order to foster a post-apartheid sense of identity. The novels seek to find an authentic self beyond (or before) the constraints of apartheid, "to penetrate that twilight zone, the uncertain zone between memory and history as a way of trying to understand [this] postcolonial nostalgia" (Walder 2011:2).

In the following two sections of this chapter I explore postcolonial nostalgia in *The Slave Book*, which examines a community displaced in the Cape against their will, and in *Joonie*, which looks at the possibility of choosing to call this same place home.

The Slave Book

The title of this novel – *The Slave Book* – refers to historical slave registers or ‘slave books’, which were listings of people bought and sold in the Cape Colony. Jacobs uses the title but immediately subverts it, because her book is much more than a list of transactions and sparse details. Her version is the slaves’ (own) book: a book that serves the purposes of the slaves, rather than the purposes of their ‘owners’. The novel depicts the lives of a few enslaved individuals who, in spite of the hardships of their existence, experience life as meaningful. Furthermore, the enslaved characters in *The Slave Book* represent a mass of individual lives that have been rendered faceless and nameless because of the distortions and omissions of historical record keeping. Jacobs’s postcolonial (re)telling of this story, therefore, imaginatively fills in historical ‘gaps’ in the ancestral stories of thousands of South Africans.

The Slave Book is Jacobs’s second novel and continues the story of the Kloot family (first introduced in Jacobs’s earlier novel *Eyes of the Sky*). Harman Kloot flees his family’s farm in the Cape Karoo (the interior beyond the boundaries of the Cape Colony) when he is branded a traitor to his people following his support of the local Sonqua in an ambush by a group of boers, in which he shoots and injures a man.⁴⁹ He goes south to the Cape Colony, where his brother is a landdrost, to avoid further conflict and to allow time for tempers to calm. Here he begins work on a wine farm, Zoetewater, which is owned by the prosperous Andries de Villiers, and which relies on slave labour for its success. The other major protagonist is Sangora Salamah, a slave with whom Harman develops a strong camaraderie. Their friendship is a pivotal theme of the novel, a theme that develops within the context of the close confines of the group of slaves on Zoetewater farm, which in turn is part of the wider community of the Colony. Sangora Salamah’s first-person narration opens and closes the narrative and frames his and Harman’s stories, establishing a decidedly male perspective. My focus in this section is on the search for identity, though, rather than on gender relations. Therefore, my focus on Sangora and Harman is, first, on characters who exemplify the search for identity under conditions of slavery but who, second, happen to be male. Although this male perspective does at times “provide a novel angle to the interpretation of female experience” (Wenzel 2004a:99), the emphasis will be counterbalanced by a focus on the female perspective in the section discussing *Joonie*.

⁴⁹ In the ‘Acknowledgements’ preceding the text, Jacobs notes that “[t]he Khoi of today were called Hottentot by the Dutch. The San were called bosjesman, boesman, and boshiesman. Koi-na and Sonqua are how the Khoi and San referred to themselves” (2012:8).

The author's evocative depiction of Harman and Sangora's friendship, the camaraderie of the group of slaves on the farm, and the love relationship between Harman and Sangora's step-daughter, Somiela, point to the author's nostalgia for that period (i.e. the final years of slavery in the Cape Colony). Jacobs's novel suggests that there is a paradoxical longing for this period. It is a period during which men and women were denied freedom, suffered brutal abuse, and had no agency or voice. Yet, there appears to be a longing for something left behind there, for something almost forgotten, but not quite. A return to conditions of slavery could never be countenanced and it is, therefore, a paradoxical situation when there is a hankering for a time when such conditions were experienced. There is a profound conflict between the longing to return and the abhorrence of the conditions of the time longed for. A return such as this, to a period of slavery, is a return to "a part of history that has disappeared – but *not* disappeared" (Baderoon 2014a:153). Nostalgic promptings, it seems, will not allow memories of that time and place, and of those people, to be forgotten, despite the fact that there are scant records.⁵⁰

The Slave Book was published in 1998, four years into South Africa's democracy, when Jacobs had returned from Canada to live in Cape Town. Her explorations of the city, in the novel, seem to respond to a yearning for a connection with her forebears and "an assertion of her heritage and identity as a woman and former exile" (Wenzel 2004a:95). As mentioned earlier, return to a longed-for place does not necessarily appease a sense of longing. The anxieties of the present, an ambivalent sense of identity, and a longing to define 'home' as a place of belonging, for example, can prompt persistent feelings of nostalgia which are, as John Su has said, a "genuine human need" (2005:3) and which demand to be explored. Jacobs has admitted that, by writing this novel, she familiarised herself with South Africa's history and that, in the process, her own personal roots became clearer to her.

As I have mentioned, in its recall of the past, there are similarities between *The Slave Book* and Etienne van Heerden's *Ancestral Voices*. The similarities are due, in most part, to the contexts: the places and the time frames. *Ancestral Voices* reaches back to approximately 1836, when the patriarch Abel and his wife Magtilt leave the Cape Colony and set out into the interior (the Karoo) as pioneers. *The Slave Book* begins in 1832 and follows the lives of its characters through the final years of legal slave-holding in the Cape. *The Slave Book* is set in the Cape that the Moolmans (of *Ancestral Voices*) have left. However, although Van Heerden does not detail the settlement of the Cape Colony, it is the region that his characters Magtilt and FounderAbel leave to make the journey across the barren hinterland, a journey which Jacobs's characters Harman and Somiela, in *The Slave Book*, also tackle. The two women of the respective novels, Magtilt and Somiela, suffer the same fears as they travel into this hostile and unknown environment: fear of the vast expanses, the hostile natural elements, the

⁵⁰ As Wenzel points out, "the only documented information that can be obtained on slaves in South Africa relates either to their names, listed on slave auction records [...] or to court documentation recording the criminal convictions of slaves" (2004a:94).

unseen animals in the oppressive dark of night, and the uncertainty of an unknown future and destination. Furthermore, both Somiela and Magtilt encounter indigenous inhabitants during their journeys (the Sonqua) and these encounters undermine and challenge the myths of creation/discovery in South Africa. Both authors show that these pioneers did not ‘discover’ an unknown expanse of land; rather, they entered an already-populated area.

For Harman, however, this is not new territory. The Cape Karoo interior is his home – it is where he was born and bred – and his time at the Cape Colony has been a time of displacement. He has been in ‘exile’ following an altercation with his family’s Afrikaner farming neighbours in the Cape Karoo, and therefore his trek back into the interior is a return home. Jacobs’s earlier novel, *Eyes of the Sky*, details a previous generation of the Kloot family ‘setting up camp’ and establishing themselves in the interior of the Cape Karoo. The novels (*Eyes of the Sky* and *The Slave Book*), therefore, present similar family and social dynamics to those presented by Van Heerden in *Ancestral Voices*. But, as discussed earlier, subversive plaasroman novels can disturb the restoratively nostalgic tone and the portrayal of Afrikaner life on the land that was previously depicted in more traditional plaasromans. Jacobs’s novels shatter, even more profoundly than do Van Heerden’s, the ‘Afrikaner founding myth’, the (restoratively) nostalgic tale of a beginning. In addition to debunking that myth, by reflectively ‘sifting through the rubble’ of the past, Jacobs brings to the fore the stories of those who did not have the option to leave and start a new life – those confined to the colony as slaves.

Jacobs foregrounds slave characters in this novel, a representation that is in contrast to the approaches of earlier literature. In earlier literature, there are “[v]ariations on [the] combination of marginal slave characters and benign depictions of Cape slavery [which] recur in any number of [...] twentieth-century historical romances” (Johnson 2012:550). For the most part, however, slaves have been represented in literature and in art as shadowy, indistinct presences. Slaves and slavery were most often represented by what Baderoon describes as the “picturesque view” (2014a:35). In eighteenth- and nineteenth-century paintings of the early Cape Colony and Cape Town, for example, the city was featured as an orderly, organized space within which well-dressed colonials are foregrounded, while, in contrast, slaves were visually represented as

diminutive human figures standing to the sides, close to the edge of the frame, identifiable by their characteristically pointed hats and colourful dress as ‘Malays’, [and] engaged in one of the identifiable forms of labour performed by slaves. (Baderoon 2014a:38)

Such paintings offer a “brief glance” at slavery but do not hold the attention of the viewer because the picturesque view does not require “intellectual effort”, and furthermore does not prompt “unsettling questions” (Baderoon 2014a:3-4).

As Kozain puts it, “the picturesque avoids the real, brutal conditions that underlie the presence of slaves in a pretty landscape painting” (2014:xix). Unlike the picturesque art and early literary

depictions just mentioned, Jacobs's novel does not ignore the presence of slaves. Her slave characters are the focal point of her novel, beginning with the very title.

Nostalgia in the Novel: Characters

As the title immediately suggests, the novel is about slaves who are presented, not as shadowy and peripheral, but rather as fully rounded characters. And in the context of slavery at the Cape Colony, *The Slave Book* is a novel about friendship. At the heart of the narrative is the unlikely friendship between the Afrikaner, Harman Kloot, and the slave, Sangora Salamah, whose nostalgic musings frame the narrative. The novel begins with a prologue in Sangora's voice and ends, once more with his first-person account, in an epilogue. Between these two short, direct addresses the story is told in third-person narration from some point in the narrative future as Sangora remembers events at the farm, Zoetewater, over approximately five years.

Sangora Salamah

As the character whose narration frames the body of the novel, an exploration of Sangora Salamah's nostalgic memories seems an appropriate point of departure. But before Sangora's own memories are explored, I examine Jacobs's creation of this fictional character.

In the creation of the character Sangora, Jacobs could not be guided by a stereotypical prototype in the way that Van Heerden could be guided in the portrayal of, for example, his patriarchal Afrikaner figures. The characters that Jacobs is longing for, and aiming to depict, have all but been erased from historical and popular record. Sangora is thus a nostalgic creation of a longed-for, imaginary 'founding father', a leader, the epitome of the strength of character that Jacobs perhaps envisions as underlying her ancestry. Her depiction of this character could be seen as a somewhat restoratively nostalgic figure. He is a strong-willed, moral leader who stays true to himself and his faith. His only moment of weakness is when he attacks the farmer's wife in retaliation for her vicious assault on his step-daughter. As this complex character 'lives' and 'breathes', however, Jacobs's initially 'restorative' depiction develops into a 'reflectively' nostalgic character. Although he is portrayed throughout in a favourable light, his inner depths, his own nostalgia, reveal the trauma associated with, and underlying, the author's nostalgia. Sangora is nostalgic in his own right, and his memories and emotions are examples of the complexity of nostalgia in that he longs for a time that was obviously also deeply traumatic. His longing is 'bitter-sweet'.

It is interesting to note that Sangora's memory focusses on his time at Zoetewater. He does not appear to long for aspects of his earlier life before he arrived at the Cape, or for the life that he had on other farms. It is this time at Zoetewater, in the years leading up to the emancipation of Cape slaves, that he recounts fondly. What is it, then, that nostalgia insists must be revisited at this time?

From the first paragraph of the prologue, Sangora asserts himself and his individuality. “I remember it as if it was yesterday” (Jacobs 2012:11) he says, immediately making his narrative personal and individual. The prologue and the epilogue are the only sections written in his direct speech, but despite a change to third person narration in the first chapter, there is a strong assertion of Sangora’s individual persona throughout. Sangora is described as he stands on the auction block, as a “tall and husky [man], in a vest and pantaloons [whose] hair stood wild about his face”. He had “an intense face, defiant” (13). The prospective buyer, Andries de Villiers, knows that this slave is “strong and crafted” (13) but also notes scars on his legs that indicate that he has worn leg irons. The scars are therefore a warning to De Villiers of the slave’s insubordination and challenge to authority. On enquiry, De Villiers is told that Sangora is “Mohametan [and that] he preached to the other slaves, converting them, giving them ideas” (13-14).

Once he has purchased Sangora, De Villiers is immediately challenged on the matter of the slave’s name. Sangora informs De Villiers, directly, that he is “Sangora Salamah” (24) and, although De Villiers tells him that “[f]rom today onwards your name will be February” (24), that name never sticks. The renaming of a slave “could be considered as a strategy through which the colonial order is imposed on the slave” [my translation] (Chaudhari 2013:33).⁵¹ This battle of wills between Sangora and De Villiers continues throughout their relationship. Because a name “can be considered as a reflection of the individual’s identity” [my translation] (Chaudhari 2013:33), Sangora’s desire to hold onto his own name reflects his desire to hold onto his sense of self.⁵² And, to a certain extent, he is successful. The other slaves refer to him as Sangora, even though De Villiers dogmatically corrects them. “‘Sangora?’ Andries asked caustically. ‘Don’t you know what his name is?’” (96). Sangora again proclaims his name clearly and defiantly when introduced to Harman Kloot for the first time, challenging De Villiers to the point that he strikes him and knocks him to the ground (97). After some time, however, when Harman Kloot, De Villiers’s farm overseer, refers to the slave as ‘Sangora’ he is not corrected even though “[De Villiers] was aware that Harman had used the carpenter’s original name” (105).

The (attempted) name change at Zoetewater (to ‘February’) is not the only name change for Sangora. Initially, he is introduced on the auction block as “Sangora van Java” (15), which serves, at the same time, as a name and as an indication of his origins. (Likewise, his wife is “Noria van Malabar” (17) and his step-daughter is “Somliela van de Kaap” (17).) During his years at Zoetewater, by consistently resisting the name ‘February’, he manages to retain some sense of identity by being known by his own name, Sangora Salamah. It is this sense of identity and recognition, of validation, that he remembers fondly. Ultimately, however, he is forced to give up his name when he is on the run for his life,

⁵¹ “Dit kan beskou word as ’n strategie waardeur die koloniale orde aan die slaaf afgedwing is” (Chaudhari 2013:33).

⁵² “Die naam kan beskou word as ’n weerspeëling van ’n individu se identiteit” (Chaudhari 2013:33).

following his brutal attack on Marieta de Villiers. As a means of survival, he feigns his own death and takes on a new identity. Through that process he cuts ties with the people and the life of Zoetewater almost as brutally, perhaps, as when his initial enslavement wrenched him from his original life. (The fact that we know nothing of his former life indicates the absolute separation.) Cutting ties with the Zoetewater version of himself, he relinquishes his authentic name and chooses a new one. He chooses the name “Sedick Samaai” (262).

Although Sangora does not give an explanation for the choice of the new name, it is interesting that the initials remain the same, ‘SS’, and that the name has a distinctly Muslim/Malay flavour. A name “provides insight to a person’s culture and individuality and binds him or her, at the same time, to an origin and to ancestors [...] and forms part of the individual’s spirituality” [my translation] (Chaudhari 2013:33).⁵³ We could thus consider the name Sedick Samaai as well chosen. It allows Sangora/Sedick to retain a link with his origins and his culture and to his spiritual and religious faith, which is the central aspect of his life, and which sustains him. His faith is central to his being and to his identity, as shown in the opening passages of the novel: he has scars about his ankles, which indicate that he has been shackled and is prepared to take punishment for his belief. One of De Villiers’s neighbours explains, “He’s a Mohametan. Word is he preached to the other slaves, converting them, giving them ideas” (13-14) and, when De Villiers questions him about why he was put in chains, Sangora declares that it was “for speaking the truth [which is] that we all need God” (24). And he practises what he preaches. During his time at Zoetewater he is able to respect his beliefs practising the rituals and traditions of Islam.

In the depictions of Sangora’s faith we see instances of both Sangora’s nostalgia (as a character) and Jacobs’s nostalgia (as the author). For Sangora, nostalgic memory recalls a time when his religious practices ‘saw him through’, gave him strength, and were recognised and validated by others. He remembers also that he shared his practices with others. Memories of sharing his faith are especially poignant in connection with Harman Kloot (the free man) as it indicates the intimate, trusting, and accepting nature of their friendship. It was a close bond, a camaraderie. Sangora’s memories then, as the character, are personal and individual. Jacobs’s authorial nostalgia details Sangora’s spiritual practices, and is therefore able imaginatively to visit sites of early Muslim tradition in the Cape. For her, this appears to be a nostalgic return, a ‘pilgrimage’ of sorts, to the early days of her religion and culture. She pays homage to the strength provided by Islam to an embattled, debased people and to the sense of community and belonging it helped to foster. As Gqola points out,

[p]articularly for Malay slaves, transported as they were from Muslim locations, it was a direct connection to pre-slave pasts. Islam functioned to support the slaves’ link not only to the homes from which they were wrenched, but also to one another; to older senses of

⁵³ “ ’n naam verskaf ’n blik op die persoon se kultuur en individualiteit en verbind hom of haar terselfdertyd aan ’n herkoms en voorouers” (Chaudhari 2013:33).

community as well as to newer clusterings with other slaves with different geographical origins, but shared religion. It offered for the enslaved a connection to an identity prior to capture and exile: a home. (2010:155)

Sangora Salamah, a slave and a Muslim, is presented as a complex individual within the collective of Cape slaves. He is representative of a population that “over the course of almost two centuries [...] came to number more than 60 000” (Ross 1999:6). “Slavery and Islam are intricately connected in South Africa” (Baderoon 2014a:7) because most of the Muslims arriving at the Cape Colony from 1658 onwards arrived as slaves, and between 1658 and 1834 “slaves formed the majority of the population at the Cape Colony” (Baderoon 2014a:8).⁵⁴ What Islam offered to a people with no rights was a separate space they could consider their own, a space free from the control and influence of their masters/owners, a space where the “objectified [could be] redeem[ed] and re-humanise[d]” (Gqola 2010:157). Furthermore, many indigenous people were converted to the religion and could be accepted as part of the “religious diaspora” (Gqola 2010:149) because the rituals of the religion “offered a space of commonality under slavery even when home languages differed” (Gqola 2010:162).

The Dutch, when controlling the Cape Colony (1652-1795), had mixed feelings about Islam. On the one hand Islam was encouraged because, by law, the children of Muslim slaves could also be enslaved, whereas the children of Christian slaves could not. Muslim slaves were sometimes regarded as easier to ‘handle’, as they were considered to be pious and they rejected alcohol, but at other times they were deemed “difficult to contain, to successfully subordinate” because they were considered “unpredictable” and “troublesome” (Gqola 2010:153). The private space provided by the religion, the independence of thought it allowed, made the slave owners uneasy. Religious practice, therefore, was tolerated but could not be practised publicly, as is reflected in *The Slave Book*: Rachel tells Somiela “There’s a house in Dorp Street where the Mohametans teach people” (30-31). Somiela says that she knows the house and has visited there with her mother. “We were allowed to do things in private, but not to talk to the other slaves about it” (31). Somiela later explains to Harman that “[p]eople feel strong when they pray together” (120) and it appears that this is an aspect of faith for which Sangora is nostalgic: the social dimension, the sharing. During his time at Zoetewater, Sangora’s faith becomes a shared and communal activity.

Driving from the auction to the farm for the first time, Somiela looks at Sangora’s face. It shows no emotion, but his wife, Noriah (who was left behind), knows that he would be using silent prayer as an “invisible internal retreat” (Gqola 2010:162). His private devotion becomes more communal once he

⁵⁴ It should be noted, however, that the history of the arrival of Muslims at the Cape Colony “includes both resistance to colonialism and the recruitment of Muslims to enforce colonial rule” because, although most of the Muslims brought to the Cape were slaves, “[t]he first Muslims to arrive at the Cape in 1658 were the Mardyckers of Amboya in the East Indies, who were brought as soldiers to support the Dutch in the face of Khoisan resistance” (Tayob; qtd in Baderoon 2014a:8-9).

is settled at Zoetewater. For example, in the presence of the other men, he prepares an azeemat (85) for Kananga, the cruel ‘mandoor’ (black overseer on a farm) (284), explaining to them that it is a “verse for healing the sick” (86), which he slides under the man’s shirt while reciting a prayer.⁵⁵ In giving advice, Sangora resorts to spirituality, advising Salie to “do tahajud for forty nights” (131) to resolve a problem, and he makes it clear that he does not “do doekoem work” (131).⁵⁶ He also practises everyday rituals such as ‘abdās’, the “ablution in preparation for prayer” (283) with fellow slaves Salie and Arend, which Harman Kloot witnesses as a matter of course (166). Later, Sangora, together with Arend and Salie, attends ‘ratiep’ at a house in town (which we assume is the house that Rachel and Somiela spoke of earlier).⁵⁷ The ratiep involves the practice of rituals “around food and cleanliness that are shared across Muslim communities [and these rituals] offer a space of commonality” (Gqola 2010:162) to those involved.

The rituals and traditions are described in some detail in the ratiep scenes, and are particularly important to Sangora on this occasion for two reasons. The day of the ratiep is also the day that he is temporarily reunited with his wife due to the intervention of the farm overseer, Harman Kloot. Furthermore, at this particular ratiep, Harman, to whom he explains all that takes place, accompanies him. It is thus an occasion of spirituality on several levels – personal, communal, and within a burgeoning and unlikely friendship. It is also an occasion that has significance for Sangora’s future because it is due to the deep connection he forges with Harman that Sangora manages to live on after his own simulated death, when Sangora is ‘born again’. (This is also a profound occasion for Harman Kloot who not only witnesses acts of faith, but reunites with relatives he had not known. I discuss this further in the next section, ‘Harman Kloot’.) This ratiep, then, is a pivotal point in the novel and also a focal point for both Sangora and Harman with regard to the meaningfulness of their lives. Nostalgically remembering this time, Sangora is able to sift through the pain and fragmentation of his life and extract meaning from certain highlights. Although, following this ratiep, his life is once again shattered, he retains a certain atmosphere from it, which is fortified by his imaginative return to that space.

So, Sangora is nostalgic for a time when he felt a sense of belonging and a shared sense of identity in community, afforded by his friendships at Zoetewater, which were supported by his spirituality. This

⁵⁵ “These amulets or azeemats were Arabic texts from the Koran written on paper or scratched on lead discs. The azeemats were worn or hidden somewhere on one’s person instead of being read” (Dick 2012:15); “azeemat: small square of paper with Arabic inscription, folded into a tablet, and worn by Muslims to protect them” (Jacobs 2012:283).

⁵⁶ “tahajud: prayers performed after one has fallen asleep” (Jacobs, 2012:284); “doekoem: Muslim clairvoyant” (Jacobs 2012:283).

⁵⁷ According to Jacobs’s glossary, “ratiep is a spiritual performance involving knives and swords – to accompaniment of rabanases and drums” (Jacobs 2012:284). A ‘merang’ would be a more routine “prayer gathering/social function at which food is served, usually on a Thursday night” (Jacobs 2012:284). However, as Somiela explains (120), the merang that Salie and Arend attend is held on a Sunday, probably to accommodate slaves’ limited free time.

period strengthens him for the difficult years that are to follow, when he is on the run after physically attacking Marieta de Villiers. Remembering this period of his life offers, therefore, an important and healing reflection. He does not express a desire to return to those times or places, or to recreate similar scenarios. Rather, he looks back to one time from the perspective of another, and he remembers. But, if nostalgia is as much about remembering as it is about forgetting, then the question arises as to what Sangora does not recall.

I have explained how nostalgic memory can occur in tandem with traumatic memory. I have also mentioned Hook's (2012) assertion that nostalgic instances should be considered alongside their psychological implications because, as he says, nostalgia is a function of the ego and serves a protective function. Nostalgic memories can, for example, present as screen memories by making prominent a seemingly unimportant event or period of time in order to mask a traumatic memory or divert attention away from a painful memory. Bearing those thoughts in mind, I will now explore the traumatic memories (or subverted memories) associated with Sangora's nostalgic memories, to understand why precisely it is his time at Zoetewater, which spans approximately five years, on which he focusses with a certain sense of longing. Is he nostalgic about that time because former and later times are too traumatic to examine?

Sangora's earlier life is complete darkness. We glean that he worked as a slave on other farms before he came to Zoetewater and he proclaims he is from Java. However, there is no mention of his pre-slavery life, his passage to the Cape Colony, or his arrival there. Similarly, all that we know about the latter years is that he worked on a wheat farm in Tulbagh. In other words, there are two sets of memories, two time periods, which he does not recall: the time before Zoetewater and the time after Zoetewater.

Consider Sangora's memories – what he does recall – in conjunction with what he does not remember, or chooses not to talk about. Could his contemplative and reflective nostalgia for the Zoetewater years be regarded as a 'screen-memory' – a protection, in Hook's (2012) terminology, from the time before he arrived there? Is he, furthermore, avoiding memories of the time subsequent to Zoetewater by making an imaginative jump from the narrative present to that earlier time? Frankish and Bradbury suggest that in

multigenerational homes, rather than direct talk about a trauma event, (grand)mothers' engagement with the younger generation often erase[s] or silence[s] recent conflictual history and, instead, articulate[s] nostalgic connections with a more distant or remote past. (2012:300)

Sangora, as becomes apparent at the end of the novel, is narrating as an old man from the home of his daughter and grandchildren. He has survived trauma but is silent about his time on the Tulbagh wheat farm. He chooses, rather, to tell about Zoetewater. Why? Because he has left something valuable there – namely, his authentic self. He gave up his name when he left Zoetewater and during the intermediate

time (at Tulbagh) he had to assume another name, another identity. Now, as he tells his story, he reclaims his real name and that identity by re-visiting Zoetewater imaginatively.

But where are his memories of his pre-slavery self, of the traumatic wrench from one life to another? These memories are too profound for words and they linger only as ghosts in Sangora's life. The ghosts resurface as spectral instances that intensify when the trauma is repeated through his sudden and violent exit from Zoetewater. In a moment of weakness he had attacked the farmer's wife, Marieta de Villiers, throttling her in a fit of rage. To avoid a probable death sentence, he flees to the outlaws' cave at Hangklip where he hides with other renegades. Once again he is abruptly moved from one life to another, cutting all ties. In the stages of this second transition there is a repetition of the earlier transition. The journey to the 'drosters' (runaway slaves) cave, on foot with Gumptsa the Sonqua tracker, is physically punishing, and he is hungry, thirsty and afraid – just as he must have been during his 'middle passage' from Java. Sangora spends a hellish night in the cave with the drosters and the dark, dank conditions are reminiscent of the slave ship. And, like the slaves transported on the ships, the fugitives in the cave are people devoid of hope and happiness, who appear merely to exist – their life-force depleted.

One of the cave inhabitants is a woman who appears to have lost her sanity. During her time hiding in the cave she has given birth multiple times to babies who have all died. She now has another puny newborn that also appears to be dying. Around them lie the bones and skulls of people who have perished there and the scene in this cave, deep in the earth, is like a tomb. Sangora, exhausted when he arrives, puts his head down and sleeps like the dead himself. When he wakes up the baby has died.

The time in the cave and his deep sleep are a symbolic death for Sangora, a descent into deeper layers of consciousness. He is repeating the process of taking leave of one life and beginning another. This time, however, he is able to process the transition. He tells them that the baby should be buried so that its soul can rest in "the dignity of his grave" (210). In a swirling mist, on the cliffs overlooking the Indian Ocean (a decidedly liminal scene), Sangora prays for the child. By burying the baby, Sangora symbolically buries his past self with a blessing and a prayer. He puts to rest the self that was wrenched from its home in Java and brought to the Cape via the Indian Ocean that the little grave overlooks. The dead babies, together with all the other human remains littering the cave, represent all the futures that have been thwarted. (Similarly, in *Ancestral Voices*, Ella Moolman's string of still-born babies indicates the Moolman's diminishing family line.) But from that very dark night, deep in the ground, Sangora re-emerges, and it is at this point that Harman Kloot catches up with him to devise an escape plan: Sangora pretends to jump to his death from the cliff and is thereafter secreted on a farm in Tulbagh.

In order for the plan to work, the deception must be absolute and he must cut ties with his past. Unlike his first transition, however, when he submerged/subverted the traumatic memories of his former life,

this time he retains the memory of the life he has just left. If his Zoetewater memories are his nostalgic screen memory, then the spectral elements (which are a form of traumatic memory) indicate the profound trauma associated with his nostalgic memory. He forms a double perspective of nostalgic and traumatic memories. Sangora must validate or process the trauma in order to heal and be whole. (And through Sangora's story, Jacobs seeks healing and validation on behalf of the slave collective.) I suggest that Sangora's time at Zoetewater, and the memory of it, is of the utmost importance to him because it was there, during that time, that he was able to proclaim, "I am Sangora Salamah. From Java." It is thus his only link to his pre-slave life. It was there, at Zoetewater, that he was able to retain the connection with his authentic self. So, by extension, in the narrative present, as an old man, his link to his Zoetewater 'self' is what links him in turn to his 'authentic, pre-slavery self'. Thereby, in his old age, he is relatively content and the novel is able to end with his happy sigh "Aah ... here's Somiela and Salie coming now with the tea" (282).

The note on which Sangora ends his narrative, points to a future that "emphasise[s] accidental living on" (Boehmer 2012:44), a quiet continuation of life rather than a dramatic stopping and re-starting. With this ending, Jacobs exemplifies "writing that suggests by its ending that it is open to slow progression" (Boehmer 2012:44) rather than 'stuck' in 'crisis reiteration'. Furthermore, to reach this point of contentment from which he is able to proceed to the future, Sangora has taken a leap of faith and trusted an unexpected friend, namely Harman Kloot.

Harman Kloot

I have suggested that *The Slave Book* is about the unlikely friendship between Harman Kloot and Sangora Salamah. In contrast with Sangora Salamah, Harman Kloot is a free man, a 'boer'. But as with Sangora, his arrival at the Cape Colony is preceded by a violent and abrupt severance from a former life, which in Harman's case is his life in the Cape Karoo interior. In effect, Harman's story, as told by Sangora, reveals Sangora's nostalgia for the friendship. But in the telling, Harman's longing comes to the fore. In circumstances similar to Floris Moolman's (*Ancestral Voices*), Harman is driven from his home on the family farm in the Cape Karoo interior, in part because of his unconventional relationships.

Harman has a close kinship with the indigenous Sonqua who reside (nomadically) in the area where the Kloot family farm is situated. When a group of boers ambush a group of Sonqua (with whom Harman is travelling), stealing three of their children, Harman shoots at the attackers, wounding one man in the leg. He subsequently leads the mission to rescue the Sonqua children from the farm to where they have been taken. The farming community is irate – Harman is considered a traitor – and he is forced to flee in the dead of night. His father, Roeloff Kloot, sends him to the Cape Colony where his older brother, Martinus, is a landdrost, and, once there, Harman is hired, as farm overseer, by Andries de Villiers of Zoetewater. (Martinus is engaged to be married to Andries de Villiers's step-daughter.)

Exiled to the Cape Colony, Harman longs for his Cape Karoo home, for his kinship with the Sonqua, for his father, and for a mother he never knew. These are the nostalgic longings that drive his actions and his search for identity and belonging. Harman's interaction with the Sonqua is atypical social behaviour in the Karoo farming world, indicating his 'otherness'. However, his "visits with the Sonqua were not secret, and his father should be the first to understand" (44), because at sixteen Harman learns from his father that the woman who raised him, Neeltjie, is not his biological mother. His mother was a Sonqua woman who grew up on the Kloot farm with Roeloff. But, although Roeloff says that he "will not make apologies for [his] youth" (44), he does not publicly acknowledge Harman's full parentage either. Neeltjie, Roeloff's wife, has brought the boy up and is regarded as Harman's mother. Added, then, to Harman's initial intuitive feelings of being different are the ambiguous messages he receives from Roeloff. On the one hand Roeloff says that his children do not have the same mother, "[b]ut there's no difference to me" (137), while on the other, he keeps Harman's mixed-race parentage a secret. Harman learns more from "Sanna the Khoi-na servant, [who] filled in the gaps: 'Zhoko was captured and brought to the farm as a girl. [...] Your father had great feeling for Zokho. But there's no place for people like them in the Karoo'" (44). Of course, as their son, Harman is 'people like them' and, though he is in and of the Karoo, he is forced to reconsider his position there, to consider that he may not be welcome. His father's complicity with the lie of his parentage corroborates that.

Thus, Harman comes to the Cape Colony with a fractured sense of identity. In this respect he contrasts with Sangora. Despite Harman being a free man and Sangora a slave, it is Sangora who displays a stronger sense of self. Sangora's struggles are to retain some vestige of his established identity (for example, in his assertion of his name). Harman's quest, by contrast, is to ascertain who he is and where he belongs, leading him to reflect on his past and his ancestry. He has had the identity of a white Afrikaner man thrust on him but it is an identity that he does not feel is authentic or comfortable. It is at this point in the novel that ideas of freedom diverge because, although a 'free' man, Harman is expected to abide by the rigid rules of society.

In his curiosity and his search for a space of belonging, Harman constantly crosses and blurs social boundary lines. Whereas in the Cape Karoo he sought out the company of the Sonqua, not content with the society only of Boer farmers, now, in the Cape Colony, he communes with landowners and slaves alike. His behaviour elicits suspicion on both sides of the divide: he does not belong entirely to either group. For example, after his first successful day's work at the farm a slave comments, "'He's still one of them'" (101). Furthermore, despite their growing intimacy, Somiela ponders that "Whatever he considered himself, to her he was still a white man" (143). Whereas Marieta de Villiers, outraged at his friendship with Somiela, says, "He likes bosjesman and hottentot. Betrayed his own people for them" (104). This ambivalence is reflected within Harman too. He may be uncompromising in his interactions with other people, and he is truthful with De Villiers about why he had to leave the

Karoo (74), but he does not reveal his parentage and cross-cultural status. The first time he speaks of it is when he tells Somiela, whom he loves and trusts, “ ‘I’m a baster’ ” (142) and “ ‘I’m like you. Not one, not the other. In the middle somewhere’ ” (142). She resolves that the “secret would never spring from her mouth” (147), which once again endorses the idea that this information should be kept secret.

But how do the facts of his origin affect Harman, especially as he learns the truth only at the age of sixteen? An “internal psychic splitting” (Abraham and Torok; qtd in Wolfreys 2002:139) occurs within him, a parting of the ways between the ‘son of Neeltjie’ and the ‘son of Zokho’. This is the trauma of a double loss. In effect he ‘loses’ Neeltjie as a mother and at the same time must accept and grieve for the mother he never knew. Furthermore, he must discard the idea of his identity as a white Afrikaner and accept the multi-cultural identity of which he had been unaware. To add to his confusion, he is expected to keep that new identity hidden.

It seems then that Harman’s longing for a sense of identity, acceptance, and belonging stems from the longing for his lost mother and heritage. He was drawn to the Sonqua, enjoying an intuitive and natural kinship, even before he learned the truth. Once he learns the truth he is expected to ignore it, to deny it. According to society, family, and friends, the truth must remain hidden, a secret. His given identity is that of a white Afrikaner, and any form of difference must be repressed. His father, Roeloff Kloot, as a youth, crossed one of the “porous boundaries” that the “colonial experience” (Gupta 2001:113) afforded, in his relationship with Zokho (Harman’s mother). When confronted with Harman’s developing relationship with a slave girl, Roeloff acknowledges, “that [his] son was trudging the same path now, taking it further” (136). His relationship appears to be “an uncanny return of differences that have been denied” (Bhabha; qtd in Edwards 2008:127). Harman confronts, and grapples with, those differences at Zoetewater.

It is at Zoetewater that Harman meets the slave girl, Somiela, whom he sees as a kindred spirit. With her he repeats the ‘crossing of porous boundaries’ that characterized his parents’ relationship. Harman’s love for Somiela gives him a renewed sense of purpose and it spurs his nostalgic yearning for a sense of belonging. Because he is confused and conflicted about who he is, his negative emotions – in accordance with the theories of Wildschut et al. (2006:989) – predispose him to nostalgia. But, although nostalgia can be prompted by negative feelings, nostalgia can, in turn, assuage those negative feelings. An exploration of nostalgic memory can “bolster social bonds, increase positive self-regard, and generate positive affect” (Wildschut et al. 2006:975). A conversation between Harman and his father, regarding Harman’s intention to marry Somiela, provides an example of nostalgia’s “meaning making capacity” (Juhl & Routledge 2013:216): The restoratively nostalgic tone of their formal language reinforces their positioning as Afrikaner males. The two men revert to formal Afrikaans terms of address, referring to Roeloff in the third person as ‘my father’ and ‘your father’, rather than the less formal ‘you’ and ‘me/I’. The reversion to formality and conventionality contrasts with the contemplative content of their conversation: namely, the crossing of traditional social and racial

boundaries. “ ‘Will it complicate things with my father?’ ” Harman asks (in regard to his relationship with Somiela). Roeloff replies, “ ‘[y]our father will not live forever’ ” (137), implying that he approves the relationship but society will not. By discussing his intentions with his father in this traditional manner, Harman acquires his father’s blessing. More important, however, is their reflection (albeit in an oblique and circumspect manner) on the relationship between Roeloff and Zokho, Harman’s biological parents, which validates the meaningfulness of Harman’s relationship with Somiela. In what is perhaps the most poignant moment in the novel, Harman assures his father that “[he] didn’t suffer” (137) as a consequence of his mixed-race parentage. He is indeed suffering, but needs to restore a certain measure of faith in the love that occurred between his parents in order for him to be able to make sense of himself and of his intended marriage. Having reflected on his parents’ union and its consequences he is, perhaps, making a choice to accept the authenticity of the love his parents shared and to reject the expectations that society is imposing on him.

Following that conversation with his father, Harman reveals the truth of his origins to Somiela and his feelings for her. By stating his intention to marry Somiela – to her, and to his father and his brother – he is effectively rejecting the rigid white Afrikaner identity that has been thrust on him thus far. Although his sense of identity is ambivalent at this stage, he is beginning to reject forms of identity that do not ‘fit’. But still he longs for a place of belonging, knowing that although he is secure in his father’s love he does not and will not belong in the community in which his father functions.⁵⁸

Harman’s quest for identity and belonging leads him to a Muslim prayer meeting, the *ratiep*, with Sangora. Befriending Somiela and Sangora, Harman is exposed to their religious practices and beliefs. When questioned about his own beliefs he replies, “ ‘I don’t know’ ” (121), despite being raised Christian. Sangora discusses religion with him and encourages him to attend the ‘*ratiep*’ when he transports some of Zoetewater’s slaves there. As mentioned earlier, the *ratiep* they attend together is pivotal in the novel and a profound experience for both Sangora and Harman. Harman is the “only white person in this environment” (153) but is soon impressed by the atmosphere of the gathering and the feeling of togetherness, and he “somehow understood the importance of their worshipping together” (156). By the time the meal is served “[t]he people had got used to his presence and some of them even smiled at him now” (158), indicating that the feeling of togetherness extends even to him as an ‘outsider’. Having confirmed their friendship, days earlier – “ ‘we have something in common, maybe a spirit’ ” (149) – he now says (at the *ratiep*) “ ‘maybe I’m one of you already and don’t know it’ ” (158). These are prophetic words that foreshadow his meeting with Boeta Mai, the relative of whom he had been unaware.

⁵⁸ The father–son relationship between Harman and Roeloff contrasts with that of Abel and Floris in *Ancestral Voices*. Roeloff does not reject his son, whereas Abel does.

Meeting Boeta Mai for a second time, Harman learns that in him he has a relative who is Muslim and the grandson of a slave. Boeta Mai and Roeloff Kloot's grandfathers were brothers. Like Harman, Boeta Mai is of mixed heritage. His grandfather (a Christian) married a slave from Ceylon (a Muslim) but did not convert. Boeta Mai, born and raised Pieter Cornelius and as Christian, converted by personal choice to Islam in adulthood.

Harman is shocked at the discovery that he has 'black', Muslim relatives whom his father has never mentioned. He is "disappointed that [Roeloff] kept something so relevant from [him]" (163). Roeloff's omission compounds the ambiguity of his attitude to his son's heritage, an ambiguity that Harman has sensed before. He believes that Roeloff has kept quiet because, "[a] half-breed son spoke of a father's carelessness – he could be forgiven the indiscretions of his youth – [but] not of slave blood running through the veins of the family" (161).

Perhaps it is at this stage only that Harman experiences a meaningful reaction to the news of his parentage: a delayed reaction, an experience of *Nachträglichkeit*. When Harman visits Boeta Mai, they reflect on the family's past, considering the various rejections, choices, and decisions made. These nostalgic reflections – first with Roeloff and now with Boeta Mai – present the past in a linear 'then' and 'now' formation of time (what we could call 'nostalgic time'). Hook suggests, though, that if 'nostalgic time' is facilitated by "psychical time" (2012:234), then the past and present can be juxtaposed and considered simultaneously. This is because "[p]sychical time, [is] the temporality of the unconscious [which] has no respect for sequential, chronological time" (Hook 2012:234-35). When considered in this light, it seems that Harman's shock at Boeta Mai's revelation (that they are relatives) has triggered a reaction not only to the advent of a new family but also, belatedly, to the news he received about his biological mother when he was sixteen years old. At the time, Harman does not seem to have had a significant reaction. Now, however, he realises it fully as a trauma. In addition, the "lie of affect" (Hook 2012:233) is banished. As Hook puts it, the affect, the pleasant feeling that nostalgic memory induces, is not the whole truth and is therefore a 'lie'. It is, rather, a symptom of something more profound. With the 'lie of affect' banished, instead of focusing only on the 'sweet' memories of his childhood, Harman is now also emotionally invested in the 'bitterness' of nostalgic yearnings for the parts of his family and past that have been denied him. He told his father, "I didn't suffer" (137), but is perhaps now, for the first time, facing up to the reality of his life.

Emboldened by the stories (and presence) of the (Coloured) Cornelius branch of the Kloot family (i.e. Boeta Mai's branch), Harman declares his intention to secure Somiela's freedom from De Villiers, in the process indenturing himself to the farmer. His allegiance is ultimately put to the test when Sangora attacks the farmer's wife and Harman is tasked with tracking him down and bringing him back. When Sangora nostalgically tells the tale of his own faked and symbolic death, he tells, at the same time, the tale of Harman's symbolic (re)birth: shortly after Sangora's dramatic 'death' and disappearance, Harman marries Somiela and converts to Islam. At the ceremony he declines the opportunity to adopt

a new name, saying “‘I will keep what I have. No matter what name I use, God will know who I am’” (263) – indicating that he now knows, himself, who he is.

Like Sangora, Harman’s authentic self is validated during his time at Zoetewater. Although he is a free man (and not subject to ‘invisibility’ as the slave men are), he has to struggle out from the confines of an inauthentic and uncomfortable identity. On Zoetewater farm he becomes his own man through his labour with the slaves, his love of Somiela, his acceptance by (and of) his reclaimed relatives, and his friendship with Sangora. It is ‘as himself’ that he returns to the Cape Karoo interior. He remains Harman Kloot by name, but returns a more enlightened and evolved version of himself. This is borne out by the warm welcome he receives from Tuka: “The son of Eyes of the Sky! You’re back!” (280).

Harman has come full circle. After fleeing his Cape Karoo homeland and being exiled in the Cape Colony, he returns with a sense of identity that has been integrated from the shattered self-image he left with, and which the clarity of distance has facilitated. Through Sangora Salamah’s nostalgic remembrances of a friendship and a time of camaraderie, Jacobs has documented Harman’s own struggles to reconcile past and present.

*

In presenting Sangora’s and Harman’s tales, Jacobs presents additional aspects of the story of South Africa’s social beginnings. Their ‘unofficial’ story ‘fills in the gaps’ in the historical story. Again, I suggest that the writer is subverting the Afrikaner stereotype and the characterisation typical of the plaasroman. Harman is indeed a boer and an Afrikaner, but he is not the mythical white Christian farmer of traditional depiction. Similarly, Sangora is a slave who, in thought and action, does not regard himself as a slave and he thus provides a focus for Jacobs’s intention of giving voice to peripheral figures in the colonial landscape. In this way, Jacobs has mined her ancestry and foregrounded South Africans who were historically obscured and relegated to the margins.

Throughout the narrative the author explores the social positioning and ambivalent development of multi-cultural characters searching for a sense of identity in South Africa’s formative years. In the above I have examined Sangora’s nostalgic recollections in order to discuss how nostalgia has manifested in, and affected, characters and their relationships. Zoetewater farm is the primary site of Sangora’s reminiscences, the site where the disparate characters’ lives intersect. In what follows, I discuss nostalgic longing that is focussed on particular places and how the search for a sense of identity is often linked to memories of places where there is/was a feeling of belonging and of being at home.

Nostalgia in the Novel: Places

The Slave Book is a historical novel, set in ‘the Cape’ of South Africa during the last five years of legal slavery in the 1830s. ‘The Cape’ refers to a geographical region that was a large and varied area populated by diverse peoples. The early, or pre-colonial, population of this southern region of Africa was disturbed and displaced by various groups of newcomers following the arrival of the Dutch in the 1650s. Subsequently, colonists, slaves and opportunity seekers have each laid claim to the places that they inhabited. In what follows I examine Jacobs’s nostalgic depictions of those attachments, be they legal and official, or emotional and spiritual, and discuss what that means for contemporary South African society. By examining significant sites, Jacobs – in two different ways – makes use of a dual view. First, because it was written in the 21st century but set in the early 19th century, the novel presents a double perspective between ‘then’ and ‘now’. In other words, the early Cape/South Africa is viewed from the perspective of contemporary South Africa. Second, there is also a double perspective between the rural and urban spaces that are explored within the temporal reach of the novel – suggesting, in other words, that the Cape Colony and the Cape interior are contrasted and compared.

In the time frame of the novel (approximately 1833 to 1838), the Cape Colony’s focal point is still the port. The Dutch had founded the port as a “refreshment station [...] in 1652 solely for the benefit of the [Dutch East India] Company and its shipping between the Netherlands and the East” (Schoeman 2012:119). In 1795 the port/colony was taken over by the British.⁵⁹ The port town was thus the most densely populated and the most closely regulated area in the Cape Colony. Further afield, on the farms flanking the colony/city, regulations were less closely adhered to or enforced. Beyond those farmlands, though, in the wilderness and the Cape Karoo interior “allegiance and authority of government came to rest ever more lightly upon the men of the frontier” (De Kiewiet; qtd in Clare 2010:79). Official control to a large extent broke down because, even though “in strict legality the land tenure was not in freehold and was revocable at the will of the administration, actually the Trekboers availed themselves of the land with the utmost freedom” (De Kiewiet; qtd in Clare 2010:79). The ‘pioneers’, the trek-boers, forged a life for themselves, taking matters into their own hands. It was a case of ‘every man for himself’. The original nomadic hunter-gatherers (Khoi/San or Sonqua) were subjugated in the process.

The first two chapters of *The Slave Book* feature two contrasting spaces – the Cape Colony and the Cape Karoo interior – thus providing from the outset a dual set of perspectives. I discuss each of these spaces in turn, considering Jacobs’s nostalgic depictions as well as the characters’ attitudes to the various sites. I then examine them more closely to explore some spaces of intimacy within each of

⁵⁹ “After governing the Cape for nearly 150 years, the Dutch East India Company was bankrupt; in 1799 it was dissolved. [...] Anxious to prevent the Cape from falling into Napoleon’s hands, Britain stepped into the vacuum” (Clare 2010:78).

them: home spaces, community gathering spaces, and former (or pre-slavery) home spaces that are recalled only as spectral images.

The Cape Colony

If we consider that Jacobs wrote this novel on her return from Canada and that the setting is her hometown, we can surmise that nostalgia has influenced her choice of location for the novel. She writes about a place for which she admits she was homesick. However, she writes about Cape Town at a much earlier period than her own lifetime. It is possible that, returning to Cape Town after a 27-year absence, Jacobs had a similar experience to that of Boym, whose nostalgic longings persisted after she returned to visit her native city in Russia. “At first glance nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time” (Boym, 2001:xv). Similarly, Jacobs appears to have begun searching for that missing ‘space’ in an earlier Cape Town, the Cape Town of South Africa’s historical period of slavery.

When the narrative opens with Sangora’s prologue, he is looking through old pictures that were drawn by a slave, Hanibal, who lived on Zoetewater farm: “This drawing here [Sangora observes], it’s faded now. Hanibal did it. He could look at something, then put it to paper from memory” (11). Hanibal’s drawings – of people, the farm, and the surrounding landscape – capture a time and place that Sangora longingly remembers. The drawings are ‘snapshots’ of a former life in another place: “Place, just like the self, is a series of stories (not a state, but a process of interaction between the semiotic and the symbolic)” (Viljoen et al. 2004:8). Thus, Sangora uses the pictures as a starting point to which he adds his stories of nostalgia. Hanibal’s drawings are picturesque scenes, but from an alternative perspective to those of the “eighteenth and nineteenth-century panoramas” that Baderoon mentions (2014:38), in which slaves are peripheral figures and the topography is neatly ordered. His drawings bring the landscape into focus as seen through the eyes of the slave while, at the same time, placing the slave firmly in focus and central to the image. Furthermore, by studying Hanibal’s pictures, it becomes apparent that what the slaves see is equally pleasing to what the ‘free’ landowning classes see and, as Sangora lets us know, the slaves too feel an affinity with the landscape despite having no official claim of ownership to it. In the epilogue Sangora says, “look here. This one’s of Zoetewater. Hanibal left out the barn, but captured the beauty of the land. See how the vineyards sweep up the Wynberg mountains?” (281). Relying on Hanibal’s and Sangora’s records, then, this story is simultaneously told by slaves and told about slaves.

Revisiting these sites and seeing them through the eyes of slaves, or experiencing them alongside slaves, validates the fact that slaves were there in a fully engaged fashion. Not ghostly presences on the outskirts of life’s experience but as complex people feeling the soil, breathing the air, appreciating the sky and the mountains, and building the foundations of Cape Town/South Africa and its farming/economic enterprises.

The novel opens in the market square where the farmer, De Villiers, purchases the slaves, Sangora and Somiela. Attention is initially focussed on the small space where the individual's fate could be decided by the call of a bid. "The auction was held under the tree. The tree which everyone knew near the well, behind the Slave Lodge" (13). Once the sale has taken place, however, an open wagon transports them away from the site "along a hard road, kicking up dust" (19). They soon pass open fields on either side of which "mules, horses, and oxen quietly" grazed (19). These observations indicate from the outset that the commercial transaction was not the be-all and end-all of a slave's existence – that their experience did not begin and end on the auction block. Somiela mentally notes familiar landmarks as they ride, such as the house on Dorp Street, the Company Gardens, and the area of Oranje Zigt. Her observations serve the purpose of orientating herself and thereby linking the locations over an expanse of time (then and now) for the contemporary reader. The journey took "less than two hours" (19) during which they passed gates "every few hundred yards or so" (20) where the houses were hidden by trees. Finally they arrived at Zoetewater farm, which was

way up the new road, nestled on twelve morgen of fertile land in isolated splendour at the foot of the Wynberg mountains [...] a magnificent estate with a murmuring stream, forested land, and vineyards stretching up into the hills. (21)

This is certainly a picturesque scene. The illusion of the picturesque is immediately dispelled, however, by the information that Andries de Villiers has laid a claim on the farm through his opportunistic marriage to the widow Marieta, and by the prominent view of the "bell from a salvaged ship that was rung to summon the slaves to work" (22). At this point – coinciding with Sangora's and Somiela's arrival at Zoetewater – the balance of power is firmly established. But, "human spatial perception is changeable and continually shifting" (Viljoen et al. 2004:1), and by reimagining the lives of the slaves on this farm, a claim on belonging can be (re)established. Although Andries de Villiers owns the farm, many of the other characters (such as the slaves, who do not/cannot own land) express admiration for the farm, and affinity with the land. In fact, Andries de Villiers is perhaps the most emotionally disconnected from the farm, despite his control and ownership, because he is overly preoccupied with the farm as an economic enterprise rather than as the environment of his life. Thus the farm, being positioned on the outskirts of the Cape Colony, is a space with multiple meanings that depend on the perspective considered.

The farm is a liminal space. It is geographically placed between the colony and the wilderness/frontier, between the ordered and the non-ordered. It can also be considered a liminal space for the characters, as most of them are not securely entrenched there and although their precarious situations arise from differing circumstances, they respond to such situations in different ways. Some characters are mindful of the uncertain nature of their stay, whereas others ignore or resist the tenuousness of their position.

The slaves are there only for as long as the ‘master’ wants them; they can be sold on at any stage. However, some of them cannot imagine life after Zoetewater or, indeed, after enslavement. For example, Rachel, the kitchen slave, and Arend, her son, decide to stay on at the farm even after emancipation when they are free to go. Another slave, Tromp, is unable to cope with the changes that emancipation brings and he hangs himself from the bell tower (281). Sangora, on the other hand, looks forward to the day when he will be free, telling Somiela as they arrive at Zoetewater, “ ‘It won’t be forever. [...] One day we’ll be free [...] One day we’ll all be together again’ ” (24, 30).

The farm is a liminal space for Harman, also; he is at Zoetewater as an employee, but more significantly as a fugitive. He has come to the Cape Colony to escape the ‘kommando’, the angry boers who seek vengeance for his attack on one of their own. When members of the ‘kommando’ arrive at the Colony in search of Harman, De Villiers protects Harman by diverting them from his trail. Harman is therefore at Zoetewater at the farmer’s mercy. He never considers his stay there as permanent, however – which he confirms at the dinner table when the De Villiers and Kloot families gather: “ ‘I’ll not stay here [in the Cape Colony] forever. When the time’s right, I’ll [...] return to the Hantam’ ” (141). And his family agree that “ ‘Harman’s heart’s in the Karoo [...] he likes it out in the veld’ ” (138).

Jacobs’s foregrounding of a liminal space as setting has interesting ramifications, because in “a liminal space, meaning can be created and [...] creative new identities and relationships between space and identity can be dreamed and produced” (Viljoen et al. 2004:18). It is in the liminal space of Zoetewater farm that both Sangora and Harman – through a process of “separation, transformation, and re-incorporation” (Viljoen et al. 2004:18) – find meaning in their lives by establishing a sense of identity and belonging, and by finding a (spiritual) home. It is also the space in which the author, Jacobs, reimagines a sense of belonging for the forebears of the former slave population. Her “retrospective stance [...] implies a re-consideration of events and an eventual re-assessment of results” (Wenzel 2004a:97). As a nostalgic reflection her approach does not try to “justify the past, but to understand it” (Wenzel 2004a:97).

The Cape Karoo Interior

The novel’s second chapter provides an early introduction to the contrasting space of the Cape Karoo interior.⁶⁰ This is the domain of Harman Kloot. As explained earlier, although a free man and a boer, Harman Kloot is not a typical boer; his actions are in contradiction to the norm. As his (non-biological) mother states, and his sister qualifies, his heart is in the Cape Karoo and he loves to be in the veld. The second chapter immediately presents and corroborates that in the opening lines: “Far, far north in the Karoo [on a morning] like a hundred mornings before [...] a group of Sonqua [are]

⁶⁰ The novel’s chapters are unnumbered and untitled, but each chapter is opened by a quotation from a historical text pertaining to slavery.

heading north” (40). Jacobs establishes first and foremost that this is Sonqua country and indicates the continuity of time. The timelessness of this space is then punctuated by a voice in the narrative present, which says “ ‘Wait’ ” (40). This is Harman Kloot, “the half-breed son of Eyes of the Sky [who had] picked up their trail two days south and accompanied them” (41). The author then indicates Harman’s close affinity to, and acceptance by, the Sonqua clan, who describe him as their “friend, [who] spoke their language, wore their skins, and frequently showed up at their camps to come and shoot springbok or eland for their fires” (41).

In this initial glimpse, and as referring to his mixed-race parentage, the narrator labels Harman as a ‘half-breed’. But in this scene, when Harman, as the son of a farmer, interacts naturally and closely with the Sonqua, we see that the implications of his origins – the fact that his biological parents are of differing races and cultures – affects not only his interpersonal relationships; his attitude to the land has a dual perspective too. He understands, of course, that to the farmer the land is “an economic resource” (43), but his actions reveal that he is also sensitive to the Sonqua belief, which is, as the narrator explains, that “the natural world and the world of spirit [a]re one” (43) and that there is a close affinity or connection between man and nature: “Every krans, fountain, pool of water carried reminders of an order whose foundations had been laid long before the coming of the farmers. [...] The coming of the settlers with their attitude to man and nature was something to which the Sonqua couldn’t adapt” (44).

Here again, though, in the interior – as on Zoetewater farm – power relations are firmly established. The “Trekboers, with an insatiable hunger for land and an utter contempt for the natives” (Clare 2010:78), laid down the ‘law’ – which is to say, their own form of ‘law’. The native inhabitants of the region had been either driven off or captured and put to work. By defending the Sonqua clan in a clash with a group of boers, Harman contradicts the ‘rules’ and is therefore in no doubt that “the kommando would come after them in full force” (44). Because he does not adhere to the conventional localised ‘laws’ adopted by the region’s dominant class (to which he supposedly belongs) he is banished; he escapes to the Cape Colony.

Harman’s ambiguous and fractured sense of self highlights the conflicted position of a person who feels a sense of belonging to a natural environment but who is rejected by the society and societal rules of that place. This is an example of how “space is [...] a production, shaped through [...] social processes and human interventions” (Wegner 2002:181). In Harman’s case, two contrasting sets of ‘social interventions’ are applied to a physical space (i.e. the Cape Karoo). One set is that of the original society, the nomadic Sonqua, and the other is that of the newcomers, the trek-boers. One group has a mindset that deems it acceptable for Harman to have a harmonious relationship with the Karoo environment, but the other does not. There is a clash between the cultural beliefs of the two communities, which Harman, who closely identifies with both communities, experiences as both an internal and an external struggle. However, I reiterate that “spatial perception is changeable and

continually shifting” (Viljoen et al. 2004:1), and therefore a nostalgic re-visit by the author/reader can reimagine Harman’s claim on the land and his relationship with that space.

It is a space to which Harman must return after he has undergone a process of healing and transformation in the Cape Colony (on Zoetewater farm, as liminal space). Once he has integrated his formerly shattered sense of identity he is ready to return to his place of belonging, his home, for what is perhaps the last part of his healing. Again though, the two communities provide contrasting receptions. Unlike the boers, the Sonqua welcome him warmly. Tuka, “[t]he little hunter separated himself from the group and ran down the mountain towards him [saying] ‘The son of Eyes of the Sky! You’re back’” (280). It is with these words of recognition and acceptance that the novel might have been ended. However, Jacobs has avoided a restoratively nostalgic, or utopian, ending to Harman’s story by continuing in a short epilogue in which Harman’s brutal reception by the boers is recounted by Sangora, a reception which is in stark contrast to that of the Sonqua. Finally exacting their revenge, a group of boers kills Harman while he is out in the veld with his grazing sheep. “Shot him in the back”, is how Sangora bluntly explains it (281). By imaginatively returning to the Cape Karoo and telling his story about Harman Kloot, Sangora has ‘sifted through the rubble of the past’ allowing his pleasant reminiscences to balance the traumatic memory of the loss of his friend. He extracts meaning from his memories of Harman with a sharp shift of emphasis between the two contrasting receptions that mark the end of Harman’s life. In this way, the emphasis moves away from Harman’s violent death and the boer’s ultimate rejection, which is mentioned dispassionately in the epilogue and outside of the frame of the main narrative of his life. Thus, although the Cape Interior is indeed proven to be the hostile space that landscape artists kept outside of the frame of the ‘picturesque’, nostalgic memory has reclaimed the space as a place of belonging. For Harman, who in turn represents many others whose claim of belonging was rejected and denied (for example, the Sonqua), “there is nothing wrong with [their] native nostalgia, a longing for a lost home set in a politically problematic space and time” (Dlamini 2010:152).

Earlier, I compared Jacobs’s and Van Heerden’s portrayals of the Afrikaner in their writing. Jacobs not only brings the peripheral Afrikaner figure to the fore – as Van Heerden does with, for example, the unconventional Floris and Soois – but she actually has the Afrikaner figure (who is often portrayed as the central figure) recede to the periphery. A new centre or at least an alternative focal figure is thereby created. Similarly, the environment in which this protagonist is positioned is a portrayal of the Cape Karoo interior that accommodates the Sonqua attitude to the land as ‘wilderness’ rather than the Afrikaner view of it as ordered farmland. Harman Kloot is recognised as an Afrikaner, a boer, a ‘white’ male, but is in fact of cross-cultural origin, referred to, in crude terms, as a ‘half-breed’. Jacobs has placed him prominently as the protagonist in this environment, where he would be (and is) pushed out because he relates more closely to the Sonqua view than to the Afrikaner view. She has used a different (or at least vastly expanded) perspective, as compared with Van Heerden’s: not only is

Harman, as an ambiguous character, placed in the foreground, but in addition his struggles are viewed from the perspective of the foregrounded Sonqua society, while the Afrikaner perspective is not explored at all. In other words, the author has reclaimed the space for previously marginal (or invisible) characters.

In summary, then, the two protagonists, Harman and Sangora, have been juxtaposed: Harman in the Cape Karoo interior, and Sangora in the Cape Colony. Furthermore, we have a view of two characters whose affinity with their respective environments has been established, but who actually cannot stake any official claim to them. When Harman (representative of the racial ‘hybrid’ or the ‘Coloured’) attempts to reclaim his place at ‘home’, he suffers the ultimate rejection of death, and Sangora (representative of slaves) is denied any rights to a home whatsoever. Turning attention to instances of nostalgic memories of the home in this novel, therefore, results (initially) in a blank space. There are scant descriptions of conventional or traditional homes because, as dispossessed or rejected people, the foregrounded characters cannot have homes.

Intimate Spaces

There are houses mentioned in *The Slave Book*, but most are viewed from the outside – because they are focalized through the consciousness of a slave – and are not presented as homes. The facades, the gates, the doors are described, but they are spaces that are not entered into, thresholds that are not crossed. During the journey from the auction to the farm, Somiela and Sangora pass “every few hundred yards or so, the entrance gate to some private dwelling” (20), and the village on Wynberg Hill, close to Zoetewater farm, which is a “cluster of houses” (21). On another trip into town, Harman and the slaves drive past houses “flat-roofed and white-washed, some with high terraces running along the front where families sat and drank coffee” (118). At Zoetewater farm “[t]he house was flat roofed [...] and had a voorhuis for receiving guests, bedrooms with doors, a lofty kitchen, and a bathroom for the family where they could perform their ablutions privately” (22). To accommodate the slaves, “a jongenshuis [...] was erected next to the stable, in front of which stood an impressive bell tower” (22).

The only room of the main farmhouse that we (as readers) are privy to is the kitchen where Somiela works with Rachel. This is also where they sleep “on a mattress in front of the fireplace” (114). There is “a bright fire crackling in the stove” (115), and Somiela sometimes watches Rachel “lovingly mend an old coat” while they have “their little coffee talk in front of the kitchen fire” (115). Thus, the kitchen provides some semblance of a home space in its intimacy and emotional comfort. For them, as for the other slaves, the idea of home is in abeyance or transition.

In the absence of homes of their own, these characters substitute for home spaces by gathering communally instead, whenever and wherever they can. Similar to the fireside space for Rachel and Somiela, the male slaves commune at night by the light of a stub of candle. During the day, they gather in the shade of a tree to eat in an atmosphere of easy camaraderie: “There was an apricot tree to

the side of the jongenshuis, under which the men ate” (28) and a mulberry tree under which they washed together at the water barrel (28, 102). These are the places where the day-to-day activities of intimate living together take place – talking, washing, eating – and where they gather in solidarity for more important occasions too. For example, it is where the men gather, with Harman, as they wait for Somiela to give birth, their “voices drifting towards her from where [they] gathered under the tree” (271). So, when Somiela eventually leaves the farm she thinks about how “she would miss the men in the jongenshuis [...] with their bickering and laughter, their gatherings under the tree” (273).

The tree is a fitting symbol for the temporary home space because “trees [are a] rich and widespread symbolic motif, [stemming] from the notion of the living cosmos in a state of perpetual regeneration” (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 1996:1026). Deciduous trees (like the apricot and mulberry) are especially symbolic of regeneration because they lose and regain their leaves annually. Nostalgically revisiting a small group of slaves gathered under a tree, thus presents a scene of people who have lost something (a home) but are themselves the holders of the concept (of home) and will in time, therefore, be the source of its regeneration.

Given that the concept of a home space can be symbolised by the tree (as a kind of ‘holding space’), the idea of home can be similarly encapsulated in artefacts and practices that can be transported for the duration of the transition period. As Ashcroft says,

[i]n the case of diasporic peoples, place might not refer to a location at all, since the formative link between identity and an actual location might have been irredeemably severed. But all constructions and disruptions of place hinge on the question: ‘Where do I belong?’ The place of a diasporic person’s ‘belonging’ may have little to do with spatial location, but be situated in family, community, in those symbolic features which constitute a shared culture, a shared ethnicity or system of belief, including nostalgia for a distant homeland. It is when place is least spatial, perhaps, that it becomes most identifying. (2001:125)

Thus, in contemporary South Africa, there is much nostalgic value attached to artefacts, traditions, and rituals stemming from the Cape’s slavery period. *The Slave Book* is rich with examples of such artefacts and practises, such as Sangora’s woodwork, Noria’s needlework, as well as Rachel and Somiela’s recipes and cooking.⁶¹ Other examples are evident in the rituals of faith at the Dorp Street house where Muslims gather for religious practice. Here the ‘ratiep’ takes place, for example, which is a “spiritual performance involving knives and swords” (284) but which, as Sangora explains it, is “not part of our religion. It’s a display of faith, a tradition. Brought here from overseas by the slaves” (157).

⁶¹ *The Slave Book* is rich with such examples as: Sangora’s woodwork, “detailed work and craftsmanship” (109) evident in a “small jewellery box” (109), a table “with flower inlay” (132), and a storage chest (172, 173-74); Noria’s needlework, such as the dress she made for Somiela with an “adornment of lace” (23), and a yellow shawl she sends as a gift (92, 242); Rachel’s and Somiela’s cooking, “Maleier food” (76) such as “cabbage bredie” (63), “breakfast with tomatoes and chillies” (113), “bredies and boboties and spicy dishes” (167).

These are all examples of artefacts and practices that are ‘mobile’. Within them lies faith in the idea of home. They can be transported in lieu of (or until there is) a physical home where they can be placed or performed. In Sangora’s words, “[a]s a slave you have to have faith or you’ll give up. You don’t have anything else” (157). (In the next section, on *Joonie*, these nostalgic items and practices will be shown to be evident also in a contemporary setting.)

Thus, the nostalgic treatment of place in the novel is closely associated with a longing for home. It maps a search for identity in spaces of belonging. Sangora imaginatively returns to a place to reinforce his sense of identity there, and in the process to validate his feelings of belonging. Both he and Harman, whose story Sangora also tells, come to an understanding of home and belonging away from their original homes: when they are in a different place. The characters’ experiences mirror the author’s dilemma: when she returned to South Africa after a long absence, she found a different home from the one she had left. Her search for the lost home, therefore, extends to an earlier time in that place.

*

From a postcolonial (and post-apartheid) perspective, then, *The Slave Book* ponders the meaning and possibility of a yearned-for sense of identity. Jacobs examines current nostalgic longings for a distant past, searching there for an authentic (perception of) self. Although the novel ends on a hopeful and future-orientated note, Jacobs’s examination is reflective and uncompromising. Her nostalgic glimpse does not shy away from the realities of slavery: neither does it succumb to the historical record of quiet complicity. “To accede to the picturesque discourse is to overlook the brutality of slavery, and accept the portrayal of slaves as complicit with the system that dehumanized them” (Baderoon 2014a:40). Jacobs’s story is nostalgic – in turn, both reflectively and restoratively so – and does not ‘accede’ to sentimentality. Rather, it returns to the fragments of a former era and is a story about survival. Memory survives through people, “including nostalgia [...] which in [a] postcolonial context [...] enable[s] a sympathetic re-imagining of some of the worst events a society has to live through, creating the faint hope that lessons might have been learnt, and [that] the cycles of oppression will one day be broken” (Walder 2011:135).

In line with Jacobs’s optimistic yet uncompromising view, her later novel, *Joonie*, which I discuss in the next section, illustrates the residual effects (with associated affect) of slavery on a people and a so-called nation.

Joonie

Jacobs's most recent novel, *Joonie*, was published in 2011, thirteen years after *The Slave Book*. The trajectory between *The Slave Book* and *Joonie* highlights the development of a society that has beginnings in enslavement but a contemporary positioning in democracy. Having responded to nostalgic yearnings that focussed on Cape slave society in *The Slave Book*, Jacobs now appears to be hankering, in *Joonie*, for a more recent past. *Joonie* focusses on contemporary Cape society between the 1970s and early 2000s. It features characters who are the descendants of the earlier Cape slave society and whose horizons have broadened to a more global outlook.

Accompanying the broadening of horizons is the shift from the male interpretation of *The Slave Book* to the female perspective of *Joonie*. In *The Slave Book*, “the male perspective remains implicit in the role and significance of the male narrator’s interpretations” (Wenzel 2004a:96). In *Joonie*, however, there is a female narrator (Joonie) and protagonist speaking in this novel on behalf of herself, her mother, her grandmother, and her daughter. The novel tells the story of a high school girl, Joonie herself, who is faced with the dilemma of an unplanned pregnancy. She decides to travel to New York to stay with an unknown aunt for the duration of her pregnancy, with the intention of returning after she gives birth. Despite her homesickness and loneliness, she meets and develops an intimate relationship with a Greek, second-generation immigrant. The relationship deteriorates – jealousy and abuse ensue. Travelling to and fro between Cape Town and New York, Joonie endeavours to find a place where she belongs. The death of her grandmother and the revelation that her aunt Laverne is in fact her biological mother (who has since succumbed to debilitating mental illness) further disrupt Joonie’s sense of identity and belonging. Despite these difficulties, however, her narration (from a perspective much later in her life) is nostalgic in tone. Joonie longingly recalls the people and places of her childhood and early adulthood. She explores the positive associations and the traumatic events she endures, along with the unspoken traumas that are resurrected from silence. Joonie learns about, and so must also tell, her grandmother’s and her mother’s story because their lives – over the course of the three generations – appear to be a painful repetition of events. Each of them becomes pregnant as a young, unmarried woman and each of them is silently blamed and shamed. The female characters of *Joonie* are not legally enslaved as are those in *The Slave Book*. However, they are mentally shackled, as “descendants of enslaved people, [by an] almost ontological shame – because of the accusation that black women were complicit with their own sexual violations” (Baderoon 2014a:88). They are affected by the legacy of slavery “that greets sexual violence [and, I would add, sexual exploitation] towards black women [with a] combination of silence and denigration” (Baderoon 2014a:87).

In addition to the shift from a male to a female perspective, another significant difference between these two novels is their representation of Islam. While Jacobs’s writings prior to *Joonie* have a focus on Islam and feature Muslim characters, *Joonie* marks a departure from that focus. In *Joonie*, there is only one – peripheral – Muslim character, Mr Ali from the corner café, and the brief mention of

another, the subject of a thwarted love affair: “[t]here was a Moslem boy I met in Standard Eight, Enver” (Jacobs 2011:80). The South African neighbourhoods that Jacobs features in *Joonie*, however, are the same contexts as those of her other writings. Although the main characters are Christian, the peripheral and unexplored figures of Enver and Mr Ali serve to illustrate the proximity of Muslim, Christian, and Jew in Cape Town in the 1970s (and earlier) in which the novel is partly set. As incidental characters they also serve to highlight both the natural development and the opposition of relationships between people of different religious and cultural backgrounds.⁶² Characters in *Joonie* are positioned within a heterogeneous community; there are links, for example, to District Six: “[Joonie’s] grandmother was forced to give up the house she loved, to make way for the whites” (14). Thus, Jacobs exploits the ambiguities inherent in such a setting to prevent any presumptuous ‘type-casting’ by the reader.

The District Six setting (in parts of the novel) presents a community made up of whites, blacks, Coloureds and Indians of various faiths, but predominantly populated by people known as ‘Cape Malay’. But ‘Cape Malay’ is an ambiguous term and cannot be used to delineate a character or person.⁶³ As Ward states,

[s]everal strands of meaning [...] converge in the eventual use in the Cape Colony of the word ‘Malay’ for ‘Muslim’ [because] the term Malay could mean Muslim, or could refer to a linguistic group, or could be a geographical designation of place of origin”. (qtd in Baderoon 2014a:13)

Therefore, it should not be presumed that a South African with slave ancestry adheres to Islam. Joonie’s “mother and father taught her how to be a God-fearing Christian” (13), and, by creating Christian characters in this novel, Jacobs has removed the temptation or tendency for the reader to make any assumptions based on stereotypes. She emphasises the diversity of South African society.

Adding to the complexity of the terms ‘Cape Malay’ and ‘Cape Muslim’ is the use of the apartheid label, ‘Cape Coloured’.

In the racial hierarchy of apartheid, ‘Colouredness’ formed the interstitial zone between ‘native’ and ‘white’. A site of acute anxiety, this zone was intensely policed. Its apartheid definition was as follows: ‘A Coloured person is a person who is not a white person or a native’. Defined solely through negatives, ‘Colouredness’ was imbued with *ambiguity*. Islam gave *added detail* to the meaning of this interstitial racial category. (Baderoon 2104a:18) [my emphasis]

⁶² In this later novel, Jacobs not only deviates from her routine portrayal of Muslim protagonists, she also, from the outset, presents the eponymous Joonie as an ambiguous, ‘in-between’ character. Nor does she delineate her characters clearly and definitively, as she does, for example, in *Confessions of a Gambler* – where the narrator baldly states in the opening lines that “The first thing I have to confess is that I’m a Muslim woman. I’m forty-nine. I wear two scarves. An underscarf, and a medorah. I’ve raised all my sons with the Word of God. When you pass me on the street, you won’t even glance my way. I’m one of those robed women who appear to be going nowhere” (Jacobs 2003:7).

⁶³ As Pumla Gqola points out, “the label ‘Cape Malay’ is not without problems/limitations when used in the context of the descendants of slaves living in the Western Cape of South Africa” (2010:16).

Jacobs, however, removes that ‘added detail’ (in *Joonie*, by creating Christian characters) and thereby retains the community’s ambiguity. Although she acknowledges the multi-cultural nature of Cape society and of her characters, she stresses that they are first and foremost South Africans. As Joonie explains, “‘You’re thinking in terms of colour. I’m of mixed race. Some people don’t mind being called coloured. I do. I’m a South African. That’s my identity’ ” (86).

But although Jacobs seems to defy any attempts at crudely ‘categorising’ her characters, she does from the outset emphatically make plain the vulnerability of women and girls to sexual aggression. Early on in the novel, a man has indecently exposed himself to a seven-year-old girl (4), and later a young mother with a “bloody nose and two teeth knocked out of her mouth” (11) appeals to Joonie’s grandmother for help. Thus, underpinning her somewhat ambiguous characters is a resolute attitude towards women and women’s bodies (particularly ‘black’ bodies) as has arguably developed from, and is a repercussion of, the history of slavery in the Cape. It is a “context of gendered and racialised violence” (Erasmus 2000:73), which stems from “the objectification of slave bodies” (Gqola 2001:48). Women slaves were particularly vulnerable, especially those working within households. They were seen as available (or exploitable) for sex but also as “alluring” (Baderoon 2014a:85). In other words, they carried the blame for their own abuse because “[t]he image of the physically alluring Muslim woman [...] served both to rationalize and obscure sexual violence” (85). Consequently, there is shame attached to “having had our bodies stared at, but also the shame invested in those (females) who have mated with the colonizer” (Wicomb 1998b:91-92). The history of slavery might have been forgotten, ignored, or made to appear benign by ‘picturesque’ representations, but its effects are nevertheless evident. “Slavery generated the foundational notions of race and sex in South Africa [and] the scale of such sexual violence is part of the reason that South Africa continues to experience epidemic levels of sexual violence today” (Baderoon 2014b:2, 3-4). If the “erasure of slavery from folk memory presumably has its roots in shame” (Wicomb 1998b:100), then artistic works – for example, the writings of Rayda Jacobs, and the photography of Berni Searle (which I will discuss shortly) – can be considered as valuable attempts to “recall slavery from the veil of ‘shame’ ” (Baderoon 2014b:4). Hence my selection of these two novels: there is a trajectory from *The Slave Book* to *Joonie* that shows how, as Rustum Kozain puts it, “South African slave society [...] remains present and reflected in present-day South African culture” (2014:xix). Present-day discontent is the common spur for the nostalgic reflections of these two novels, which both look to the past in order to find meaning in the present and for the future.

Rayda Jacobs has said that *Joonie* “is about displacement” (Lehman 2010:1). A similar term, ‘dislocation’, is used “for both the occasion of displacement that occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event” (Ashcroft et al. 2007:65). The state of ‘dislocation’ is also often described as “*Unheimlichkeit* – literally ‘unhousedness’ or ‘not-at-homeness’ ” (Ashcroft et al. 2007:65). In this novel, Joonie is ‘dislocated’ when she leaves Cape Town and

goes to New York in order to hide her pregnancy and have her baby. Here she meets Aunt Laverne and her friends who are all also, to various degrees, ‘not-at-home’, displaced. But, more profoundly, it is the layers of historic displacements that have led to the uncanny feelings of longing that Joonie and the other characters feel. Their yearnings are for a sense of identity and belonging that has been unsettled (to say the very least) through the historical events and conditions of apartheid, colonialism, and, most profoundly, slavery.

In this evocative novel, nostalgia’s nuanced complexities are subtly utilised and serve different functions at different times. So it will be very helpful, while analysing the novel, to bear the range of theories and perspectives about nostalgia in mind. As a point of departure, Boym’s (2001) typologies of nostalgia – the ‘reflective’ and the ‘restorative’ – serve to distinguish whether the subject longs simply to recreate a past situation or wishes, rather, to examine the urge to return. Medalie’s (2010) distinction between ‘static’ and ‘evolved’ (or ‘contemplative’) nostalgia are similarly useful. Once an instance of nostalgia has been identified, it may be useful to consider Hook’s (2012) suggestions regarding the overlapping of nostalgia’s sociological and psychological qualities. Nostalgia serves to protect the ego, Hook says, and so it can serve as a fetish or a fantasy, or as a screen-memory, or it can foreground its ‘sweet’ qualities when, in fact, its ‘bitter’ qualities are of more importance. In addition to Hook’s warnings, it is useful to also bear Juhl and Routledge’s (2013) assertions in mind about the content, triggers, and functions of an instance of nostalgia. In other words, to ask why is the subject nostalgic, what is the focus of the nostalgia, and does it serve any purpose? Asking those questions leads to a contemplation of the double perspective that is (most) often apparent across nostalgic and traumatic memory.

In what follows, then, instances of nostalgia will be identified in the novel, which can then be considered with the aforementioned ideas in mind. Firstly, I discuss nostalgia with regard to the characters, and secondly, nostalgia pertaining to place.

Nostalgia in the Novel: Characters

This novel is the story of a young woman who, faced with the crisis of an unplanned pregnancy, makes decisions that not only change the course of her life, but also unsettle the secrets and silences of her family’s past. What at the outset appears to be a case of simple homesickness is in fact the catalyst for far deeper yearnings. It is these yearnings that Joonie ponders as she narrates the story now as a much older woman. There are consequently two ‘levels’ of nostalgia to consider here: firstly, Joonie-the-narrator’s (or ‘older’ Joonie’s) overarching nostalgia for the people and places of her earlier life, and secondly, the characters’ nostalgia as experienced at that earlier time – the nostalgia experienced by ‘younger’ Joonie, by Laverne, and by Ma (Joonie’s grandmother and Laverne’s mother).

Because their lives have followed a similar pattern, Joonie's memories are entangled with Laverne's and Ma's memories. This entanglement of memory and history stretches back to a much earlier point than the lives of these three individuals. Their memories are in turn bound up with a sense of shame that has perpetuated from one generation of slave descendants to another. It is the "shame of having had our bodies stared at" (Wicomb 1998b:91), the sense of shame that accompanies objectification and powerlessness. Contemporary artists seeking to nullify that lingering attitude to women's bodies do so by confronting it artistically and changing the perspective: the objectified looks back, metaphorically returns the gaze, thereby challenging previous points of view.

A powerful example of this matching or reversing of the 'gaze' is Berni Searle's (1999) photographic art. In a series of photographs, a woman lies naked, covered – almost smothered – with ground spices. The spices, of course, link the woman to the history of the slave trade, which operated in conjunction with the spice trade, following the same sea routes. At the same time, the spices link her to the domesticity, labour, and service of the kitchen. But the subjects in Searle's photographs challenge the viewer by staring boldly back.⁶⁴

In what follows, I discuss how Jacobs presents Joonie in similar fashion to the subjects in Searle's photographs. As subject matter, Joonie is placed within the reader's gaze, simultaneously vulnerable and alluring. Metaphorically, she is covered in the spices of the slave trade, suggesting the limits of what is expected of and for her. At the same time, Joonie challenges ideas of passivity in the women of her community; she rejects notions of shame.

Jacobs's fictional writing overlaps with the biographical details of her own life and Joonie's characterisation could therefore be seen partially as a reflection of the author's search for identity. By unblinkingly 'returning the gaze', Joonie questions perceptions of identity and challenges the reader to explore what is behind the 'mask of spices'.

⁶⁴ Within the framing of both the broader global picture and the more intimate, localised picture, the woman in Searle's series of photographs is positioned as subject to preconceived roles of subalternity, of subjugation. However, the fact that the artist uses her own body as subject subverts the vulnerability of the woman. As the artist managing the project, the depiction, she takes control of the position she is placed in and instead leaves the 'gazer' vulnerable and unsure of their role. Once the viewer is aware that the subject and the artist are the same person, her perceived position as entrapped is nullified. She can in fact remove herself as easily as she has placed herself. The agency, the decision-making power, is hers. Ideas of subjectivity and passivity are therefore projected as being as ephemeral as the lingering scent or aroma of the strong spices that we can see in the pictures but that we cannot in fact smell. Their aroma is simply a lingering memory.

In one particularly striking picture, '*Untitled*' (Searle 1999), the woman subject is again vulnerable to the viewer's eyes, completely available to be looked at, but "in a simultaneous sense of vulnerability and potency" (Baderon 2014a:44) she gazes directly at the viewer, "undermin[ing] expectations of passivity" (Gqola 2010:178). The question arises: who is looking at whom? Also, because the back-and-forth staring of an art installation is overt, rather than covert, the viewer, in gazing at Searle's pictures, becomes self-consciously aware of the act of staring and can, therefore, begin to question or examine their reaction.

Joonie, as we shall see, retrieves a sense of identity and belonging for herself. She also recovers herself, her mother, and her grandmother from behind the ‘veil of shame’, effectively undoing their pattern of blame and shame. But before I discuss Joonie’s challenge to the status quo, however, I will discuss, by way of contrast, the content, triggers, and functions of Laverne’s nostalgia. Laverne, Joonie’s aunt/mother, is a generation older and their views of the past are markedly different.

Laverne: Averting the Gaze

As I have already mentioned, the lives of Laverne and Joonie follow a similar path, but the similarities dissipate because of their differing reactions to their challenges and circumstances. Although both become pregnant as unmarried teenagers, Laverne, unlike Joonie, is unable to confront the challenges this situation presents. Following the birth of her baby, Laverne leaves South Africa, taking employment as a nanny to a family emigrating to America. Now, seventeen years later, on meeting Joonie she has seventeen years’ worth of longing to appease.

Laverne’s nostalgia takes a decidedly ‘restorative’ form. Her present relationship with the homesick Joonie is reminiscent of Henk’s and Zan’s reunion (in *30 Nights in Amsterdam*). Zan also is intensely homesick all the time she is away from South Africa, and when Henk joins her in Amsterdam his presence triggers in her a more reflective nostalgia and a resurrection of traumatic memories that had been effectively submerged. Like Zan, Laverne has longed for home all this time, and she has kept a restoratively nostalgic picture of her home place intact as a “screen” (Hook 2012:233) to hide her deeply traumatic memories. Additionally, for Laverne, the screen is bolstered by the diasporic South African community of which she is a part and whose every conversation and interaction is permeated by a longing for the ‘homeland’.

When Laverne meets Joonie for the first time, therefore, she is hungry for news of life back home. “Now you have to tell me everything, Joonie. The whole scoop. How’s my brother? Auntie Olive? Ma?” (70). In response to Joonie’s news she declares, “Oh, I miss home. You don’t hear those kinds of stories in New Jersey” (71). For Joonie, Laverne’s adherence to her ‘South African-ness’ is comforting. Laverne peppers her speech with Afrikaans terms – such as “laatlammetjie” (70) and “deurmekaar” (73), and her cat’s name is “Skollie” (80) (a colloquialism for ‘layabout’) – saying that “‘it helps with homesickness to speak a little of your own language now and then’” (75). It appears that Laverne is intent on maintaining her connection to her South African roots, as when she declares, “‘I’m still a girl from the Cape’” (81). But the photographs she has pinned up in her kitchen are all old and dated. For example, Joonie observes one of herself as a very small girl (79). There are no recent pictures, indicating perhaps that the connection Laverne is carefully maintaining is not to her home and family as they are now but as they were in the past, and as reflected in those old photographs.

Reinforcing her connection to home, Laverne's group of friends are "some South Africans in Manhattan" to whom she refers as "the gang" (87). They introduce themselves to Joonie by identifying themselves as being from, for example, "Grassy Park" or "Belgravia Estate". Also, snippets of colloquial Afrikaans intersperse their conversation, terms such as "haai shame" (102), "ons straf jou" (103), "siss man" and "a tak of grapes" (104). When playing cards, they talk about "the people they knew back home" and friends whom they knew in high school (104). But, although Laverne tells Joonie that many of the South Africans she knows "never look back", there is always, for her, a "longing for the familiar sounds and smells of the mother country" (76), for "you never forget the place you come from" (76). Her home reflects those sentiments and is a nostalgically restorative 'shrine' full of kitsch art (which I mention again in the next section on nostalgia and place).

It is clear, then, that Laverne experiences a deep longing for home. By moving away and not keeping in regular contact with her family, she has become painfully disconnected from them; the lines of communication have broken down. But the move abroad and the lack of communication appear to be of Laverne's own doing. Her mother, Ma, is still angry with her for "running off to New York when she hadn't even finished school and [for] not keeping in touch with them" (60). Laverne, it appears, is in America in self-imposed exile. Because of the shame of an unplanned pregnancy at the age of fifteen, coupled with the stigma of mental ill-health and inability to bond with her baby, she ran away to a place where she did not need to confront these traumas.

It is not apparent how much she remembers regarding the pregnancy (and possibly other additional pregnancies). Ma tells how "[Laverne] didn't do well with the birth. It unhinged her and she ended up in Valkenberg Hospital with a stick between her teeth" (178). Laverne tells Joonie three different stories, each with a different ending. It is unclear whether she is describing three separate events or whether it is one story that she revises with each telling. One version ends in abortion, one with a still-birth, and another with the confiscation of the baby. Laverne is haunted by the child/ren she does not have. When Joonie comes to stay with her, the unwelcome memories that she has managed thus far to suppress now begin to resurface and her mental equilibrium falters, especially as Joonie is herself expecting a baby. After Joonie's baby, Bobby-Jo, is born, Laverne is unable to cope and completely breaks down mentally. Earlier, when asked directly if she ever considers going 'home', back to South Africa, Laverne says she "think[s] about it all the time" (100) but that "the longer you stay away the more you remember the things you didn't have and still won't get in your own country" (100). There is something lacking at home that she did not have and knows that she never will have. She did not have support or acceptance from her mother or her community and is left with an aching gap in her life. Such a profound gap could be better described as a void, which – as Punter puts it – "is about that moment when no quest seems possible; it is about an impossible draining of energy; it is about depression and melancholy" (2000:65).

One of the first stories Laverne tells Joonie is about her early pregnancy, which angered her mother, who “ ‘without asking [her], took [her] to a doctor [...] who recommended a scrape the next day’ ” (81). Her mother tried to “ ‘spare [her] from shame [and] said nothing to [her father] about the whole thing’ ” (81). Silence and shame are the traumas that haunt this woman. It is a sense of shame foisted on her by a society whose attitudes have been shaped by history. As discussed earlier, there is a historical legacy in South Africa of sexual exploitation of women, which furthermore puts the blame on women themselves and expects them to bear the associated shame in silence. The shame (according to Wicomb) is attached to ‘having had the body stared at’ and objectified. Laverne has been ‘looked at’ as shameful and is unable to ‘look back’ at it clearly, or to challenge it. Various versions are given of the circumstances that led to Laverne’s unplanned pregnancy. Laverne speaks of a love relationship with a young Muslim boy, Enver, (a compliant or consenting encounter), while Ma writes of a liaison with an older, white, bus driver (which implies that Laverne was exploited or possibly raped). Whoever the man involved, though, he is not contacted, questioned or confronted, nor is Laverne’s father informed. Whatever the circumstances, Laverne alone is made culpable and forced into silence. Her parents’ silence (whether inadvertent or not) deepens Laverne’s silence. She is not given space to express herself or to process her trauma. She therefore silently packs the past away into a restoratively nostalgic ‘box’. These silences surrounding Laverne are conducive to the forming of her ‘statically’ or ‘restoratively’ nostalgic version of the past. According to Mohamed and Ratele, “[p]articularly when its stated focus is a traumatic remembering, nostalgia cannot exist without silences” (2012:291). I would add to that comment by specifying that ‘restorative’ nostalgia relies on silences and subversions because to rearticulate the trauma, to speak about it and ‘un-silence’ it, would be to reflect on it.

Once ‘the problem’, the pregnancy, has been removed, Laverne is left to deal with the emotional consequences. Her response is to turn away from her pain, and to attempt another life in another place, taking along with her her ‘box’ of nostalgic memories. Hers is the life of the exile, the exile who will never return and who “develop[s] a peculiar kind of diasporic intimacy, a survivalist aesthetics of estrangement and longing” (Boym 2001:xix). Subsequently, she cannot develop emotionally because she longs for her past life, but that past has become a frozen picture in her mind’s eye. She merely survives. Her nostalgic memories are a screen, “like static snapshots whose formal exaggerations and triviality alert us to the fact that something has been excised” (Hook 2012:234). So Laverne’s mental picture of home is an outdated picture, and when Joonie arrives she brings along with her the picture of home as it is in the present. For Laverne, these two versions of home clash. For her to reconcile the two images, to form a double perspective, she will have to acknowledge home in its present manifestation. She will have to move on, mentally and emotionally, from the idealised image of home in the past to which she is anchored: home as it was before the traumatic events of losing her baby/babies. She must move beyond the trauma. Joonie’s presence forces Laverne out of her comfortable, restoratively nostalgic haze, out of the static mindset she has formed, and so she is confronted with the associated traumatic memories. She is forced to reflect. This is similar to the

function that Henk plays in Zan's confrontation with her own past (in *30 Nights*). Henk's presence forces Zan to reflect on the past anew and to confront her traumatic memories too. But unlike Zan, Laverne cannot deal with her profound trauma. Her restorative nostalgia is indeed a screen that has protected her ego, her sense of self, and that has enabled her survival. Instead of moving tentatively towards a more balanced truth, therefore, as Zan is able to do, Laverne retreats psychologically into her own world.

Trauma that is submerged will persistently re-present itself in one form or other in order to be acknowledged and resolved. Like Sangora, Laverne is given an opportunity to confront her traumatic losses again; Laverne can do so by vicariously living through Joonie's experiences of pregnancy, birth, and motherhood. (As I discuss in the next section, Joonie deals with her own trauma and nostalgia in a different way to Laverne. Through her process of healing Joonie is able to understand and empathise with Laverne's pain.)

By the time that Joonie understands that Laverne is her biological mother, Laverne's dementia is too advanced for them to acknowledge one another as mother and daughter. Laverne understands, at some level, that Joonie is the child that she lost but in her confusion thinks of Joonie as a baby. After returning to America once again to care for her, Joonie, at their final meeting, places her baby, Bobby-Jo, in Laverne's arms: "It's your baby, Mom. Don't cry anymore. It's Joonie" (200). In that moment she affirms Laverne's status as mother on two temporal levels simultaneously: by calling her 'Mom' she acknowledges her as her mother in the present, and by placing the baby in her arms she reconnects her with the baby that was taken from her. This is an example of Hook's concept of non-linear psychical time, which allows for an "appreciat[ion] of the simultaneity of past and present" (2012:235). Laverne is able to find peace through this re-enactment, even if it is not the 'truth' but rather another version of it.

The function of nostalgia in Laverne's story is thus twofold. Firstly, it has a selectively protective function in that – comprising only positive memories – it enables her to survive into her adult life by 'hiding' her traumatic memories. Secondly, her nostalgic memories alert others (e.g. Joonie and the reader) to the probability of Laverne's associated traumatic memories, enabling them to understand Laverne's pain. That is why understanding the nuances of 'nostalgic language' is important and valuable – because it enables and promotes empathy. Although Laverne has not been able to challenge her subject position, has been unable to 'gaze back' or 'write back', the reader (or Joonie), by interpreting her nostalgic memories and actions, is able to understand what she herself cannot independently express.

Joonie: Gazing Back

Joonie's nostalgic reminiscences serve a very different function to Laverne's. While Laverne has memories that attempt to 'restore' an idealised past, Joonie's nostalgic memories, in contrast, are

‘reflective’ (Boym 2001). By now a fifty-year-old woman, Joonie is the focaliser and protagonist of the novel. She nostalgically revisits the people and places of her past, questioning her decisions and comparing ‘what is’ with ‘what if’ – pondering on “how things might’ve turned out.” (241). Her pleasant memories are fragmented and interspersed with unpleasant truths or with gaps that demand to be filled, and she examines her memories in order to arrive at a meaningful interpretation.

In the narrative present, Joonie confronts the past from a vantage point of contentment and emotional ‘at-home-ness’, as did Sangora in *The Slave Book*, but, again like Sangora, she also looks to the past with a certain sense of longing for what she has left behind. What function does her nostalgic rumination serve in her quest for meaning? Nostalgia serves the purpose of drawing her intuitively towards moments where the “lie of affect” (Hook 2012:233) prominently presents a ‘sweet’ memory that seems to ignore an associated ‘bitter’ but more profound memory. By looking at the past uncompromisingly, albeit nostalgically, she tells her own story. She ‘gazes back’ at whoever is looking, and refuses to accept the shame with which her mother and her grandmother were humiliated. What she retrieves from the past – what she does not want to leave behind unacknowledged – is the strength, resilience and love of the generations of women who came before her and inspired her, so that she will be able to survive. Joonie’s backward glance is not simply a “phenomenon of the ego” (Hook 2012:230) meant to protect her sense of identity, as Laverne’s is. Rather, her backward glance is a “union of longing and critical thinking” (Dlamini 2010:18), a reflective nostalgia that evokes fond memories, as well as associated traumatic memories that require validation and examination.

From the outset, the reader is presented with contrasting images: on the one hand, the love and security Joonie enjoys as a child within her family, and on the other, the threats and dangers that are apparent outside of that sphere. She and her father “played football on the field across the road” and he “took [her] everywhere with him” (1), while her mother “relished the attention showered on [Joonie]” (1). Having established an image of love and security, however, the narrator swiftly introduces contrasting themes of sexual violence and the objectification of women and girls’ bodies. At the beginning of the novel, seven-year-old Joonie is traumatised by an uncle’s sexual abuse and witnesses her father’s violent retaliation in the form of “a cracking punch to the right side of his face [that] knocked him clean off his chair” (8). Added to the trauma of the abuse is the shock that her uncle “had called her a liar” (9) and the realization that “no one spoke about such things [...] it was too shameful” (9). Jacobs offers us an immediate juxtapositioning of Joonie’s sweet and bitter memories as well as a foreshadowing of her refusal to remain silent or complaisant in the face of injustice.

Subsequent to her uncle’s abusive behaviour, and to keep her out of harm’s way, Joonie is sent to spend weekends and holidays with Ma, her paternal grandmother, in District Six. This is an idyllic time during which they develop a strong bond. Joonie “cuddle[s] up” with her grandmother “watching the rain” (10), and they eat “warm bowls of custard [and] chocolates” (10). There is “so much activity” at her grandmother’s “cottage in Chapel Street [where] Ma [knows] all the neighbours” (9).

She is a woman to whom others tell their “deepest, darkest secrets” (11). Ma listens, without judgement, and gives advice, while Joonie, listening in, learns valuable lessons about the harshness of life for the women of her community, and simultaneously about their resilience. At the same time, she is immersed in an atmosphere of acceptance, camaraderie/sisterhood, and belonging. This home ‘education’ is not an ‘immunization’, however, and despite being a clever girl with dreams of becoming a lawyer, Joonie finds herself with a problem similar to that of so many of the young women who have visited Ma on her ‘stoep’ in the past. At 17, she meets a young man, Blair, and is pregnant by the time he leaves town.⁶⁵

The pregnancy is the catalyst that sparks radical change. On a practical level, it interrupts her education. Emotionally, she feels bereft and abandoned by the young man who left without saying goodbye. Ma takes her to an old woman “who helps girls in [her] situation” (37) but Joonie chooses to maintain the pregnancy. The word ‘shame’ is not used by the family, but Joonie knows that they are “so disappointed” (36). On hearing the news, Joonie’s “mother’s eyes narrowed with anger” (42) and Joonie could tell that her father “felt deeply disappointed” (43) when he left the house incapable of speaking to her. Her mother insists on abortion telling Joonie that what she has done is “wrong in God’s eyes” (42). Alternatively, Joonie should go away and give the baby up for adoption: “No one need ever know that you were pregnant” (42), her mother insisted. Shame: the word is not uttered, but it is implied.

Throughout the ensuing years, Joonie is expected to feel shame for the pregnancy. Her parents’ reaction implies a sense of shame; Blair’s mother shuts the door in her face saying, “‘he’s not a friend for [you]’ ” (37); and the lecherous Reverend Martinus uses the opportunity to try to take advantage of her, telling her, “‘you’ve been a naughty girl, Joonie’ ” (46). Later, when Joonie becomes engaged to Stavros, in America, Stavros tells his mother that Joonie’s child is the result of a rape. He offers this explanation, to ‘spare’ her reputation, thereby implying that he too finds his fiancée’s status as unwed mother shameful. Joonie refuses to accept blame or shame, however, telling her mother, “‘I want to have her and keep her. It wasn’t rape. I had feelings for Blair.’ ” (53).

As Joonie, now in her fifties, recounts the events of those years, her memories of her relationship with Blair are loving and tender. This is perhaps a restoratively nostalgic memory, sentimental even, that enables her to fend off the crowding shameful feelings. She holds onto the memory of their relationship as mutually loving, and Blair’s disappearance, or absence, as a misunderstanding. A more sceptical view would see Blair as an opportunistic boy taking advantage of a lovelorn girl before leaving for army life. In her mother’s view, “Blair took advantage of [her] and ran off” (53). This view of him as a careless, arrogant young man would support the idea that “the history of sexual violence in

⁶⁵ The Blair character is classified as ‘white’ and is therefore conscripted by the apartheid government to do National Service in the army.

South Africa [...] has given both white and black men [a] sense of sexual entitlement” (Baderoon 2014:91). In Joonie’s version of events, when Blair learns about the child, much later in the narrative, he seeks to be involved in their lives.⁶⁶

Either way, whether conceived in love or exploitation, it is by making the decision to have and keep the baby, and choosing to believe that the child was conceived in mutual love, that Joonie alters the course of her life. Joonie refuses to cultivate a victim mentality and knows that life would have been different “if [she] had let the old woman flush out [her] uterus and not had the baby and never left South Africa” (241). Joonie’s choices are indeed a turning point because although she does not accept the unspoken shame surrounding her pregnancy, she does acknowledge the ‘sensibilities’ of her family and community. They cannot easily shrug off the sense of shame that society imposes. She is thus motivated to go away to her Aunt Laverne, a woman she has never met, in New York.

Homesickness strikes Joonie within months of arriving in New York. It is this dislocation that spurs her search for a sense of identity and a place of belonging. As family, Aunt Laverne initially provides a sense of belonging. However, as Laverne succumbs to mental illness, Joonie is overwhelmed with loneliness and understands what her aunt had meant earlier when she had told her, “you could live in a city of eight million people and still be achingly lonely” (93). Joonie is now isolated and alone. Although she is warmly welcomed by the South African diaspora that are Laverne’s friends and substitute family, she cannot quite relate to them. They reminisce about, and represent, a much earlier South Africa that is alien to Joonie.

Carrying with her the inherited unease about identity typical of the descendants of slaves, her journey to New York seems to accentuate her difficulties of self-definition. Even her diasporic South African friends in New York cannot resist the desire to ‘place’ her, “‘Joonie’s not white. She only looks white’ ” (121). She balks at the label ‘Coloured’ with its ambiguities and negative connotations (that I discussed earlier, in the introduction to this section). This term does not provide for any sense of self. “‘Some people don’t mind being called coloured. I do’ ” (86 *already quoted*), as Joonie says. Unsettled in Cape Town, unsettled in New York, she is indeed “homesick and sick of home” (Boym 2001:xix). Furthermore, her search for a sense of self, her relationship with herself, is entangled with her relationships with men. In her loneliness, she begins a relationship with Stavros, a young second-generation Greek immigrant. This relationship only serves to further complicate her feelings of being in-between, of being unable to define herself. It appears that there is a hierarchy even amongst the diasporic and the migrant, depending on the length of stay and on origin. Stavros tells her that his

⁶⁶ Jacobs as author does not, however, give the character Blair the benefit of the doubt or a chance to prove his sincerity. He is killed while in the army. On this point, the plot shares a striking similarity to *The Slave Book*, where another couple’s relationship (also cross-cultural) is denied longevity, despite marriage, due to the man’s untimely violent death, which can be directly or indirectly attributed to the hands of their ‘own people’ respectively. In both stories, hope and the future live on through the life of the woman and the child who survive the father.

family will expect him to marry a Greek girl, that Greeks “‘won’t marry out of the culture’” (119). His mother is suspicious of Joonie’s motives and “ma[kes] a snide remark about immigrants coming into the country and trying to marry innocent guys for citizenship” (210).

Uncomfortable in New York, she yearns for her father, grandmother, and mother in Cape Town. She comforts herself with “thoughts of Ma’s love of hot-cross buns and her father’s weakness for marshmallow Easter eggs [, her mother’s] roast leg of lamb and potatoes and sweet yellow rice” (93). These are the very people she had sought to escape, admitting that “I hadn’t left South Africa for benefits – I had run away” (112). Now, she longs to run back to them. Calling home, she tells her father, “‘I needed to hear your voice. Say something in Afrikaans, Dad’ ” (94). When her relationship with Stavros deteriorates into abuse, in what appears to be another rotation of the cycle of violence that the women of her family endure, Joonie flees back to whence she came, to her parents, family and community in Cape Town.

Once again, though, warm memories – in this case memories of her return to the place where she believes she belongs – are accompanied by deeply upsetting memories. She uncovers the secret of her parentage: her father is in fact her uncle, who adopted her, and Laverne is her biological mother. Her grandmother has breached the silence of this subject in a letter (written before her death) further fragmenting Joonie’s insecure sense of identity. Her grandmother, ‘Ma’, and her adoptive mother, Merle, have been cowed by a sense of shame and have silently kept Joonie’s identity a secret.

Joonie’s account of her younger life, then – from her vantage point as an older woman – is an attempt to retrace the steps of her quest of defining her sense of self. Her story includes recollections of her relationships with the various men she becomes involved with. Her relationships with men are complicated by socio-historical assumptions regarding women and women’s bodies (that I discussed earlier). With each relationship, though, Joonie works through the sense of shame that generations have endured and silently perpetuated. Her nostalgic retracings chart her progress. This is a profoundly traumatic process, however, culminating in a vicious verbal and physical attack by her lover Stavros. Ultimately, she is confronted with his angry question, “Who the fuck do you think you are!” (234). This outburst encapsulates the overriding question of her personal search. In this awful clash, she fatally stabs Stavros, a violent act that does not of course provide an answer to the question of who she is, but does dramatically go some way to declaring who she is not. She is not someone who will passively accept another’s claim to her body. Nor will she allow the projection of another’s shame onto her body. Her tendency to challenge such assertions of power begins when she is seven years old, at the defining moment when she is wrongly accused of lying by a sexually abusive family member.

Knowing without any doubt (even as a child) that her abuser is in the wrong, she refuses to accept unjust blame and shame.⁶⁷

Joonie's story is fraught with traumatic events: paedophilia, exploitation, rape, violence, abandonment, lies, silences, disconnections within the family, man-slaughter, and mental illness. But she tells her story in a nostalgic tone, with many warm and affectionate details, especially about her grandmother. How is this possible and why is she nostalgic? It seems that the 'sweet' parts of her story enable Joonie to survive and tell the 'bitter' parts. Nostalgia has indeed served as "a mode of protection" (Hook 2012:230) by providing the balance required for her to acknowledge and process her traumatic memories.

Ma: Breaking the Silence / Interrupting the Cycle

Nostalgia's protective function has been manifested in both Joonie and Laverne, but in distinctly different ways. Joonie has been able to confront her past by superimposing her nostalgic and traumatic memories in a type of double perspective. Contrastingly, for Laverne, a nostalgic version of the past that excludes traumatic memory has given her a one sided, limited version of the truth, but that is a version with which she can cope.

Joonie and Laverne react differently to the similar circumstances of their pasts, but it is important to note that by finally coming together and acknowledging each other they are each, however, able to continue with life in different fashion. Most important for this reconciliation is the common thread in their lives: their mother/grandmother, Ma. It is Ma who engineers their reunion and it is, finally, she who breaks the silence surrounding their biological relationship, thereby enabling 'closure'. But again, it is due to the entanglement of the three women's lives and histories that Ma is able to do so. With each generation there is a repetition of events. As I mentioned earlier, Laverne has the opportunity to vicariously re-experience the traumas of her own pregnancy and birthing when Joonie gives birth. Laverne is still unable to process the trauma during this second re-enactment of pregnancy and birth, which further destabilizes her mental equilibrium. For Ma, Joonie's pregnancy is a third opportunity emotionally to process her past experiences, for she, herself, became pregnant as a teenager. For Ma, it was partly an attempt to escape her home life. As we now understand, she supported her own mother by caring for her many younger siblings. When Ma's daughter, Laverne, becomes pregnant out of wedlock, she rejects the opportunity to break the cycle of exploitation and shame. Ma withholds emotional support from Laverne and, when Laverne leaves following her mental breakdown, their communication breaks down, making Ma complicit in the secrecy surrounding Joonie's parentage.

⁶⁷ Following Stavros's death, Joonie is rigorously questioned at the police station, but is released, pending an investigation. The lawyer who represents her points out that it is "obvious from the scene of the crime and [her] bruises that [her] action was in self-defence" (238) and that, additionally, witnesses have given exonerating statements. Ultimately, Joonie does not face any legal consequences for Stavros's death.

Ma has grown, however, with each new pregnancy of daughter/granddaughter, reaching a point where she is able to organise unifying events. When Joonie announces her pregnancy, Ma tells her that the choice of how to proceed is her own. She takes her to an abortionist, but when Joonie declines that option Ma supports her decision. We assume that it is Ma's suggestion that Joonie travel to New York to stay with Laverne for the duration of the pregnancy. She certainly supports the move, whether or not she understands the implications or can foresee the outcome. It is perhaps an intuitive move towards reconciliation that indicates independent thinking, rather than a reliance on the dictates of society. Finally, it is Ma's letter to Joonie, and the journals she left for her, that break the silence and reveal the secrets of Joonie's origins.

Is Ma a nostalgic character? She likes to tell stories on her 'stoep', first at her own house in District Six, and later at Joonie's parents' house, when she comes to live with them. She is a sociable woman who likes to talk to people. She tells stories of longing that grandmothers tell their grandchildren: stories of happy times that by-pass unhappy/traumatic times (Frankish and Bradbury 2012:300). These could be deemed to be restoratively nostalgic accounts: static depictions of the past as utopian fantasies. But, although she does not talk about her early life, she does not entirely submerge those memories. She has simply tucked the memories away, although she has obviously reflected quietly on them in private. From the safety of the grave – in the form of letters – she passes on to Joonie the secrets of which she was made to feel ashamed. Subsequently, Joonie, true to her seven-year-old self, refuses to continue the silence or to accept shame.

In the nostalgic creation of Ma as a character, then, Jacobs has fashioned a stereotypical grandmother figure. She is nurturing and involved, and although she is a somewhat peripheral figure whose internal imaginings elude the reader, she is pivotal to the plot and to the outcomes of both Laverne's and Joonie's lives. Ma, as a nostalgic character type, is the pillar of family who provides the love and support that empowers Joonie. Nostalgic memories of her grandmother not only allow Joonie to accept and empathise with certain actions and decisions Ma made that have negatively affected Joonie's life, but also to acquire the strength required for her to face her own demons (and those of Laverne and Ma). As a result, Joonie is able to be the woman who can finally stand up to adversity on behalf of her family's earlier generations and also, symbolically, for all women negatively affected by their heritage as the descendants of slaves.

*

In the process of telling her story, Joonie (with Ma's help) has broken the silence surrounding her grandmother's and mother's stories. When she speaks, when she 'gazes back', she does so on their behalf too. Their lives have followed a cycle of traumatic re-enactment, but although events and traumas of the past are repeated, Joonie's story does not end exactly at her 'point of origin'. It seems

that there has been a shift, so that, in effect, there is a ‘spiralling’ rather than a strict recycling. The story ends with an optimistic “living on, [so that there is a] provisional moving onwards, or sideways, or somewhere else, [an] incremental yet perceptible progression” (Boehmer 2012:43). Joonie ends her narrative with a comment about her daughter, Bobby-Jo, who now has two children of her own: “I had to let her make her own mistakes” (248). This infers that Bobby-Jo will not have to repeat the unresolved mistakes of her forebears.

Joonie’s ‘forward spiral’ – the psychological shift from a recycling of trauma to an “accidental living on” (Boehmer 2012:43) – has been facilitated by her physical shift from one place to another, and back. Like Henk in *30 Nights*, Joonie travels to another country on another continent and in doing so dislodges entrenched mental habits. In the next section I explore the novel’s nostalgic considerations of place and space.

Nostalgia in the Novel: Places

Joonie is set in Cape Town and New York City. Nostalgic longing, however, is concentrated on the city of Cape Town. There is a yearning for Cape Town when the protagonist is located in New York, but it is a longing that persists even when she returns to Cape Town because she in fact longs for an earlier time of her life in this city. *The Slave Book* visited the same Cape location, but approximately 150 years earlier in the 1830s. Between the two novels there is thus a trajectory from a period of slavery – which was followed by periods of colonialism and apartheid – to the current era of democracy. As the descendants of slaves, the characters in *Joonie* are in the same geographical location as their forebears, but the city of Cape Town has changed from the time detailed in *The Slave Book* (when it was referred to more generally as ‘the Cape’).

Positioned in Cape Town in the 2000s, an older Joonie, as narrator, retrospectively gives a nostalgic account of her earlier life there in the 1970s and 80s. If nostalgia is more about a discontented present than it is about the past, then what is it about the current circumstances of this location that initiates nostalgic looking back? For Wegner, considerations of space/place are “a continuous dissolution and reorganization of the environments [...] that we all inhabit” (2002:181). For Joonie, between ‘then’ and ‘now’ Cape Town has become a ‘different’ place; it has altered. Although it is now an environment of democracy and freedom, it is also, in postcolonial terms, a site of displacement and dislocation.

Another consideration in relation to space is that *Joonie* has urban settings: the city of Cape Town and the city of New York. (Hence, my reference to ‘Cape Town’ when discussing *Joonie*, rather than to ‘the Cape’.) The novel does not venture into rural settings beyond the city limits as the earlier novel does, although by moving between Cape Town and New York it does not focus exclusively on the

South African city either. The novel's expanded scope therefore highlights the characters' freedom of movement in this time period. Also significant in *Joonie's* representation of space, are homes as intimate spaces. Contrastingly, in *The Slave Book* there are few homes to describe because, as slaves, the characters do not own homes. In what follows, I examine some of the spaces visited in *Joonie* and discuss their significance.

Cape Town and New York: Spaces of Production and Force

The author and the protagonist of *Joonie* are nostalgic about Cape Town in the 1970s and 80s. If “there is a causal link between negative mood and nostalgia” (Wildschut et al. 2006:989), if nostalgia is initiated by discontent in the present, what has triggered the need for this nostalgic revisit?

As I have said, Cape Town, the city in which we meet the protagonist in the 2000s, is a ‘site of dislocation’. Considering why this should be so, we should first consider that

space itself is both a *production*, shaped through a diverse range of social processes and human interventions, and a *force* that, in turn, influences, directs and delimits possibilities of action and ways of being in the world. (Wegner 2002:181)

In other words, space is shaped *by* human society, but it in turn exerts a certain influence *on* society.

Second, we should consider the social forces particular to the production of the places specific to this novel – Cape Town and New York – and the forces they subsequently exert. In this regard, and beginning by examining the Cape Town setting, I refer back to the introduction to this section (on the novel *Joonie*), where I discussed the complications and ambiguities that are inherent in the term ‘Cape Malay/Muslim/Coloured’. I pointed out how Jacobs has retained the uncertainties and insecurities of the term/s with regard to her characters. With regard to physical location, Jacobs again exploits feelings of ambivalence because she writes about a place whose community is deeply affected by such utter uncertainties. It is a place populated (predominantly) by the descendants of slaves, and is furthermore a place where, during apartheid, inhabitation was politically and legally dictated and controlled. Many people were forcibly moved from one area to another. Initial settlement was involuntary (during slavery) and habitation afterwards continued in a hostile environment (during periods of colonialism and apartheid). These are the socio-political forces that have affected this location – the Cape/Cape Town – and that have shaped and affected its society.

Now, at the temporal point from which the novel is narrated, there is a political system of democracy and equality, but even so this is not a place of contentment. As a space, it exerts a certain “force that [...] influences, directs, and delimits possibilities of action and ways of human being in the world” (Wegner 2002:181). However, identifying or understanding the inherent ‘forces’ this city-space exerts requires careful consideration of the complicated entanglements of its history. Because slaves were brought to the Cape from many different locations in Asia and Africa, this community “engage[s] [...] with not only the changing South African state and citizenry, but also with the South East Asian

region” (Gqola 2010:138). To whom does the community owe its allegiance?⁶⁸ There is a need for a feeling of belonging, but a history of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid – each with its own subjugations – complicates the ideas of belonging and the wounds of the past therefore remain unhealed. The question that arises when taking into account the diversity of past influences is whether this community has a diasporic identity or an African identity?

In the same manner that post-apartheid South Africa has opened up the terrain of race/ethnic belonging to a variety of meanings, it has permitted the revisiting of earlier positions by Cape Malay/Muslim on multiple belongings. (Gqola 2010:138)

When considering nostalgia in this novel, then, “belongingness deficits” (Seehusen et al. 2013:905) can be considered the root of the discontent that triggers nostalgic remembering. The need to belong is a strong inducement for nostalgia, which “can serve as an indirect strategy for coping with belongingness deficits” (Seehusen et al. 2013:905). With *The Slave Book* and *Joonie*, Jacobs facilitates “multiple belongings” (Gqola 2010:138). She mines the memory of slavery in *The Slave Book*, honouring and recognising the presence, influence, and contribution of slaves in the Cape, and traces the beginnings of a unique cultural heritage. In *Joonie*, Jacobs connects with the same place but in a more recent past, illustrating a community’s strong and unique cultural identity, which is now firmly entrenched in its geographical location (but which is also undeniably linked to its Cape Malay identity). In this way, by facilitating multiple belongings, she illustrates “a link, rather than a rupture, between the rejection of a Cape Malay identity during the anti-apartheid struggle and its later rediscovery and celebration in contemporary South Africa” (Gqola 2010:138).

Nostalgic longings for a place of belonging become apparent in *Joonie* when the protagonist leaves home for the first time. Joonie longs for her home in Cape Town when she travels to New York. At first, she marvels that “here she actually [is] in the great United States of America” (72). New York offers a temporary reprieve from the disconcerting ‘forces’ of Cape Town and the difficulties of her life. Generally acknowledged as a place of new beginnings, as the land of the free, and known for its promise of the American dream, Joonie regards this destination as an escape, and as a place to hide. But although she wants to regard the city as a blank space, she must acknowledge that as a city-space, New York of course has its own unique set of social forces. It has produced, for example, a ‘hierarchy of immigrants’, which is evident in the suspicion that surrounds Joonie’s relationship with Stavros, a second-generation Greek immigrant; his family believes that Joonie wishes to exploit their position as

⁶⁸ Gqola points out that “Dutch and British slaves forced to work in the Cape were captured from a variety of locations in South (East) Asia, East Africa, as well as the South African interior” and that “[m]ost people with a known varied ancestry prioritise one [of those locations] with whose name to identify themselves” (2010:51). She explains the South African dilemma thus: An “‘overdetermined’ identity in Malay diasporic celebrations, because it is posited as a ‘single identity’, actively functions as a denunciation of contemporary South Africa as a valid/valuable home. Amidst conservative expressions of black domination and coloured marginalization, thus fracturing Black alliances which pre-date democracy, this rejection is highly troubling for it validates these racist narratives. However, if the same impulse is seen as a desire to open up the terrain of Black internal and multiple belongings simultaneously, it gestures towards creative and progressive ends” (2010:141).

established Americans. However, from the outset she has no intention of staying – she has “‘come here to hide [her] shame’” (100) – and she soon becomes homesick for Cape Town. Her longing is initiated by the discontent of ‘not being at home’, which is exacerbated by the restlessness of the diasporic community of which she becomes a part, and by “New York’s highly strung disposition” (77). She is able to see things anew in this location. Although “they say America is a melting pot of cultures, and of new beginnings [and that] there’re all kinds of people here; [and] everyone wants to stay” (134) – she ultimately does not. What her time in New York makes possible is the objectivity required to comprehend Cape Town as home, to see herself as a South African rather than one of its diasporic inhabitants.

In *30 Nights in Amsterdam*, Van Heerden similarly utilises a double perspective – the protagonist straddling two countries – which offers his characters the objectivity they need to accept South Africa as their home. However, unlike Van Heerden’s use of Amsterdam as a narrative setting – a city which has cultural significance for the Afrikaner – the use of New York as alternative location in *Joonie* does not have any cultural ties for Jacobs or her characters. It is a neutral space – a place apart – that simply offers them a long-range perspective and the opportunity to experience a truly diasporic and migrant status by way of comparison to their experiences in South Africa.

Double Perspectives: Different Times / Different Places

If nostalgia in the novel is triggered by ‘belongingness deficits’, why does it – in its longing – focus on the un-picturesque suburbs of Maitland and Grassy Park in the Cape Town of the 1980s, the last years of apartheid? Why does it not focus on a more familiar site of belonging, such as District Six in the 1960s? Zoë Wicomb notes District Six’s “assumption as ethnic homeland” (1998b:94-95) and how there is a “self-fashioning of a totalizing colouredness located in a mythologized District Six of the 1950s and 60s” (95). In the search for one’s identity, would not this location be ideal? But in the same way that Jacobs has retained an ambivalence for her characters, so too has she retained ambivalence in her choice of time and place.⁶⁹

I suggest that Jacobs, as author, is drawn to a place (Cape Town) at a time when it was different – ‘then’ an apartheid space; ‘now’ a democratic space – with a similar motivation to Jacob Dlamini’s in his *Native Nostalgia* (2010). Dlamini revisits the township of his youth (Katlehong) to show that there was “a richness, a complexity of life among black South Africans that not even colonialism and apartheid at their worst could destroy” (2010:19). Jacobs utilises the double perspective of time –

⁶⁹ Although the novel visits District Six (albeit briefly), it does not become sentimentally entrapped there. During the school holidays, Joonie visits her grandmother in the “house with the high ceilings, [and] polished red stoep” (14). It was where Ma had spent her life thus far; she “knew every little shop, alleyway and trestle table where fresh fish was sold” (14). Forced to give up the house, “she said she would miss staying at the foot of the mountain and long for the intoxicating smells and sounds of District Six” (14). However, having lingered until the bulldozers came, the novel’s focus moves to Grassy Park and Maitland: away from a location where, as Wicomb would say, “ethnicity [i]s constructed within a politics of nostalgia that sentimentalize[s] the loss” (1998b:95).

comparing ‘then’ and ‘now’ – to arrive at an understanding of ‘the richness and complexity of life’ in Cape Town. Before Joonie is able to compare different time periods, though, she must first make a comparison between different places, which she does when she experiences the loneliness of migrant life in the USA.

For Joonie, the 1970s and 80s are the decades on which her nostalgic memories focus, but her initial reflections are evoked with regard to place, as perceived through the double perspective that geographical distance affords. (As established earlier, nostalgia is often focussed on a particular time, in a particular place.) Leading a migrant and diasporic life in another city, in another country, she longs for Cape Town. Her homesickness appears to prompt the question of where she belongs but, as Seehusen and others (2013:905) have pointed out, the need to belong is what prompts nostalgia. A nostalgic frame of mind – when dwelling on the need to belong – could therefore be an endless cycle of irresolute contemplation. However, it is perhaps the way in which nostalgia is employed that could determine the outcome of such explorations. Here Boym’s typologies are once again useful. A ‘restorative’ approach (which in Medalie’s (2010) terminology would be called ‘static’) could well be irresolute. Alternatively, ‘reflective’ nostalgia (or in Medalie’s terms ‘evolved/contemplative’ nostalgia) could perhaps provide the platform for the resolution of this conundrum, because reflective nostalgia would focus on both the pleasant and traumatic aspects of the need to belong. Thus, the cycle could be broken. Both Laverne and Joonie are affected by ‘belongingness deficit’. But because their nostalgic memories take different forms – restorative, in Laverne’s case, or reflective, in Joonie’s case – the outcome for each of them is different. For Laverne, belongingness deficit and restorative nostalgia become an endless, unresolved cycle, whereas for Joonie, belongingness deficit and reflective nostalgia lead to a breakthrough.

As I discussed in the previous subsection (Nostalgia in the Novel: Characters), Joonie is faced not only with her own homesickness in New York, but also with Laverne’s accumulated sense of longing for her homeland. She is confronted furthermore with the collective homesickness of Laverne’s diasporic group of friends, who process their sense of longing in different ways and therefore produce different outcomes.

Clustering together as a diasporic group provides some comfort: as Laverne points out, “[p]eople from the same country live in small pockets here; it helps with the homesickness to speak a little of your own language” (75). Laverne misses home. She says that “‘you never forget the place you come from’” (76), but because home is, for her, a restoratively nostalgic place, fixed in a time that is past, she can never go back to it. She acknowledges that “‘displacement is the immigrant’s plight’” but is reluctant to grapple with it, complacently accepting that “‘for South Africans, it means another identity crisis. You feel displaced wherever you go’” (76). Laverne’s ‘belongingness deficit’ therefore fuels her nostalgia, and, in turn, because her nostalgia is of a ‘static’ nature, it perpetuates her feelings of not belonging.

Joonie's longing for home is complicated by her relationship with Stavros and by the fact that, being born in the USA, her child is American. To add to her existential confusion, Joonie learns furthermore that Laverne is her mother (not her aunt) and a sense of duty therefore keeps her in America to care for her. Because "[she's] far away from home and [she] need[s] to have some friends'" (212) she socializes with people who are "'South African [explaining that] it'll be good for [her]'" (208). However, she comes to the understanding that she will never feel a sense of belonging in America. "'We come here from tight-knit groups and we're like fish out of water. We flounder. We don't know how to cope. You only succeed if you give in completely and become one of them'" (242). Due to a series of events, Joonie travels to and fro between the two countries. Slowly, she begins to consider that Cape Town is where she feels at home despite Laverne's claim that, as South Africans, they will feel displaced wherever they go. Despite inherent ambivalences, there is a measure of recognition amongst South Africans that she had not comprehended before: "'Here [in South Africa] black or white, despite everything, you can knock on anyone's door and ask for a piece of bread. You know the way a South African thinks'" (54). And in terms of her relationship with her daughter's father, she later feels that, "[d]espite their different colour classification, she and Blair were cut from the same political and emotional cloth" (129).

So Joonie, through deep reflection, arrives at the understanding that South Africa is where she feels a (tentative) sense of belonging (even though it is an ambiguous relationship). The conflict of being in one place yet longing to be in another finally manifests as depression. Her doctor's response is that "'It's clear [...] that you don't belong here [in America] and that you'll be happier in your own country'" (196).

By moving between the two cities she has the clarity of distance to see each more clearly from the vantage point of the other. Thus, the double perspective between 'here' and 'there' leads to Joonie's ultimate decision to return to Cape Town together with her child. Here, after she has returned, she reflects on her perpetual feeling of nostalgic longing (despite her current presence in the place she was longing for). She attempts, by examining earlier times, to piece together the fragments of her identity.

The fragments (of identity) are often to be found in the intimate spaces of houses and homes, and in the artefacts that furnish those spaces, which I discuss next.

Intimate Spaces: Home, Food, and Body

In New York, Joonie feels intense longing for home: more exactly, for the city of Cape Town but more specifically for the family home. Although she is in the home of another family member in New York (Laverne), she is displaced and feels dislocated. Also, as mentioned above, Laverne is herself dislocated and she compounds their mutually felt *Unheimlichkeit* by asserting that as South Africans they will always feel a sense of displacement. That sense of displacement can be traced back to several distinct points of time in their recent past. Joonie's immediate sense of dislocation arises from her

sudden move to New York. Additionally, in her early childhood she experiences her grandmother's mandatory move away from District Six. Laverne's feeling of dislocation stems from her immigration to New York seventeen years earlier.

Joonie, through nostalgic reflection, opens a space for submerged trauma to be acknowledged. She confronts her homesickness and seeks to understand the nostalgic longings that develop when she is in New York. Laverne, however, having suffered similar homesickness, responds differently. She 'freezes' the mental picture she has of her original home and creates a dusty emotional shrine to it in her new home. Her decorations include "wooden giraffes and rhinos and lions and other African knick-knacks [...] white lace doilies [...] and a framed picture of Table Mountain on the wall as well as two springbok hides on the floor" (76). Her nostalgia is reflected in her choice of kitsch art, which has an "important diagnostic value" (Baderon 2014a:3). Although "kitsch is generally used in a derogatory fashion, it can also be used in an affirmative sense when it refers to items of nostalgia" aiding the recollection of a "lost world" (Buchanan 2010:269). Also displayed are "some photographs pinned on a board" that are faded and old. One of them is of Joonie "at about five years old" (79), indicating Laverne's attachment to her lost home.

Laverne asserts that "'displacement is the immigrant's plight'" (76) but additionally "'for South Africans, it means another identity crisis. You feel displaced wherever go'" (76), suggesting a hauntedness and a concession that the feelings of displacement and insecurity are inherent and inescapable. Her comments echo Punter's suggestion that "trauma [...] forever inserts a wedge into history's doors, keeping them open" (2000:137), whether it is remembered or forgotten. But if trauma is "by definition something one is not able to remember [...], as such, it repeats itself indefinitely" (Zizek; qtd in Wolfreys 2002:136). Underlying their feelings of displacement, therefore, is their reaction to an uncanny reiteration of the displacement suffered by slave ancestors.

It is interesting to keep in mind the uncanny influence of slave displacements when considering Joonie's homesickness: she is homesick for Cape Town but her focus is on the home space, the family home. As I mentioned before, the author from the outset contrasts the threats and challenges outside of the home with nostalgic memories of life within the family home. Although their house "was in a bleak area close to the cemetery, where the cottages were crammed in together like fish sticks" (22), Joonie's memories are of a secure and nurturing space. She remembers having supper in the kitchen when her father came home (28), where he listened to cricket on the radio (52), and her grandmother "vigorously stirred the logs in the grate of the coal stove" (58). Joonie's search for a place of belonging, therefore, happens through 'visiting' home imaginatively while she is in another place, physically removed. Although this is a humble home, "a modest cottage with a small stoep" (21), it is

the intimate space where the bonding of human lives occurs.⁷⁰ The slaves in the previous novel (*The Slave Book*) are similarly connected in their intimate gathering spaces (e.g. beneath the apricot or mulberry tree, or round the light from a stub of candle at night). In similar fashion, Ma entertains her frequent visitors by telling stories and listening to them on the 'stoep'. As home, this house forms the focal point of Joonie's world, it is the home she nostalgically yearns for. Nostalgia is, of course, the yearning for a return home. But underlying the celebration of this particular home, perhaps, is also the subconscious and uncanny celebration of an eventual metaphorical home for the almost-forgotten slave forebears who did not have physical homes in their time.

Memories of home often evoke memories of food, which provides more than simple bodily nourishment. Remembering meals is to remember having been nurtured. Joonie remembers her mother's cooking, such as the "mince frikadels" (40) she prepared, and the "roast lamb [with] sweet yellow rice full of fruity raisins" (93). People bond by preparing food and sharing meals, and these practices can be traditional manifestations of culture. Joonie's memories of the typical 'Malay' dishes are, therefore, concerned with her strong sense of belonging in her mother's kitchen but also in the community in which her mother's kitchen is situated. Furthermore, as Baderoon suggests, "images of the kitchen are weighted with repressed knowledge" (2014a:50) in relation to slave history. If food and meals are considered as cultural memorials, then Joonie's profound and persistent memories of food can also be seen as "slave memory conceptualized as a shadow which hovers above the present and influences it in unpredictable ways" (Gqola 2010:9). Thus, by searching for a sense of identity within memories of her family home Joonie is perhaps encountering fragments of memories from a much earlier historical ancestry, experiencing an "uncanny nearness [and] a coded trauma" (Baderoon 2014a:50).

In addition to the cultural and artistic implications of meals, giving and preparing food can be seen as a nurturing and life-affirming act. To feed someone is to invest hope in his or her future and a sense of worth in their physical body. But Joonie's memories of being nurtured and fed in her mother's kitchen conflict with the tacit rejection she suffers when she becomes pregnant. She and Laverne both flee to America under similar circumstances: their bodies are 'shameful' and must be taken away from the 'gaze'. They are both displaced from home, but worse still, they both experience a sense of dislocation from their own physical selves/bodies. Laverne succumbs to mental illness in the form of dementia. Joonie suffers depression. Thus, at the heart of this novel of displacement is the site of the woman's body as a site of ambiguity and submerged trauma. It is the site of a struggle for a sense of identity, a sense of self, a sense of worthiness and wholeness. Ultimately, the idea of the body as commodity or object must be replaced with the idea of the body as sacred and subjective agency. To be content in the

⁷⁰ A similarly simple house/home appears as another focal point of nostalgic longing in Ronnie Govender's novel, *Song of the Atman* (discussed in Chapter 6).

present and to look towards the future, Joonie must acknowledge her ‘woman’s body’ as a body worthy to be fed and nurtured.

When Joonie returns from New York, she asks the shop owner, “‘do you remember me, Mr Ali?’” It is as if she needs to be reassured that she exists. He replies, “‘Of course. You live just down the road’” (163). With these simple words he acknowledges her and her place in the community and neighbourhood. Furthermore, he blesses the baby (her daughter Bobbi-Jo) and gives her a gift – a large tin of baby milk formula – a gift that is life-affirming and invested in the future. Like Harman in *The Slave Book*, Joonie has come full circle, returning home with a greater sense of who she is and where she belongs, in spite of – or perhaps because of – the traumas she has endured and reflected on in New York.

Jacobs’s treatment of space in the novel has thus tracked a physical journey that has facilitated and mirrored an emotional journey. By revisiting the Cape Town of the 80s with Joonie, Jacobs has explored ‘belongingness deficit’ – a postcolonial dilemma – and the difficulties of finding a place of belonging, a home. Joonie’s experiences of dislocation as a migrant in New York, which are retrospectively contemplated by the ‘older’ Joonie, allow her to confront the idea of diaspora. Her experiences (as a migrant) give her the advantage of the double perspective: the advantage of being able to compare one view of life with another. Only by experiencing ‘homesickness’ is she able to recognise and acknowledge South Africa as her home. Jacobs has examined this longing for place through both the homesickness of young Joonie and the nostalgia of older Joonie. Acknowledging and exploring such feelings is a move towards acquiring a sense of belonging to a place and community. Feeling ‘at home’ is an important step towards finding a sense of identity, which, for Joonie, is an ongoing quest. By contrast, Laverne is unable to restore either her sense of belonging or her sense of self because her home is confined to the past. Thus, it seems that nostalgic memory about place, and the form that the nostalgic memory takes, can play an important role in the integration and reconciliation of the fragments and layers of memory that coalesce in the present. That, in turn, influences how the future is approached.

*

The novel concludes on a future-inflected note. Although the past and its traumas have been confronted, at the end of the novel the trauma is not definitively concluded or ‘end stopped’. Rather, there is an acknowledgement that, although the past can be examined, fragmented memory means that any resultant healing is incremental. The sense of longing that *Joonie* conveys throughout the novel is partly assuaged by the end of the novel. A critical/reflective confrontation with the past and its traumas has allowed for an engagement with the future.

Chapter 5 – Mongane Wally Serote’s *Revelations* and *Rumours*

In the previous chapters on the writings of Etienne van Heerden and Rayda Jacobs I examined novels that were published decades apart in order to chart the changes in their work over time. (*Ancestral Voices* was published in 1989, *30 Nights in Amsterdam* in 2011; *The Slave Book* was published in 1998, *Joonie* in 2011. Both pairs of novels compare an ‘apartheid-era’ novel with a ‘democracy-era’ novel.)

Like Van Heerden and Jacobs, Mongane Wally Serote has been writing over the course of decades. He has lived through, and written about, two distinct eras in South Africa’s development and history. Like the authors examined in the previous two chapters, Serote too writes about the past, and I am interested in the significance of the time frames on which he chooses to focus, and how he approaches the past.

In selecting two of Serote’s novels for examination here, however, the pattern set by the previous two chapters has been altered. Both novels in this chapter were published in the 2000s: *Revelations* in 2010, and *Rumours* in 2013. Yet although both were written and are set in democratic South Africa and were published only three years apart, there is a marked thematic development and a shift in nostalgic focus between them. In *Revelations* the nostalgic focus is on the world that Serote’s earlier novels inhabit: the author imaginatively returns to the townships, and to the sites of the armed struggle in the 1970s and 80s. In *Rumours*, the nostalgic longing is focussed, in part, on the struggle years but gazes more prominently towards an earlier time of Africa’s history and to traditional African life. (In this regard, a train of thought and enquiry introduced by the Teresa character in *Revelations*, continues and expands in *Rumours*). Each novel, of course, transports the past into present-day and even future dimensions.

Serote’s novels may at first seem an unusual choice for the study of nostalgia in literature because he is perhaps better known as a poet, and a ‘protest’ poet at that (a label he himself shuns).⁷¹ In the 1980s, however, he became “very, very interested in people” (Wilkinson 1992:184) and realised that “if he wanted to record and describe apartheid’s everyday experiences, the struggle, [and] the interior lives of people, [he would] need another form” (Schneider 2012:4). Thus he wrote *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1981) in novel form, which – he feels – “gives you a much wider scope” (Wilkinson 1992:184) than

⁷¹ In an interview with Rolf Solberg, Serote said, “One must recognise that I was speaking about a spirit and a consciousness of defiance. I don’t want to call anything protest poetry. It is a very unfortunate category and name. I do recognise that there are phases that a writer moves through. Writers are the most unfortunate artists because they grow through speaking loudly in public and everybody remembers what they say. Lots of other people do that, but then people forget what they have said. That’s why I don’t like to call it protest poetry. There is a growing process where one is outraged, where one wants to say that in one’s clearest voice and one uses all sorts of mechanisms to do that. Some of this in our time was the swearing poetry, the sloganeering poetry. It served its purpose at that time. We should not discard it. It is part of ourselves” (Attridge & Jolly 1998:181).

poetry. It will become apparent in what follows that his novelistic writings – which chart the interior lives of people – display a profound sense of yearning, a yearning for people, places, and times past.

Serote's five novels (to date) have a historical and temporal reach that encompasses living memory. His various characters are active between the 1960s and the 2010s. Some characters experience apartheid conditions while others grapple with the uncertainties and insecurities of the new democratic era. Throughout the five novels there is a consistent quest for meaning that challenges the difficulties and discontents of the narrative present by harking back to earlier times. The characters in the two later novels that I am examining (*Revelations* and *Rumours*) have experienced life under apartheid as 'black' South Africans and have been involved to various degrees in the liberation struggle. They subsequently contend with a present in the democratic era that, as a lived experience, is different from what they had anticipated. The need for a new sense of identity under altered circumstances prompts nostalgic explorations both of their earlier lives and of a past well before that of living memory: sometimes their searches lead them imaginatively to a time prior to apartheid, colonialism, and slavery in order to connect with an earlier, pre-modern, African culture.

The nostalgic search for an early 'African-ness' detailed in Serote's novels can be likened to the creative attention he has given to the same themes in another project: the Freedom Park memorial. Serote was "the inspiration behind the design" (Villa-Vicencio & Soko 2012:243) of Freedom Park and was the CEO of the monument. Freedom Park is a 52-hectare heritage site commissioned by the South African government as a post-apartheid monument "which seeks to portray and integrate the conflicts of South African history into an unfinished story of healing" (Villa-Vicencio & Soko 2012:243). It was launched on 16 June 2001 (the date coinciding with the commemoration of the student protests of 1976) and reflects "3.6 billion years of history, told from an African perspective" (website: freedom park).⁷² The various elements of the park include an amphitheatre, a meditation sanctuary, an eternal flame, a wall of names, and a 'hall of heroes'. The park is regarded as a spiritual resting place for those who have fought for freedom and liberation. It houses nine boulders collected from, and symbolic of, the nine provinces of the country, and eighty per cent of its natural vegetation is made up of medicinal plants and trees. "[I]ndigenous knowledge systems and concepts derived from southern African religious belief systems were appropriated, translated, and employed in the formation of the park" (Jethro 2013:374) and cleansing ceremonies were performed before any construction began.

Many of the elements of Freedom Park are mirrored in *Revelations* and *Rumours*. In an interview with Serote, Leon De Kock suggested a link between Serote's literary work and his work on Freedom Park. De Kock suggested that implicit in *Revelations* is the "critique that we're not quite there yet" (2012, 36:09), inferring that South Africans have much to learn about living together in a democracy. Serote

⁷² <http://www.freedompark.co.za>

responded by saying that “no, we’re not [quite there yet]” but explained that for South Africans to reach a point of consensus, conversation and discussion are required. Serote’s character, Otsile, the protagonist in *Revelations*, expands on that suggestion, saying that

[i]nitiation should talk to education; traditional leaders should talk to members of parliament; indigenous knowledge should talk to science; Sesotho to Afrikaans; African languages to English; extended family to the single-unit family; customary law to judicial law. [...] That was what we’d meant when we fought for freedom. (218)

I suggest that Serote’s novels open up a space for the types of discussions that Otsile recommends, and that Freedom Park – as a “living memorial” (Baines 2009:337) – provides a similar space for ordinary South Africans to address difficult and sometimes contradictory cultural challenges.⁷³

Monuments are of course nostalgic symbols, and very often examples of restorative nostalgia. As Boym has said, “[r]estorative nostalgia is at the core of recent national and religious festivals; it knows two main plots – the return to origins and the conspiracy” (2001:xviii). The return to origins is surely a theme identifiable throughout Serote’s work. Although my focus is on his literary work (and not on manifestations of nostalgia in the Freedom Park memorial), I point out the similarities of the themes and aims of each of these bodies of work to highlight the overarching nostalgic tone. His novels, in addition to his work on the Freedom Park memorial site, could thus be seen as commemorations of interrupted lives and histories. Annie Gagiano, in similar vein to De Kock (mentioned above), has also compared Serote’s literature to his work on the memorial site. In a critique of Serote’s first novel, *To Every Birth Its Blood*, she argues that “he achieved a work of such affective power that it ‘rivals’ the commemorative dimensions of that site [Freedom Park]” (2012:222).

Thus, there appear to be convincing correlations between Serote’s literary and memorial works that might suggest that his writings are also restoratively nostalgic. However, if restoratively nostalgic symbols are not regarded in isolation but seen rather as part of a process of remembering, they can also help us incorporate a reflective perspective.⁷⁴ Likewise, Serote’s memorial work, together with his literary work, provides a similarly layered and nuanced view of the past.⁷⁵

⁷³ The scope of this dissertation does not allow for a discussion about the links between Serote’s fictional writings and the memorial elements of Freedom Park. However, I suggest that this could be a fruitful area of research for further study. Among the shared elements that I have identified between Freedom Park and the novel *Revelations* are these: the Park’s *legotla*, which is represented in Teresa’s home in the novel; Bra Shope and Otsile’s travels through South Africa’s provinces, which mirror the Freedom Park developers’ preparatory explorations; the notion of the memorial park as a spiritual resting place, reminiscent in the Drakensberg cave’s sanctity in *Revelations*; and the incorporation of indigenous medicinal plants at Freedom Park, which have relevance in Teresa’s training as a sangoma.

⁷⁴ For example, in my discussion on Rayda Jacobs’s *The Slave Book* I mention that it is Hanibal’s drawings, together with Sangora’s narrative, that provide a ‘reflectively’ nostalgic view, a multi-faceted perspective.

⁷⁵ A study of the manifestations of nostalgia at Freedom Park could provide a wealth of examples of both restorative and reflective nostalgia, as it is an interactive, “living monument” (Baines 2009:337). However, the scope of my project does not warrant such investigation.

As I have noted in the introductory chapter, to articulate and explore the unexplainable, people have through the ages turned to art, as in the images captured in painting or photography, in sculpture, and in the words and language used in literature. In both *Revelations* and *Rumours* all those art forms are in evidence: Serote articulates his longing for the past using the form of the novel – the written word – while the characters in the narratives extend that nostalgic longing by expressing themselves artistically through, for example, painting, sculpture, architecture and photography, and also dancing and spiritual practices. My point here is that in Serote’s case nostalgia manifests itself throughout his work (in both his memorial and literary work) and that there is a considerable overlapping/entangling of ‘restorative’ and ‘reflective’ expressions of nostalgia.

Furthermore, if literature can be regarded as a kind of memorial, then it should be seen as a dynamic memorial; as T S Eliot declared, all literature stands in relation to other pre-existing literature and so its meaningfulness changes and develops with time and with the addition of new literature:

The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of the novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered. (Eliot 1932:5)

In this chapter I apply the notion of Serote’s writings as ‘affective memorials’ to his two latest novels, *Revelations* and *Rumours*. I discuss Serote’s nostalgic approach using examples of both restorative and reflective nostalgia – an approach which, I argue, facilitates an affective engagement with traumatic memory.

First, though, I give a brief overview of Serote’s oeuvre to position the two selected novels within his body of work and the wider context of South African literature.

Serote’s Oeuvre

Serote’s writing career spans five decades and his oeuvre consists of poetry, novels, plays, and essays, beginning with the publication of a collection of short poems, *Yakhal’inkomo* (1972). This collection of short lyric poems bears a symbolic title that refers to the cry of cattle at the slaughterhouse, and was awarded the Ingrid Jonker prize in 1973. A second collection of poetry, *Tsetlo* (1974) – the word, ‘tsetlo’ describes a small bird – is again made up of short lyric poems. This collection appeared in the same year that Serote went to America as a Fulbright scholar. The two collections, *Yakhal’inkomo* and

Tsetlo, form what Mncedisi Mashigoane calls Serote's "initial Black Consciousness phase" (2000:18).⁷⁶

Serote's next publication is distinguished by what Mashigoane describes as Serote's "stylistic trademark" (2000:18): *No Baby Must Weep* (1975) takes the form of a long autobiographical poem. Next, Serote published *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1981), the first of his five novels (to date). *To Every Birth Its Blood* is about the political activity of the 1970s and explores how the tensions in the country shifted towards violent confrontation. It features a (sometimes) confusingly broad array of characters, but despite the number of characters, Serote empathetically exposes the inner tensions experienced by individual people. This novel took six years to write and was completed after Serote left America to live in exile in Gaborone, Botswana.

Three other books written in exile include *Behold Mama, Flowers* (1978), *The Night Keeps Winking* (1982), and *A Tough Tale* (1987). *Behold Mama, Flowers* – Serote's fourth book of poetry – features a long poem, similar to *No Baby Must Weep*, but this time pairing the long poem (in Part I) with a collection of shorter poems (in Part II). *The Night Keeps Winking* combines two art forms in a single publication. It is a collection of three long poems which are bound together with Thamasanqa Mnyele's drawings, a presentation which is therefore similar in fashion to the works of William Blake. The long poem, *A Tough Tale*, like *Behold Mama, Flowers*, also consists of two parts: Part One is entitled 'For Holes are Forever Cold and Dark and they Threaten Life', and Part Two is entitled 'Life is Freedom'. The cover blurb describes *A Tough Tale* as an "extraordinary poem about the protracted and bitter struggle against apartheid oppression, [in which] Serote powerfully conveys the indefatigable fighting spirit of the South African people."

Next came a collection of essays, *On the Horizon* (1990). In the Preface to the collection Serote explains that "in the three years, from 1986 to 1989, [he was] the cultural attaché based in London" and, in that capacity, he travelled to different parts of Europe giving talks "on behalf of [the] organisation, the ANC" (1990:1). *On the Horizon* is "a selection of essays from [those] discussions and talks" (1990:1).

The three books following the essay collection — in what Mashigoane's (2000) refers to as the "post-exile phase" — are *Third World Express* (1992), *Come and Hope with Me* (1994), and *Freedom Lament and Song* (1997). *Third World Express* "places the South African struggle within the broader context of 'third world' struggles" (Mashigoane 2000:30). In this long poem, *Third World Express*, Serote develops the idea "that although so much has been done to diminish and destroy people – in Africa, Asia, South America – reconstruction and the restoration of human integrity are not only

⁷⁶ Mncedisi Mashigoane (2000) identifies five phases in Serote's writings between 1972 and 1997, which he distinguishes as: (1) Black Consciousness-influence, (2) the long autobiographical poem, (3) the novel, (4) poetry written in exile, and (5) the post-exile phase.

possible but are happening” (Serote 1992:back cover). For *Third World Express*, the author won the ‘Noma Award for Publishing in Africa’. By the mid-1990s, confrontation was replaced by negotiation in South Africa. *Come and Hope with Me* (1994) mirrored the optimism of the time. Although it does not shy away from the difficulties the country was facing, the poem displays a “strong chord of hope, perfectly in tune with the spirit” of the times (Serote 1994:back-cover). On a different note, however, *Freedom Lament and Song* (1997) questions the meaning of freedom, particularly in Africa and South Africa.

In a return to the novel genre, Serote’s *Gods of Our Time* (1999) is set in the 1980s and deals with the turmoil in the townships. It explores the dilemma, as faced by many, about whether or not to join the armed struggle, and how the outcome of such decisions shattered the structures of lives, families, and communities. A third novel, *Scatter the Ashes and Go* (2002), depicts returning exiles’ sense of dislocation and their difficulties in adapting to a changed society. It portrays the strong friendships and connections between ‘comrades-in-arms’ that will be encountered again in the later novels, *Revelations* and *Rumours*.

The next publication was poetry once more: Serote’s epic poem, *History is the Home Address* (2004), for which he received the ‘Pablo Neruda Award’ from the Chilean government. *History is the Home Address* covers multiple topics, among them the impact of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid and the resultant racial tensions and poverty, and the devastating effects of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. However, although it is a tragic story of two lovers – an elegy – it maintains an optimistic tone. Serote continues to explore these themes in the novel *Revelations* (2010), but within a broader geographical scope. *Revelations* incorporates an examination of violence against indigenous people on other continents that have a history of colonisation and slavery – a situation that parallels and expands the South African perspective. Finally, Serote’s latest novel to date, *Rumours* (2013a), broadens the South African perspective further still, reaching into its distant history and into African tradition and spirituality. Serote has hinted that he will write another novel – “the next book, yes, there will be one” (Serote 2013b) – but, in the meantime, he has diversified his repertoire to include drama.⁷⁷ In 2015, the play *Fresh Footprint* (unpublished) was performed at the Olive Tree Theatre in Johannesburg.

Literary Criticism

As is evident from the above, Serote’s body of work is diverse in terms of genre and scope of theme and context. Furthermore, spanning five decades it has developed through various phases. Literary

⁷⁷ Speaking at The Time of the Writer Literary Festival in 2016, however, Serote said that although he is a committed writer he has [temporarily] stopped writing now. “I can’t write because I don’t know what is going on in the country,” he said (2016:50:05).

criticism of his work is equally diverse. Serote's writings have elicited a variety of responses which are sometimes contradictory, particularly in regard to the novels – my area of focus.

Serote's art in relation to politics has been given considerable attention. Critical attention has chiefly focussed on the influence of socio-political issues and the treatment of socio-political themes in his writings. Serote himself grants that he is a "freedom fighter/freedom writer" and says, "[his] country has made [him] a political animal" (2013b), thereby confirming Zwelinthini Sibisi's reflection that Serote (among others), "wrote about political subject matters because circumstances [...] compelled them to do so" (2013:241). Those circumstances were the conditions of apartheid, and Michael Chapman notes that as a writer in the 1970s Serote was part of a group of poets writing "New Black Poetry, or Soweto Poetry, [that] found purpose in Black Consciousness opposition to apartheid" (2002:498).⁷⁸ These poets attached value "not to skill with words but to the idea, the action, the life" (Chapman 2003:335); the attitude they sought to inspire was of paramount importance, while their skill with language was secondary. Philden Ndelela examines Serote's work as a Black Consciousness poet, which, he says

sets out not only to champion the cause of the oppressed Blacks, but also to project a new ideology which questioned and challenged the racist ideology on which apartheid was based. The challenge was presented in the form of a fearless and aggressive attitude, which represented the new determination of the Black people of South Africa to resist White domination. (2004:7)

Similar views have been expressed by Monica Popescu, pointing out that "culture [was used] as instrument of the struggle" (2014:98), and also by Priya Narismulu, commenting that Serote's poems "attempted to encourage and empower ordinary people to intervene in various oppressive discourses of power" (2015:84).

But other influences have also shaped Serote's writings in addition to the Black Consciousness Movement. As Mashigoane points out, there are "two major forces which have shaped Serote's literary, political, and epistemological outlook: the Black Consciousness Movement [but also] the Congress Movement [...] led by the African National Congress" (2000:108). The "more pragmatic politics of the ANC" (Mashigoane 2000:27) attracted support from many people (like Serote) who owed an earlier allegiance to the Black Consciousness movement.⁷⁹ By the time Serote wrote *History is the Home Address* (2004), however, some critics considered his political sentiments to be limiting:

⁷⁸ Sten Moslund explains that Black Consciousness was a "resistance movement [that] made an effort in countering state myths of apartheid by exposing the process of white invasion and conquest followed by dispossession, enslavement, segregation and disenfranchisement of non-white South Africans. The purpose was to discredit the apartheid regime's justification of itself internationally, but more so to make the oppressed realise the extent of their oppression in order for them to engage in changing the existing power structure" (2003:17).

⁷⁹ The African National Congress was first formed in 1912, becoming a firm political presence in South Africa by 1950, and forming its military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) in 1961. Jacob Dlamini notes the dramatic increase in the size of the military wing, MK, between 1975 and 1980: "By 1980 it had jumped [from 1000] to 9000, with the bulk of new members coming from the 1976 generation" (2015:156-57).

as Chapman comments, “cliché abounds and we are given roll-calls of heroes which, it is taken for granted, we will all endorse” (2011:180).

In relation to the political leanings of his poetry, I have mentioned that Serote does not like the term ‘protest poet’ – a stance that Essop Patel has taken up, asserting that it is “subtly disparaging” to label Serote as a “protest poet rather than evaluating his poetry” (1990:189). He points out that Serote’s “first two collections were concerned, not only with the dialectics of violence, but also with the dynamics of cultural and psychological metamorphosis from banal servility and self-awareness” (1990:189). Patel therefore prefers to describe Serote as “a revolutionary poet, [who] root[s] his poetry in a higher priority: that of the national liberation struggle” (1990:193). But because Serote’s earliest works focus on political themes, it is understandable that the earliest examinations of his work explore influences and themes of the socio-political context.⁸⁰

Furthermore, with most of the critique having been focussed on political leanings in Serote’s writing, a number of critics have commented on Serote’s use of the collective perspective: the viewpoint of the unified ‘we’. Patel observes how Serote’s use of the collective ‘we’ indicates that he “invested hope and aspiration in solidarity” (1990:5). Likewise, Jane Wilkinson notes that the use of multiple voices in *To Every Birth Its Blood* is “more suitable to the global nature of urban experience”, according to which, the collective voice thus aptly depicts a social process (1990:490). Similarly, Mashigoane says that the use of the collective ‘we’ in *To Every Birth Its Blood* highlights a “confidence in group action” (2000:140) that was inspired by the writer’s “allegiance [...] to the African National Congress” (2000:108).

The trend continues in a later novel, *Scatter the Ashes and Go*, where Serote uses a “telescoping narrative perspective” that, as Popescu explains, “zoom[s] in on the thoughts of a character and then immediately zoom[s] out with a comment that involves seemingly remote political actors” (2014:97). Thus, the novel “mediate[s] on the facilitating synergies and the debilitating tensions arising between individual and organizational goals” (Popescu 2014:97).

Although there is much commentary around Serote’s focus on the collective, much of it in actual fact pertains to Serote’s earlier writings. Contrastingly, in the later novels of the 2010s (on which I focus in this study) I have noticed that the focus shifts from the collective to the individual. My observation correlates with the change that Salim Washington notes: he points out a “shift in social and political setting” (2015:117) between two of Serote’s novels, *To Every Birth Its Blood* (1981) and *Revelations*

⁸⁰ However, it would appear that some critics are themselves ‘nostalgic’ as they continue – even today – to focus on Serote as exclusively a political and revolutionary writer, even though his writings have subsequently embraced more individual and existential themes (especially in the novels). For example, Narismulu’s recent article (published as recently as 2015) focusses on Serote’s political poetry of the 1970s and early 1980s without contextualizing it, while a young panellist at the Time of the Writer Literary Festival in 2016 asked Serote to elaborate on the “notion of writing as an act of resistance” (Serote 2016:40:17).

(2010), which are published and set approximately thirty years apart.⁸¹ Washington contends that the later novel, *Revelations*, raises the question of how “one enrich[es] political freedom with spiritual depth and meaning” (2015:117). Extending the idea of a divided loyalty or consciousness, Washington refers to a “triple consciousness” (Dlamini; qtd in Washington 2015:118): the roles, or identities that those with ‘triple consciousness’ have adopted are

their national identities, [...] their postcolonial, racialised identities, [and their] ethnic heritages that have withstood the ravages of slavery and colonialism, and which have bequeathed specific data and practices that continue to help navigate them through the travails of human existence. (Washington 2015:118)

This ‘triple consciousness’, the critic explains, is adopted by the novel’s protagonist, Otsile, as he attempts to understand the significance of being African. (I expand on this thought in the next section, which is dedicated to *Revelations*.) Thus, Serote’s characters continue to search for a sense of meaning in life as his writings follow the trends of contemporary South African history.

Furthermore, in following the trends of contemporary history Serote’s novels can be regarded as historical works. Patel describes Serote as “one of South Africa’s foremost historians of the emotions” and his novel, *To Every Birth Its Blood*, as “a brilliant exposé of the revolutionary struggle” (1990:191). Sten Moslund, who examines the use of history in South African fiction, is of the opinion that Serote’s novel, *Gods of our Time*, “shows that the ‘literary project’ is more likely to complicate the past than to freeze it in old dichotomies” (2003:48). Literary texts such as *Gods of our Time* provide ‘counter-histories’ – alternatives to the master narratives of history – which are not homogeneous and which, by presenting differing versions of the past, allow for many and varied perspectives of the present and the future.⁸²

Thus, although he writes about South Africa’s recent history (i.e. the last thirty to forty years) and explores what Philden Ndlela calls the “shameful past as a fractured society” (2004:1), Serote’s writing is nonetheless considered by some to be future-oriented and hopeful. For example, Thomas Hale points out Serote’s “hope for the future, for himself, and for the continent”, commenting that the phrase ‘one day’ “resonate[s] with an immediacy which underscores the timelines of *No Baby Must Weep*” (1976:148). Hein Willemsse, likewise, points out how the novel *To Every Birth Its Blood* “calls

⁸¹ In the earlier novel, *To Every Birth Its Blood*, the characters are portrayed as heroic members of MK, whereas in *Revelations*, set much later, the characters are former MK members now dealing with the problems of older, middle-aged people, in the new democratic setting.

⁸² Counter-histories are “histories that emerge when the objectified, the Othered, the oppressed assume the power of definition, and assert realities, of past and present, that refute or challenge the master narrative. [...] Counter-histories may rework and restructure the past psychologically, socially, and metaphorically to change our past experience and perception of truth and the limits of reality [...] and carr[y] the promise and opportunity of envisioning and making other future realities possible in which one can exercise one’s right to influence” (Moslund 2003:15-16).

out for birth and eventual triumph over repression” (1985:650), while Annie Gagiano, contemplating the same novel, describes Serote’s writing as “commemorative, but future-directed” (2012:227).

It is evident from the above that Serote’s writings explore the possibility of balance between several opposing existential and social forces (for example, between the public and the private, the political and the cultural or spiritual, and between an understanding of the past and the present). However, although he strives to find a balance (for his characters) and displays optimism regarding the quest for meaning in life, he does not ignore the tensions between these opposing forces, which can manifest in melancholy or trauma, and there are critics who have commented on the melancholy tone of Serote’s novels. For example, Michela Borzaga says that “the ailment of melancholia [is] particularly relevant to [her] analysis of Tsi Malope” (2015:70), the focaliser in the first part of *To Every Birth Its Blood*. Similarly, Gagiano considers the character Tsi Malope to be a “melancholy presence [...] for whom it is hard to imagine a hopeful recovery or return beyond the text’s time span” (2012:239). She avers that “[t]here is hope in *To Every Birth Its Blood*, but it is muted” (2012:239). Applying the same ‘diagnosis’ to another character, Bongani Kona points out that “Otsile, through his narration, comes across as melancholic” (2011:3) in *Revelations*. But, unlike Gagiano’s summation of the earlier novel, Kona feels that, because “melancholia pathologically refuses to let go [...] of the lost person or object” (2011:3), *Revelations* offers little hope.

Like Gagiano and Borzaga, Tlhabo Raditlhalo examines the tensions inherent in *To Every Birth Its Blood*, in which “historical trauma” is represented by the “sense of dislocation and alienation, and lack of self-worth in the novel’s key characters” (2013:99). Raditlhalo believes that “only in understanding the significance of memory and historical trauma might one arrive at a truer reflection on the novel” (2013:99). His suggestion that the text be revisited and a ‘truer reflection’ sought implies that the understanding of a text – in this case the novel *To Every Birth Its Blood* – can alter over time.

This encourages me to consider how each of Serote’s texts can be revisited and reassessed as he adds to his oeuvre and as each new text affects the reading of the previous texts. There is also the issue of how the author deals with the concept of time within the text, and Serote’s treatment, or use, of time in his writings has elicited critical engagement, particularly with regard to how his treatment affects both the merit and meaning of his texts. In this regard, Kelwyn Sole comments on the temporal indicators in *To Every Birth Its Blood*, which, he says, are so plentiful “that they act as a source of confusion rather than clarification” (1991:58); his assessment is that in analysing this particular novel “it is more fruitful to understand that time – however unfixed and paradoxical the manner in which it is expressed – is the presence which dominates and ultimately delineates the narrative body Serote constructs” (1991:58). Sole refers to the “temporal looping” (1991:59) that Serote employs in the novel; Patel similarly refers to “the cyclical movement of seasonal phenomena” (1990:189) in the poetry collection, *Tsetlo*. Borzaga, too, feels that time is important in *To Every Birth Its Blood*, for it is “a conceptual and philosophical underlying concern of the text” (2015:68). She says that “an intricate,

dynamic and multi-layered phenomenology of time” (2015:64) lies at the basis of the novel and she identifies different types of time: external time, inner psychic time, and disrupted time. Popescu identifies an example of “a blurred experience of temporality” (2014:101) in the novel *Scatter the Ashes and Go*, which revisits “the tortuous transition from struggle to postapartheid democracy” (2014:101).

To conclude this overview on the literary criticism of Serote’s writings, it becomes apparent that critical attention has chiefly been focussed on his poetry and his earlier novels. The themes of politics, history, identity and culture, trauma and melancholy, time and place have been explored and discussed. However, little work has been done to date on his later novels. And, although critics have discussed Serote’s explorations of history, insufficient attention has been given to the nostalgic tone of his perspective or the apparent longing for times past. Furthermore, little attention has been granted to Serote’s spiritual leanings or to his reach into very early pre-colonial history, where he explores, and attempts to retrieve, perspectives from traditional African culture.

The most recent novels are not included in Mashigoane’s (2000) classification of Serote’s texts, which identifies five phases culminating in the post-exile phase. In an attempt to extend Mashigoane’s classifications, I accordingly ask what the criteria are to which newer, subsequent writings could be classified. Leon de Kock refers to Serote’s most recent novels as “post-transitional novels” (De Kock 2012:35:02): and there are other possibilities that spring to mind: post-militant? post-revolutionary? post-MK? the democratic-era phase? Or perhaps the newer works could simply be classified – to use Serote’s own terminology – as the ‘what now’ phase?

I will show that in Serote’s later writings, in the post-apartheid era, his characters are returning to the concerns of the individual, and that his novels display a deep (and paradoxical) sense of yearning for an earlier sense of identity and meaning.

Revelations

Revelations (2010) is a book in which, Serote says, he “reveal[s] all kinds of things” (2011:19:50). He explains that following the struggle against the apartheid system and the subsequent negotiations towards reconciliation, the question that faced South Africans was, “so now what?” (Serote 2011). This is the question that faces the characters of *Revelations*, a question that they ponder but are not able adequately to resolve: the narrative closes with Otsile, the protagonist, asking his late friend, Bra Shope, “‘What now, my brother’ ” (Serote 2010:245).

Framed by that question, the novel is about people endeavouring to understand their respective identities and roles in a democratic South African present. The central characters of *Revelations*, Otsile and Bra Shope, have lived through the final years of the struggle for freedom in South Africa

and are now faced with the realities of democracy in circumstances different from what they had envisioned, circumstances that prompt Otsile to comment that “free South Africa [is] a strange place to live” (50). Otsile’s close relationship with the older man, Bra Shope, begins when Bra Shope, an artist, convinces Otsile to “use a camera – to replace [his] AK47” (131). Otsile’s former role as a soldier has dissolved with the disbanding of uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the ANC, which has left him without a sense of purpose. Having been involved in the armed struggle for the greater part of his adult life, Otsile, on Bra Shope’s recommendation, “exchanges instruments” (Serote 2011), swaps his gun for a camera, and accompanies the artist, taking photographs and assisting him as he travels locally and abroad exhibiting his art and speaking publicly.

Otsile is the novel’s first-person narrator, and as such he is inevitably an unreliable narrator, with a subjective perspective that is further exaggerated by self-absorption with his personal struggles. Even so, Otsile’s narrative conveys both his own sense of longing and Bra Shope’s nostalgic motivations for their travels and their friendship. Their lives overlap – this is the friendship of an older and a younger man – and their past, present and future become entangled in Otsile’s memory. Bra Shope’s influence on Otsile’s life and life-view is similar to the effect Henk has on Zan (in Van Heerden’s *30 Nights in Amsterdam*) and Joonie has on Laverne (in Jacobs’s *Joonie*). It is interesting to note, however, that in this novel it is the older person who affects the younger person, whereas in the other two examples I have just mentioned, the younger person brings new insight to the older. It is Bra Shope’s nostalgically motivated actions that ultimately influence a greater self-searching by Otsile so that his initial restorative longings develop into a more reflective view.

Serote’s portrayal of Bra Shope and Otsile’s friendship is similar to Jacobs’s portrayal of Sangora and Harman’s friendship in *The Slave Book*. In both novels the male friendship is at the heart of the narrative and is told from the perspective of only one of the men. Otsile tells his own story and that of his friend and mentor Bra Shope, just as Sangora tells Harman’s tale.

A turning point occurs in Otsile’s life when Bra Shope dies. Without the guidance and leadership of his mentor, Otsile is emotionally adrift. Initially, his nostalgic memories are of their friendship. He yearns for their time together. He remembers their journeys, their conversations, and their interactions with the people they meet along the way. But as Otsile strives to recapture (in words and photographs) the essence of their friendship and their time together, he begins to dwell on earlier histories too – of his own life, of South/Africa, and of humanity. Otsile also attempts to seek solace in the comfort of his relationship with his wife, but just as his life is undergoing change so too is hers. The world around them is also changing – change happens within change – and he is therefore forced to reflect on his life and his sense of self as he begins to accept that the past can never be restored. By the end of the novel Otsile has “many questions [but] few answers” (237); his story is perhaps simply his reminder (to himself and the reader) to continue questioning and reflecting. It is a call to the search for meaning in life.

What follows is an analysis of selected instances of nostalgia in the novel. I begin by focusing on the nostalgic memories of and about two characters, Bra Shope and Otsile, following which I explore the nostalgic revisiting of certain places and spaces in the novel.

Nostalgia in the Novel: Characters

The novel opens in the middle of a late night conversation – as Otsile recalls it – between Bra Shope and Otsile, following a dinner with fellow artists in Mozambique. Their dinner with the happily married couple has triggered nostalgic memories in Bra Shope, and their hosts' happiness highlights for Bra Shope the difference between his life as it is, as it was, and as he had expected it to be. This brief and seemingly benign moment of nostalgia that Bra Shope shares with Otsile is the starting point of the narrative's overarching tone of nostalgia. In the analysis that follows I explore the nostalgic yearnings of both Bra Shope and Otsile to uncover the more profound memories that prompt their longings – to establish what their nostalgia means. I also consider how nostalgia affects the way in which Otsile remembers Bra Shope after his death and how other people (the general public) regard the old man while he is still alive.

Bra Shope: Static Persona / Reflectively Nostalgic Individual

Otsile is the narrator and focaliser of *Revelations* but Bra Shope, as the object of Otsile's gaze, is the pivotal character around whom the narrative revolves. At the beginning of the novel, Bra Shope explains to Otsile how he and his ex-wife had given everything to their marriage. "If a person could give themselves to another, he said, he felt he'd done so: he'd given his body, his spirit and his mind, whatever their worth, to Tembile" (3). But it was not enough. The marriage broke down and now life is not as he had expected it to be. Bra Shope's words echo Serote's own words in a 2011 speech at the Centre for Conflict Resolution, speaking about the armed struggle: "We had given our lives to this movement. We had given everything we had to this thing. And yet here it was, simulating implosion" (2011:18:50). Bra Shope, in the novel, seems to mirror a certain bewilderment at an outcome in the present that does not match the "utter optimism" (Serote 2011:17:20) of the past. He is a somewhat ambiguous character who can be considered, or analysed, from various angles, I see three different aspects of Bra Shope that will be instructive to consider: (i) his public image: the restoratively nostalgic image that people have of him, (ii) Otsile's similarly restorative framing of Bra Shope, and (iii) by contrast, Bra Shope's own internal, private feelings, and his reflective nostalgia.

i. In relation to Bra Shope's public image, the novel depicts him in the mould of the 'elder-statesman' of the liberation struggle without actually giving him a definitive struggle background – his earlier life is not described but merely hinted at – and his presentation, on some levels, can even be seen as caricature: the old and wise, but slightly bewildered man who still remembers the original vision that drove activists forward to this rather disappointing present.

There is often little known about the private lives of the older figures of the ANC and MK because they were part of an outlawed organization – they went ‘underground’ – and many put aside their personal and individual lives, a situation that Serote’s earlier novels examine. Furthermore, record of the activities and personalities of struggle activists is limited because the media were banned from reporting on them. Thus they became mysterious, shadowy figures. Nowadays, such figures are sometimes seen merely as amiable old men who have public personae based on vague heroic pasts, while their current lives (or incarnations) as vibrant or dynamic individuals are discounted or disregarded. Thus, although the narrator does not elaborate on Bra Shope’s earlier life, he is a representative of an older generation who has come into the democratic era already in their maturity and who will only experience the very beginnings of the democratic dispensation in South Africa.

Bra Shope’s public persona is that of the esteemed artist and elder-statesman, and in that capacity he is invited to exhibit his work and speak at various venues in South Africa and abroad. His presence is sought after, and “there are always people around him” (20). For example, the first glimpses we have of this character are when he is in Maputo having dinner with artist friends at the crowded “opening of the gallery” (6); later, similar scenes are presented in Cape Town (71) and again in Santiago, Chile (15, 25, 35). Bra Shope has a broad network of acquaintances and, upon his death, Otsile finds that “Bra Shope’s voice echoed still in many cities around the world. [...] Voices popped up on the computer screen in a variety of English forums to mourn his passing” (141).

However, Otsile notices that, although many of the people who meet Bra Shope “listen so intently” (27), they are listening to, or hearing, only the ‘public’ man, and regard him in a fixed role, as a relic of what Medalie would term a “static” (2010:39) version of the past, rather than as a vibrant member of contemporary society. In the same way that statues are representations of people from former times – as fixed and restoratively nostalgic representations (Boym 2001) – Bra Shope, too, is approached as a ‘memorial’, as if he is an animated statue. For this reason, despite his popularity and appeal, he is lonely in his old age. His public persona is a façade and behind it is a less amiable individual. Glimpses of the individual man behind the public persona indicate his unhappiness. For example, occasionally he “flashe[s] a wide but expressionless smile” (8), he is occasionally “rude as he sp[eaks] to people” (71), and he becomes irritable, sullen, and sulky in his behaviour (71). In his final days he advises Otsile, “[d]on’t be like me, alone in this state” (135). So, although Bra Shope is a vibrant and thoughtful individual and actively engaged with contemporary life, it seems that people respond to him primarily as a public figure. He has become an artefact himself.

In contrast, what initially draws Otsile to the old man is Bra Shope’s “ability to listen” (60) rather than his ability to speak. Bra Shope, in turn, knows that Otsile sees the individual beyond the façade, and perhaps this is the reason he invites Otsile to photograph his final journeys and engagements; Bra Shope trusts Otsile with his legacy. But it does take some time for Otsile to form a truly realistic picture of his friend; in fact, he will only begin to form a realistic view, and to consider his nostalgic

memories reflectively, long after Bra Shope has died (whereas initially his memories of Bra Shope are restoratively nostalgic).

ii. In Otsile's restorative framing of Bra Shope, (and although he gradually comes to know and appreciate Bra Shope as a private individual rather than a public man), he too has a rather limiting perspective of his friend. He records and recalls nostalgic images of Bra Shope – restoratively nostalgic images – because he longs to retain the feeling of safety and purpose that the older man used to provide.

Otsile wants to 'contain' his friend/ship within the perfect photograph, to "g[et] that shot" (34). The perfect photograph – 'that shot' – would memorialise his friend; it would in effect seal in the essence of their friendship and everything that he meant to Otsile. But although such memorialisation would be designed to keep Otsile's memories of Bra Shope safely within the frames of his pictures, it would be, in Hook's terms, a "fetishistic" (2012:231) version. Otsile does not want to consider anything beyond this fetishised image, endeavouring only to capture Bra Shope as he perceives him to be: as "one of the kindest and most sensitive men [he'd] ever known" (168). That is how he chooses, or tries, to remember Bra Shope: years later, Otsile will look at the photographs in a restoratively nostalgic mood, to catch a glimpse of the man as he has always imagined him to be.

Bra Shope's death is the initial trigger for nostalgia in the narrative. The narrator's grief is extreme – he is "devastated" and "traumatised" – and he is overwhelmed by the intensity of his feelings, unable to explain "why [Bra Shope's] passing has been so overwhelming, so painful, so difficult to accept" (153). The intensity of grief is disproportionate to the death (by natural causes) of an old man. The truth for Otsile, of course, is that his friendship with Bra Shope has provided a 'screen' for other unresolved traumatic memories, and that is why a clearly defined, singular view of Bra Shope – a restoratively nostalgic image – has been required. When Otsile was commissioned to photograph Bra Shope's exhibitions and chronicle his journeys, his photographic focus soon veered towards Bra Shope, the individual. Because Otsile still maintained the mindset of the soldier requiring leadership, and because he had not yet made the painful transition from the group mentality of the soldier to the independent mindset of the individual, when Bra Shope offered guidance, Otsile blindly latched onto him as mentor, becoming emotionally dependent on him. That is why, when Bra Shope dies, Otsile is bereft: he is left without a mentor, without a leader, and without a screen for his trauma. (I discuss Otsile's traumatic and nostalgic memories in greater detail in the next subsection).

iii. Initially, then, although Otsile frames – and obscures – the view of Bra Shope with his restoratively nostalgic recollections, for the reader there are clues alluding to Bra Shope's own nostalgic motivations and his complexity as an individual character. On a few occasions, Otsile mentions that he does not know or understand why they have made a particular trip, as he suspects that they do not always travel entirely for the intention of an exhibition. For example, Otsile says about their visit to

Maputo, “I felt [Bra Shope had] come here for other reasons [...] he hadn’t come here to exhibit; he was merely curious about Maputo and had seized the opportunity when he was asked to exhibit” (6). Otsile has similar suspicions about their trip to Cape Town (72). He observes that during their various visits Bra Shope “read[s], look[s] at pictures and walk[s] around [...], asking this and that” (15). The suspicions hint at Bra Shope’s own nostalgic yearning and indicate that his travels are motivated by a profound existential longing; a discontent that evokes a nostalgic yearning: in a desire to travel and in a compulsion to communicate through art.

Bra Shope is aware of his own public image, and that his celebrity status effectively presents him as an ‘artefact’ (which sometimes attracts more attention than his paintings). At one particular exhibition he tells the gathering, “I have brought fourteen paintings that have really challenged me. Let them speak if they can” (35). At another, he says, “I really should not speak to you tonight. I won’t say anything about what hangs now on the wall” (70). Thus he resists the one-dimensional perception of himself in a public guise only, and attempts to reintroduce the version of himself that is beyond social conventions. Although the public with whom he engages seem to regard his life and his artistic expression as concluded or concluding, Bra Shope has in fact moved into a new phase of life. He is still actively exploring life and its meaning, and is still engaged in on-going ‘conversation’ through his art. An example of his enthusiasm for engaging with others about deeper meanings is when Nel (an art gallery’s van driver) tells them a story about a small child fending off a hyena. Bra Shope declares,

I want to paint that! The speed, the strength, the breath, the fear. The utter suspense. The victory of the spirit and flesh over life. Do you know what I’m saying? I would call it *The Spirit of Primitive Man*. Heh, you see, Nel doesn’t know what he’s done. He’s taken my hand without knowing or intending to, and revealed the indestructible spirit of the human race. Nel’s badly brought up, he wouldn’t understand what I’m saying, but at least he had the sense to be curious and relate the story to others. (69)

The exclamation mark, together with the words ‘speed’ and ‘strength’, indicate the vigour of Bra Shope’s response: while “victory [...] life [...] indestructible” imply his optimism for the future. He refers to the individual by referring to ‘the spirit of man’ rather than ‘men’, and, importantly, he conveys an intimate interaction between individuals in the image of Nel taking his hand.

Furthermore, the titles of Bra Shope’s exhibitions and art pieces hint at the messages he is attempting to convey: “In Truth We Reconcile”, “The Spirit of Man”. These titles and themes suggest a quest for honesty and authenticity and for connection with humanity. A dancer’s comments about one painting in particular illustrates that his art is indeed part of an interconnected and ongoing ‘conversation’; she observes that his painting “suggests the dance piece ‘Revelations’ [which her dance troupe performs] in a mysterious way” (36). Her use of the word ‘mysterious’ emphasises the use of art to convey ideas that are beyond the language of the everyday.

Through his art, his travels, and his eagerness to talk about serious issues, it appears not only that he reflects on the past but also that (by involving Otsile in his quest for meaning) he invests himself in the

future.⁸³ His nostalgia takes a reflective turn because it leads him/them to fragments of the past but with the future always in mind. As Jill Bradbury has said, nostalgia can be seen “as a kind of backward looking hope or the counterpart of an orientation toward the future” (2012:342), and in this spirit Bra Shope takes Otsile on his journeys with him: he wants Otsile to pick up the threads of his life’s concerns. His intention might be that Otsile would carry these threads into the future, a future that he will soon not be there to share. The role Bra Shope adopts as a mentor figure to Otsile is in line with the vision of the revered elder: a vision which is hinted at by the opening inscription of Book One of the novel: “Let our lives be a revelation / as we pass on” (1). Bra Shope’s role as guiding presence aligns with his notion of a golden chain that “binds people together, whether they know it or want it, until they’ve completed the chores fate has given them” (170). Bra Shope sees that Otsile is lost – Otsile’s relationship with his father has temporarily broken down – and that he depends on him for guidance in his search for identity and belonging, purpose and meaning. Bra Shope’s nostalgia is, indeed, ‘nostalgia for the future’ as Boym (2001) has put it.

To recap my discussion on nostalgia pertaining to Bra Shope: I have explored the restorative nostalgia of his public persona (the fixed image that people hold of him) as well as Otsile’s restorative, or static, framing of his image. I have also examined the character’s own reflectively nostalgic longings. But while Bra Shope may be a pivotal character in the novel, *Revelations* is Otsile’s story.

Otsile: From a State of Confusion to a ‘Point of Departure’

Otsile is the novel’s protagonist, narrator, and focaliser, and the novel charts his development from a state of confusion to a point at which he is ready to begin, or resume, his search for a sense of identity and belonging with a renewed sense of purpose. His confusion mirrors the uncertainty of the time, a time of change and adjustment in South Africa. Following a protracted struggle, apartheid was officially dismantled and free elections were held in 1994, but a new struggle then began – the struggle to adjust to changed circumstances. Although a desired goal had been achieved, there was (and is) still much discontent and confusion amongst South Africans, which prompts the question, as put by Johan Jacobs: “[h]ow, then, should one try to understand the paradoxical character of the newly liberated nation, with an exemplary Constitution and a model Bill of Rights, which is apparently so divided and (self)destructive?” (Jacobs 2016:291).

Otsile’s nostalgic musings therefore arise from his state of confusion about, and his discontent with, life under altered circumstances. He has not adjusted to civil life after the struggle for democracy and still identifies himself as a soldier, which he indicates several times during the narrative: “I have been,

⁸³ “For Serote art, memory, and exploration are part of the healing and empowerment process that is needed to enable a nation, depleted by conflict and the suppression of human creativity, to discover its identity and the inner resources that will enable it to meet the challenges of alienation, poverty, and defeat. In [*Revelations*, Serote] grapples with the impact of past memories and their scars on the present as he ponders the future, locating the reader at the heart of the debate on memory and healing” (Villa-Vicencio & Soko 2012:250).

and always will be, a soldier,” (77) he says, and “I’m still a soldier at heart” (69). He does not recount any specific traumatic memories of his life as a soldier – these appear to be too deeply rooted – but it becomes apparent that his involvement with MK and his time as a soldier is the cause of great anguish. Firstly, it must be considered that the severity of the social and political conditions that drive a young man to the point at which he decides to fight must be extreme. Secondly, there are the deeply conflicting emotions that must be faced in making the decision to become a soldier and to leave the family home and the way of life thus far known. Thirdly, joining an underground movement means joining “a network of spirits [and becoming] invisible” (212). Subsequently there is the loss of purpose when conditions change and there is no longer a battle to fight.⁸⁴ When there is no longer a need for the talents/skills of a soldier, men like Otsile again become ‘invisible’ and feel inconsequential. All of these matters weigh heavily on Otsile and he thinks “about exile, about MK, the camps, [and] the frontline. The ghosts come back to haunt [him]” and he has dreams that “end in a nightmare” (90). Gerald Gaylard asserts that a “painful sense of destruction and the resulting nostalgia for the old is not the only obstacle that those who encounter newness have to face. In order fully to embrace the new they also have to be prepared to embrace the unknown, to make a leap of faith” (2005:291). Accordingly, during the course of the novel, Otsile carefully contemplates his past until, having reassessed his position in the world, he arrives at a point where he is ready to face an uncertain future with a renewed sense of purpose. At the end of the novel, he imaginatively communes with his deceased friend (Bra Shope), when he asks “What now, my brother?” in an optimistic tone that indicates his willingness to face the future.⁸⁵

Otsile’s emotional development – from despair to optimism – is reflected in the structure of the novel. The novel has three distinct sections: the first two sections (Books One and Two) follow a logical, chronological sequence of ‘before and after’ Bra Shope’s death. This delineation furthermore marks a neat distinction, in terms of nostalgia, between Otsile’s ‘restorative’ and ‘reflective’ nostalgic recollections. In Book One, Otsile remembers Bra Shope in a restorative manner, but in Book Two, following Bra Shope’s death – which for Otsile is a turning point – he looks at the past more reflectively and begins to also recall other aspects of his past life. In Book Three, which takes the form of a brief epilogue, the reader witnesses Otsile’s reorientation towards the future, following his restorative and reflective considerations of the past.

As I have already noted, Otsile tried to take photographs of Bra Shope that captured a particular image of his friend and mentor; in other words, he attempted to ‘frame’ him within the photographs he took.

⁸⁴ As Jacob Dlamini comments in his book *Askari*, “Life in MK camps was difficult, but filled with purpose. The thousands of recruits who streamed into the camps believed they were changing the world” (2015:29).

⁸⁵ “If *To Every Birth Its Blood* is a meditation on the political struggles in South Africa during the 1970s, *Revelations*, set during the Mbeki presidency in the South African democracy, is an exploration of the epistemological and ontological questions that involve ‘liberated’ South Africans and Africans” (Washington 2015:117).

In Book One, Otsile looks to his old photographs to find, or restore, that version of the old man. He wants to restore the feelings of security and sense of belonging that he felt when he was with his friend. But he is dissatisfied with the stock of photographs he has, unable to find what he is looking for. He regrets taking certain pictures that do not reflect his 'static' vision, but most importantly he regrets not having been able to capture certain important moments, certain special occasions that he now longs to restore. For example, there is the memory of what Otsile considers to have been 'a perfect moment' when he sat down at a table in Santiago with Bra Shope and a group of friends: "it looked like the greatest photo in the world, but [he] couldn't shoot it: [he'd] already sat down" (26). Thus the photographs do not always align with his memories, so that these reminiscences are unsatisfying, bringing no comfort or relief from his mourning. Instead, Otsile is left feeling even more bereft and discontented. And as he searches, it becomes apparent that he cannot imaginatively restore his nostalgic memory of Bra Shope with any satisfaction because that idealised version of Bra Shope did not actually exist. In retrospect, Otsile sees a more complex man and a more complex relationship.

The rigidly nostalgic view that Otsile has retained of Bra Shope displays a devotion to a mentor that is so excessive that it has taken on the status of a fetish. It consequently follows that if "the fetish is that isolated feature or activity that enables the disavowal of a threatening reality" (Hook 2012:231), then Otsile's 'fetishistic nostalgia' could indicate that he has been shielding himself from a threat; or, to take it one step further, that he could be protecting himself from certain (threatening) traumatic memories. Now, when Otsile juxtaposes these disparate fragments of the past – his photographic images and his mental images – he arrives at a more holistic truth: that his time with, and memories of, Bra Shope have been a 'screen' protecting his ego from other more private, unresolved traumatic memories. It becomes apparent that Otsile's emotional void is a continuing state of mind, that his grief is not simply for the loss of his friend, but is also in response to long-submerged trauma. Bra Shope's friendship has temporarily appeased the emotional pain that he was already carrying. Mourning Bra Shope has thus compelled Otsile to confront his pre-existing emotional emptiness.

Arriving at this point of his development, Otsile can begin to benefit retrospectively from Bra Shope's guidance. In the course of his existential explorations and reflections on life in his final years, Bra Shope encouraged Otsile to accompany him on journeys. It was as if Otsile was a 'spectator', and/or a witness. Bra Shope invested emotionally (nostalgically) in Otsile's future in a way that benefited them both: Bra Shope could 'live on' in the future through Otsile, while Otsile, without appreciating it at the time, was introduced to people and ideas that would later aid his search for a sense of identity and belonging. Bra Shope's nostalgia for the future thus overlaps with Otsile's nostalgia for the past.

I reiterate that the initial trigger for Otsile's nostalgic memory is his grief and longing for his friend, which corresponds with the findings by Wildschut et al. (2006) that those experiencing negative emotions are prone to nostalgia. His grief causes him to remember his time together with Bra Shope and the feelings of safety and belonging that the attachment had given him. However, as noted, these

restoratively nostalgic memories lead him to a point where, still, “[e]verything felt so empty, so surreal”, and he begins to ask, “[w]hy was this man’s passing so catastrophic?” (144). He arrives, again, at a point of discontent: mourning has not brought peace, rather it has re-triggered nostalgic yearning.

*

Otsile therefore continues to look nostalgically to the past in order to make sense of his confusing and unsatisfactory present. But having acknowledged that he cannot restore the past as it was with Bra Shope, and that his life with his wife has altered, he broadens his recall (in the second part of the book) to consider memories not only of earlier times, but also of more difficult times, indicating thus that his reminiscences are becoming more reflective. It is a gradual progression, however. Otsile oscillates between the two types of nostalgia – between restorative nostalgia that “protects the absolute truth” and reflective nostalgia, that “thrives on *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming” (Boym 2001:xviii). He still hopes, perhaps, that he can restore the past as it was (or according to his idealised vision).

In Book Two, Otsile eventually reaches a stage of despair because he cannot assuage his grief and he seeks solace in drunkenness. He resists a complete decline into depression and self-destructive behaviour by once again resorting to musing about the past. Needing “something to hold onto, something to direct [his] mind in a more positive manner, [he] beg[ins] to search” (145) for a renewed sense of belonging and meaning. Drawing on the sense of resilience he developed as an MK soldier he revisits people from his past who are linked with his soldiering days. First he visits Dikeledi, a former ‘comrade’ and lover, and next he reunites with a group of ‘comrades’ who attend a session of Parliament in Cape Town. Both of these encounters, although they have the initial appeal of a restorative form of nostalgia, lead to more reflective perspectives.

His visit to Dikeledi is made on a whim and “[i]n a drunken stupor” (147), an instinctive retreat to someone who, he feels, will understand his pain. He has comforting memories of earlier visits to her: “the soft porridge, the silence, the issuing of gifts, the embrace and the kiss” (112). They have shared an uncanny connection in the past – he had once wondered if “she could read [his] mind (113) – but now their meeting is awkward because Dikeledi has since married and become a mother. But although his reunion with Dikeledi is uncomfortable, she does not completely reject him or his obvious need of help. She travels with him to a mutual friend, Ngaka, who is also a spiritual man, an *inyanga*. Ngaka tells Otsile about his ancestors and that they are all “linked to cattle, land, and communal family” (150). Otsile’s original motivation for visiting Dikeledi may have been a restoratively nostalgic need to reconnect and recapture an old relationship, but it leads him to a more reflective view by opening up lines of inquiry into his hereditary lineage and giving him a fresh perspective on his identity.

Otsile also reconnects with a group of friends whom he describes as “comrades [he] hadn’t seen for a long, long time” (166) when he attends a session of Parliament in Cape Town with his wife, Teresa. A ringing bell in the Parliament building reminds them “of the combat bell in the camps” (162), which Otsile associates with the warmth and camaraderie of friendship. But, despite such shared recollections, Otsile once again finds the encounter of returning to people from his past unsatisfying. His hope of restoring a remembered sense of identity and belonging with his former ‘comrades’ is ineffectual. His sense of belonging is linked to MK and is therefore linked to something that no longer exists, because the armed wing is defunct and he is no longer a soldier. The friends and ‘comrades’ with whom he reconnects now, the other former soldiers, have left that ‘space’ and have moved on to new phases of life, often finding fulfilling occupations. For example, Sello is a general in Pretoria; Phumzile makes “the laws of the nation with the nation” (166); Molefe is an MP; and Jean is a computer expert. Otsile, however, although occupied with photography and travel, does not feel fulfilled and has not been able to develop emotionally. Following this brief reunion of friends/comrades he is once again left floundering in his memories and longings.

As with his recent visit to Dikeledi – and despite his dissatisfying trip to Cape Town – the trip leads to experiences and perspectives that are more reflective. A friend requests Otsile’s intervention in the traditional lobola process for his forthcoming marriage (186). Traditions and customs, Boym tells us (2001:xviii), are a form of nostalgia: practices that people repeat in order to feel ‘at home’ and to kindle a sense of community. Revisiting these traditional rituals on behalf of a friend reconnects Otsile with his cultural background. Indirectly, these rituals also reconnect him to his family, which is a bitter-sweet experience. He has been through the lobola process for his own (first) marriage (a process in which his parents participated), but he has since divorced and remarried without observing custom (a process in which his parents did not participate). Discussing this matter with his parents now in the narrative present, after the event, re-engages the three of them in dialogue and at the same time painfully foregrounds the fact that the intermittent years of struggle, during which he was separated from his family, have ruptured their relationship; the continuity of family custom and cultural tradition has been interrupted. It is a revelation to Otsile that former relationships cannot be wholly restored, if at all. Gradually, he acknowledges that his decision to join MK interrupted the momentum and continuity of his life and has left him feeling dislocated and displaced.

So, although Otsile’s nostalgic memories are at first “regressive”, as Hook would put it, and have kept him emotionally stuck in a ‘static’ (as Medalie said) version of the past, his attempts at recreating former relationships lead to encounters that reacquaint him with spiritual and traditional ideas. Custom and ceremony are also nostalgic activities, and Otsile’s return to traditional practices could be seen merely as another form of restorative nostalgia, another attempt to mask traumatic remembrances. But, whether restorative or reflective, instances of nostalgia signal that there are other associated issues that

are more profound. Thus, with each shift of focus Otsile's view can be considered to be shifting gradually to a multi-faceted and far-reaching view of the past.

At the close of the narrative, Otsile is still far from healed, but by exploring his nostalgic memories, he has arrived at a point where he understands his needs. He has followed a nostalgic course through layers of his past, and his examinations have moved through several stages. First, he remembers Bra Shope, then he attempts to restore this kind of camaraderie to his MK/soldier days – encounters which lead him to revisit family ties, explore cultural traditions, and ultimately renew spiritual links with his ancestors. He develops and grows in this process, coming to an understanding that “[t]he sense of belonging we always seek is really the seeking of our own essence” (157).

*

Having examined the nostalgic memories of two important characters in the novel – Bra Shope as a pivotal character/object of the narrator's gaze, and Otsile, as the protagonist and focaliser – I now turn to the effect that certain places have on the characters' memories, and the way the novel presents a sense of longing for lost places.

Nostalgia in the Novel: Places

The setting for *Revelations* is the early years of South Africa's democracy, between approximately 1998 and 2008, but it also reaches back, by way of the characters' memories, to the era of apartheid. However, the temporal setting is not clearly stated from the outset and the physical setting is similarly vague. The novel starts with disconcerting movements between continents, countries, and cities. This unsettled and unsettling condition – this disorientation – sets the tone for the treatment of place and space in the novel, and reflects a sense of what postcolonial theory terms *dislocation*. Dislocation is

a term for both the occasion of displacement that occurs as a result of imperial occupation and the experiences associated with this event. [...] A term often used to describe the experience of dislocation is Heidegger's term *unheimlich* or *unheimlichkeit* – literally 'unhousedness' or 'not-at-home-ness' – which is also sometimes translated as 'uncanny' or 'uncanniness'. (Ashcroft et al. 2007:65)

The novel's first chapter has Bra Shope and Otsile in Maputo, Mozambique, but the author, without specifying the change of narrative location, swiftly shifts the view to Santiago, Chile. At the beginning of the second chapter, when the reader is still imaginatively invested in Maputo, Otsile relates his puzzlement: “I realised that I'd been walking a while and had hardly met or seen a single black face. What had this city and its people done with their blacks?” (9). The reader shares Otsile's confusion,

which is exacerbated by the unspecified temporal setting (has Otsile been transported to Maputo in an apocalyptic future?). However, several paragraphs later he clarifies that he is in a different city. He is no longer in Maputo but in Santiago, Chile, a city that makes him feel “intrigued, suspicious, afraid and baffled” (10) and which awakens terrible, apparently unrelated, memories of a shooting that he had witnessed at yet another (unspecified) time and place.

The reader is affected by the rapid, disconcerting moves between locations and is therefore able to empathise with the characters’ feelings of displacement and dislocation. The characters and the reader are constantly trying to orientate themselves in different or altered places. Furthermore, because displacement (or a sense of displacement) “can be experienced as a most traumatic event [that] dislocates and alienates and interferes with identities” (Viljoen et al. 2004:17), the reader can understand the characters’ need to establish a sense of identity and a connection with place. Thus, the author prolongs the initial sense of disorientation. Shortly after the scene in Santiago, Otsile and Bra Shope arrive in Johannesburg – obliquely identified by their arrival at Oliver Tambo Airport (36) – but they have in the meantime talked about many other cities and countries: for example, the cities Buenos Aires, Montevideo, London, Paris, Bonn, and New York, and the African countries Angola, Zimbabwe, and Botswana. Questions arise: Where is home for Bra Shope and Otsile? Where do they belong?

The novel seeks to answer these questions by tracking Otsile’s nostalgic odyssey. Nostalgia, of course, is a feeling of homesickness, a longing for return to home, but Otsile does not feel at home in present-day South Africa. He can remember experiencing a feeling of being at home in the past, but “[i]n the South African context, [...] the past is quite literally ‘another country’ ” (Bradbury 2012:341), so a nostalgic attempt to restore that past home in the present is impossible.

For an overview of this novel’s treatment of space (and to track Otsile’s ‘nostalgic odyssey’) it is helpful to consider the focus as shifting along the course of a spiral. Beginning with sweeping movements between continents, countries, and international cities, the focus gradually spirals inwards as Otsile moves between South African cities, then visits smaller towns and villages, homesteads and houses, and ultimately culminates with his pilgrimage to a cave in the Drakensberg.

My exploration of space in *Revelations* begins with an examination of Otsile’s global journeys (with Bra Shope) between continents and countries. Bearing in mind that “space in literature as in life is never just an empty, neutral extension [and that space] gets its meaning from human experience and memories, and from relations between people” (Viljoen et al. 2004:3), I consider why they visit these specific places and contemplate whether there could be a nostalgic motivation behind their attachment to these cities? I then discuss Otsile’s solo journeys (following Bra Shope’s death) and examine the narrowing scope of his travels to local South African cities and villages. Finally, I explore the various houses and homes represented in the novel as intimate spaces.

Global Spaces: Continents, Countries, and Cities

Otsile starts his narrative by describing the larger orbits of his physical journey: the movements between continents, countries, and cities. The first half of the novel, 'Book One', is concerned with his travels accompanying Bra Shope, who decides when and to where they travel. Bra Shope's earlier life is undisclosed and so it is unclear whether he has visited Chile in the past or whether this is his first visit, but as "he's been talking about Santiago for a long time" (15) it is obvious that there are strong inducements for the visit. As I have already mentioned, Bra Shope's movements, at this stage of his life, are nostalgically motivated. He longs to connect in a meaningful way with people and ideas from an earlier time and in turn make new connections that will survive into the future. He longs, in other words, for continuity. Bra Shope visits these particular cities (Maputo, Santiago, Cape Town) ostensibly to exhibit and give public speeches, while his real intent is to explore and examine each city's people and histories. While in Chile, for example, he "read[s], look[s] at pictures and walk[s] around Santiago, asking this and that" (15). In short, he seeks meaning in these places. At the same time, Bra Shope introduces his younger companion, Otsile, to the idea of travel as therapy, and to photography as a mode of observation and expression, notions that Otsile later embraces wholeheartedly: he continues travelling after his mentor dies, both on his own behalf and on behalf of Bra Shope's sense of continuity.

By moving between Mozambique, Chile, and South Africa in the first few chapters, the narrative links two continents, South America and Africa, and draws parallels between countries that have experienced similar traumas associated with colonisation, de-colonisation, and an even earlier history of slavery.⁸⁶ I reiterate here that social space is modified and influenced by human intervention and that people in turn are influenced by the spaces that they inhabit. In Wegner's words, space is both "a *production*, shaped through a diverse range of social processes and human interventions, and a *force* that, in turn, influences, directs and delimits" (2002:181) human actions. The South American and African cities that Otsile and Bra Shope visit are places that have been shaped by – and bear traumatic marks of – slavery and colonialism, and these spaces in turn affect – or influence – the people who live in and visit them. Thus it follows that South American and African literatures reflect "the identity crises resulting from an oppressive colonial past and the concomitant reality of adjusting to a multiracial society" (Wenzel 2004b:72) and that "both sets of writers have responded with similar attempts at syncretism between the antinomies extant in their societies" (Gaylard 2005:173). In

⁸⁶ Chile was colonised by Spain in the mid-16th century and has a history of slavery between 1536 and 1823. Independence for Chile was declared in 1818 but the government was overthrown in 1973 and, until 1990, was in the grips of a dictatorship led by Augusto Pinochet. Chile is now run by a coalition government and is stable and prosperous.

Mozambique was colonised by Portugal in 1505, declared independent in 1975, but sank into destructive civil war between 1977 and 1992. Since then Mozambique has been stable but it is an underdeveloped and poor country. There is one official language, Portuguese, though more than half of the population speak it as their second language only. Mozambique has a history of slavery too, as the country lay along the historical 'slave route' resulting in many people being captured to provide labour in other colonies.

Revelations, Serote, as an African writer, exploits these similarities further by (temporarily) situating African characters in a South American context where they recognise a certain ‘sense of place’.

Because Mozambique and Chile share a similar history with South Africa, Otsile experiences an uncanny sense of recognition in each of these places. While in Santiago, Otsile is thinking about Maputo. For example, he says, “[s]omething here in Santiago reminded me of Maputo” (12). While in Johannesburg he is thinking about Santiago, saying, “Santiago stayed with us for days after we got back” (36). And, later, in Cape Town, he thinks about conversations in Maputo, and how “[s]omething Bra Shope had said in Maputo came back to [him] now [in Cape Town]” (170). Each place evokes thoughts of another place. Sights and sounds trigger memories in Otsile that seem insignificant, benign even; yet the evocations are vivid and intense, indicating that the connections between these places (for Otsile and for others) are profound and emotional. Emotions that are linked to places “might be seen as a form of connective tissue that links experiential geographies of the human psyche and physique with(in) broader social geographies of place,” according to Joyce Davidson and Christine Milligan (2004:524). That is why, when visiting these various cities, Otsile has a sense of recognition as well as a feeling of being ‘at home but not at home’; he experiences a feeling of *Unheimlichkeit*. The recognition is two-fold: there is a sense of recognition between the cities, and for the cities they were in the past. There is a sense that the current façade that each city presents is only a flimsy veneer that is superimposed on its past image/s. Humanity and history have made their mark on these spaces, and now, even though those historical influences are not always overtly apparent, they still impose a certain force on its inhabitants and visitors. Signs of that past are found, for example, in each city’s architecture, its language – in Maputo, “long, wide streets that sp[eak] Portuguese” (7) – and in their cultural practices and traditions, such as food, dance, and art. In Santiago Otsile “doesn’t know why, but [he feels] contemptuous, angry, and also apprehensive” when he visits a cathedral: “[t]hat damned cathedral was so overwhelming, [its] pillars made me feel like an ant, like a thing” (12). He feels a similar discomfort in Cape Town: it is “odd to be in this city” (68). It is a city that “in its prettiness [i]s very ugly [because here the slave trade] this trade in human flesh and spirit” (68) has made its mark. (Otsile and Bra Shope are affected by the lingering legacy of slavery in/on Cape Town; the haunting discomfort they experience corroborates the points raised in the previous chapter’s discussion about the novels of Rayda Jacobs.)

It is apparent, then, that because there are similarities between the histories, and therefore the underlying traumas of the places visited, that people like Otsile and Bra Shope experience an uncanny recognition when they visit. Could this be why Bra Shope and Otsile are drawn to these evocative places? Could they be hoping for more clues, for interpretations (sounding-boards), of the past in each of these similar, yet different, places in order to satisfy their nostalgic yearnings, to find the meaning of ‘home’ and of ‘belonging’?

Davidson and Milligan suggest that in order to

understand emotion or make sense of space [...] we can, perhaps, usefully speak of an emotio-spatial hermeneutic: emotions are understandable – ‘sensible’ – only in the context of particular places, [and] likewise, place must be *felt* to make sense. This leads to our feeling that meaningful senses of space emerge only via movements *between* people and place. (2004:524)

Therefore, although Otsile and Bra Shope do not fully understand their emotional reactions to the cities they visit, their emotions seem appropriate (or ‘sensible’) because they are experienced in a meaningful place.

To Davidson and Milligan’s suggestion about movements between people and place, I would add the dimension of time. While in Santiago, Bra Shope says “ ‘we’re so far from home’ ” (32), but he is not thinking only of the geographical distance between Santiago and their home in South Africa. He is implying that there is a time distance too, which Sarah (their Chilean friend) reiterates. In Sarah’s case, although she is in her home country, she feels that “ ‘to reach my people I have to cross so much time’ ” (32). Nostalgia has prompted the two men to travel to other places, other countries, but instead of satisfying them, the visits exacerbate their nostalgic yearnings – which is a reminder that, as Boym has said, “[a]t first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time” (2001:xv). The sense of identity, home, and belonging that Bra Shope and Otsile long for is located not in a particular place, but in a particular time. That time is the past, which they can revisit only in their imagination.

At the end of Book One, neither Bra Shope nor Otsile have resolved their search for a sense of identity and belonging, just as they have been unable to restore a former sense of wholeness within themselves. However, in relation to representations of space in the novel, Bra Shope’s death again marks a turning point: Otsile’s emotional vulnerability increases and, in his grief, he becomes introspective, his nostalgic memories increasingly persistent. While he had previously followed Bra Shope on his trips somewhat mindlessly, he now reflects on his own past as a more confident individual, and interprets his memories more carefully, more reflectively. Thus, although he is still prompted to visit places that have nostalgic meaning for him, his movements now form a smaller orbit. The spiral path of his journey moves inwards and closer to ‘home’ and, subsequently, closer to the associated repressed trauma of his nostalgic memories. He is drawn to rural localities, to towns and villages, via memories associated with his time as an MK operative/soldier.

Local Spaces: Towns and Villages, Closer to Home

I mentioned earlier that at the beginning of the novel the author creates a sense of disorientation which establishes empathy between the reader and protagonist, and reflects the feeling of dislocation, or *Unheimlichkeit* experienced by many in the (global) postcolonial era. The narrative maintains this sense of dislocation through the individual view provided by the novel’s first-person narrator and focaliser, Otsile, who is, furthermore, a deeply confused and conflicted character. Otsile’s sense of

dislocation is entangled not only with the historical socio-political conditions of apartheid and colonialism, but also with his experiences as a soldier in an underground movement – uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) – that demanded a nomadic existence. Members of the armed wing of the banned organisation lived and trained in exile and when (or if) they returned to South Africa, they moved constantly to avoid detection. Although “life in MK camps was [...] filled with purpose” (Dlamini 2015:29) it was difficult because links with home, family, and community were severed. In an interview with Jacob Dlamini, one former MK activist summed up the anguish of a fellow soldier: “At some stage I got the feeling he was not convinced we would ever go home” (2015:30).

The destination of Otsile’s first solo journey after Bra Shope’s death is therefore significant. He does not travel to any of his family’s homes; instead, Otsile visits a homestead near Villiers that evokes intense emotional memories for him because it was here that he had come “to plan and prepare for missions” when he was a soldier (149).

Interspersed throughout the novel are Otsile’s random flashbacks to his time as a soldier: “[his] mind flashed back to Angola, that’s where [he and] Nomwazi came from” (83); Miriam Makeba singing ‘Homeland’ on the radio “transported [him] back in time [to Swaziland]” (95-96); “[he] thought about exile, about MK, the camps, the frontline” (90); the sound of a bell ringing reminds him of “the combat bell in the camps” (162). These images of places are connected to that period of his life which is never far from his mind and is presented throughout the novel. Yet these fleeting, harmless impressions, are just as easily dismissed as recalled. Why are these intermittent memories so persistent, though? In Hook’s (2012) terminology, they are ‘screen memories’, sweet images that hide their bitter counterparts, which are traumatic memories associated with the same times and places but which have been subverted. The sweet memories that arise in their stead can be swiftly acknowledged and dismissed, helping to push the subverted traumatic memories back into the depths of the subconscious. However, “[l]ike the speech of the patient of psychoanalysis, nostalgia – we might venture – may present in primarily defensive forms while nonetheless providing an instrument to access precisely what is being defended” (Hook 2012:226). Memories associated with the homestead at Villiers, and Otsile’s longing to return to the place, are an example of such a screen memory, which signals, and provides access to, the associated traumatic memories.

In the past, when Otsile visited Villiers, it was in his role as a soldier. Villiers therefore has traumatic connotations for him that remain fixed, but hidden, in his imagination. When he arrives at the homestead in the narrative present, he is in fact a free citizen in a democracy, no longer subjected to the oppressions of apartheid. Furthermore, he is a civilian, not a soldier, and no longer involved in an armed struggle. However, he has not yet accepted or adopted that identity, as he is still shackled to his former identity as activist/soldier. To use Hook’s (2012) terminology once more, Otsile has nostalgically ‘fetishised’ his own image as an activist, and he clings to that version of his identity in order to protect the ego, so much so that it is blocking his (psychological) way back to himself as an

individual, to his true, uncompromised self. He has not acknowledged or processed the traumas associated with that period of his life, neither will he be able to do so until he actively remembers the traumas. Although the Villiers homestead is no longer a place where missions are planned in a state of anguish, for Otsile this homestead, is imbued with meaning that is imaginatively tied to his former identity as soldier. That could be the reason why he is nostalgically impelled to revisit it; for, as Bradbury suggests, “[p]erhaps nostalgia is the desire not to be who we once were, but to be, once again, our potential selves, selves not yet formed” (2012:342).

This particular site, this homestead, is pivotal for Otsile because here the double perspective of nostalgia and trauma come into play. During Otsile’s earlier, broader travels with Bra Shope, which took him to faraway countries and cities, he was able to consider the similarities (and differences) between those countries and his home country, and he also began to experience the overlap of bitter and sweet memories. So, when he now revisits this site in Villiers, a site which is associated with his personal past, he has newly acquired perspective and wisdom learnt on those earlier journeys. Also, he is now in a raw, emotional state of grief, and his carefully constructed and maintained psychological defences are less effective; his ‘sweet’ nostalgic memories will no longer screen his traumatic memories; rather, they will accompany them. His nostalgic memories, superimposed on his traumatic memories will, in effect, ‘soften the blow’.

In the past, Otsile “ha[s] found peace [...] on many occasions” (149) at the Villiers homestead even though he had been there when he was a soldier, which was an emotionally turbulent time. He has longed to return because “something about the homestead, its trees, plants, boulders, little stream, the smell of incense, the orchestra of birdsong [...] put [him] in dialogue with [him]self and [his] deepest conflicts” (149). It is therefore important that he revisit Ngaka’s homestead, because the imaginative connection to the place that he felt while he was a soldier can now be re-established when he revisits in the narrative present as a civilian. That is because space is not static or fixed; “its moments of stability [are] short-lived and contingent” (Lefebvre; qtd in Wegner 2002:182). So, although he is visiting the same physical place, it is a different time, he is a changed person, and therefore it is a different space. And, because space is “an open-ended, conflicted and contradictory *process*, a process in which we as agents continuously intervene” (Lefebvre; qtd in Wegner 2002:182), by returning to the homestead, he creates new links at this site between time, place, and his own identity.

His nostalgic memories of peacefulness lead him back to the Ngaka homestead because he can now safely face ‘his deepest conflicts’: the breaking down of his family relationships and the disruption to the continuity of the greater cycles of his personal history. He feels disconnected from his ancestors and therefore from his essential ‘African-ness’. Ngaka talks to him about his ancestors who are “all linked to cattle, land and communal family”, and as a result he begins to consider himself a “tributary to that past” (150).

Just as Sangora (in *The Slave Book*) must imaginatively revisit Zoetewater Farm in order to recoup and confirm his sense of identity, so Otsile has to go to Villiers in order to exorcise the ‘ghost’, or version, of himself as a fugitive soldier/activist. It is as if the (nostalgically fetishised) version of himself as soldier/activist has become an obstacle in his psyche and must be shaken loose so that he can reconnect with other versions of himself. As Leswin Laubscher said: “The nostalgic I is about a divided I, recollecting itself to itself, recalling itself to itself, and pledging, promising itself to itself” (2012:221). Otsile’s yearning for a cohesive sense of identity thus inspires his continued search.

Otsile’s expeditions now become shorter in distance but extended in time (because these are places which hold memories of an earlier time in his life). The places he visits are the houses and homes of friends and family, which require only short day-trips as opposed to the lengthy air travel of earlier journeys, but what he longs to find in these places, what he seeks to restore or to reflect on, are memories of a much earlier time.

Intimate Spaces: Houses and Homes

As I have discussed already, *Revelations* presents the theme of dislocation by moving swiftly between continents, countries, and cities. A feeling of not-being-at-home is uncannily repeated in cities with similar histories. However, before the narrative begins to explore a sense of dislocation and a longing for home in a broad sense, the first scene fleetingly – but potently – presents an image of a home as an intimate space of belonging when Bra Shope and Otsile visit their friends, the Dambuza’s. Bra Shope’s tearful confession to Otsile about his marriage and divorce is “pre-empted [...] by [their] visit to Dambuza’s home” (3). The narrative begins, therefore, with an oblique glance at a (desired) home – words such as ‘warm’, ‘relished’, ‘beautiful’, ‘mingling’, ‘integrating’, ‘whispering’, ‘smiling’, ‘pouring’, ‘eating’, ‘listening’, ‘curious’, ‘polite’, ‘intimate’, ‘presided’, and ‘cherished’ are used in the single paragraph that describes their hosts’ home – an image of home which is immediately dispelled as they walk away into the night and return to their hotel (3-4). Thus, ‘the home’ is presented, from the outset, as the desired ‘place’ that Bra Shope and Otsile lack; and foregrounds their position as ‘homeless’.

Having visited, together with Bra Shope, (local and global) places representative of collective ‘homelessness’, or *Unheimlichkeit*, the path of Otsile’s journey now follows a spiralling course, moving inwards towards the local and familiar places of his personal memory. Otsile’s involvement in the underground freedom struggle uprooted him from his community and family; the sense of dislocation shattered his self-image, a self-image that had been already precarious due to the psychological scars left by the legacy of apartheid and colonialism. ‘Dislocation’ is a term used to describe being displaced or moved but, in addition to describing the actual move from one place to another, it also describes the “experiences associated with this event” (Ashcroft et al. 2007:65). Furthermore, the term can be used to describe the experiences of colonised people whose “indigenous or original cultures [...] are metaphorically dislocated [which results in] psychological and personal

dislocations” (Ashcroft et al. 2007:66). In the aftermath of such a psychological or personal dislocation, however, nostalgic reflection can facilitate a process of regeneration.

Otsile initiates such a nostalgic process by visiting places that have a sense of meaning for him. A place becomes a meaningful location when it is not only a “locale” – *locale* being “the material setting for social relations [or] the actual shape of place within which people conduct their lives as individuals” – but when it also has a “sense of place”, which means that there is a “subjective and emotional attachment” (Cresswell 2004:7) between a person (or people) and that place. Following his visit to Villiers, Otsile revisits other additional sites that have a ‘subjective and emotional’ meaning for him, and where aspects of his fractured identity – pieces of himself – can be retrieved and reassembled. According to Viljoen et al., we can “view the relationship between space and identity as a symbiotic relationship, a mutual dependency creating meaningfulness” (2004:12); thus, by communing with meaningful places, Otsile begins to slough off the overbearing, dominant identity he had assumed as a soldier and to reconnect with aspects of his former identity. His visits are to intimate home spaces, such as his parents’ home, his wife’s family home, his uncle’s home, and the houses of Ngaka and the cemetery-keeper.

Otsile’s home in the narrative present is the house he shares with Teresa (his wife). They have created a home space for themselves and for their children. Teresa has created a space echoing traditional African homes, which they think of as *lesaka* and/or *lekgotla*: “*lesaka* in the sense that all home matters got settled here; *lekgotla* in the sense that broader world issues were dealt with here” (40). This is the nurturing space that Otsile returns to after he has travelled abroad with Bra Shope. Shortly after Bra Shope’s death, which leaves Otsile emotionally adrift, his instinct is to retreat to his home, with Teresa. However, Teresa too is greatly shocked by Bra Shope’s death, and she retreats to the care and guidance of her grandmothers and to the practice of ancient rituals. Teresa and her grandmothers go away soon after Bra Shope dies, to train with a *ngaka* for six months. Once she abandons their ‘nest’ it becomes an empty and meaningless space, especially as the children are there only from time to time. Their effort to create a traditional home space has been based on restoratively nostalgic longings for home (as they knew it in their earlier lives), but their attempt has been too fragile to sustain without the support of an extended family in situ. In crisis, both Teresa and Otsile turn to their former family homes (their parents’ homes) yearning for emotional comfort.

Otsile now sits with his father on the ‘stoep’ at his parents’ house. The area surrounding the house has changed in many ways since his youth. It has become bigger, busier, and noisier: for example, “[o]pposite his house was a shebeen, a recent development, from which noise blared” (196). However, although change is apparent all around, his parents’ habits are dependable. The consistency and continuity is comforting to Otsile. For example, he notes: “My father had done a lot of things on that stoep. He’d sulked, dealt with sadness, talked to his loneliness and tackled his demons and ghosts there. He’d sat on that same chair as long as I’d known him. It was as old as he was; it looked like

him” (201). Another example is the Sunday meal which used to commence, when they returned from church, with “the jingling of cutlery [upon which his] father went into the house” (198). These memories of his father on the stoep, and of their ritual Sunday meals, evoke a restoratively nostalgic picture that is momentarily comforting but also incomplete, for these are but fragments of the original picture; Otsile’s parents now have only each other, as neither Otsile nor his brother or sister live at the house. In a reflective moment Otsile considers that “[t]he extended family had broken down, [that] it was a myth, [and that] Teresa was mad to think it could be brought back by looking at indigenous knowledge” (198).

But it is a myth in which Otsile has been prepared to believe, in which he wants to believe; it is a restoratively nostalgic longing that he sees as almost-fulfilled in Teresa’s family home. Here is how he describes Teresa’s family home:

They had a large house [and in] that home lived her parents, her grandmother who was her mother’s mother, and her great grandmother who was her father’s grandmother, and sometimes the children of her brothers and sisters. Everything was negotiated there, and there was respect and politeness. (41)

But his image of the family home is perhaps simply another of Otsile’s ‘snapshot’ memories: a framed image he endeavours to keep intact. An alternative view emerges when he now visits with Teresa. Only the two old ladies are there, and they remark on “the things we live to see!” (184, 185) as they discuss with him current affairs and the changes in the world at large, so that he slowly arrives at the consideration that “African culture”, like everything else, changes with time: “Indigenous knowledge, Christianity, colonial culture, apartheid culture, struggle and liberation culture, and whatever we called Western culture – these were all a part of African culture” (85). Change is inevitable, and all the influences that affect change leave traces on the new.

This syncretism (or perhaps catalysis, rather) is further exemplified in Otsile’s additional three visits: to Ngaka’s house in Villiers, the cemetery-keeper’s house in Alexandra, and his uncle’s house. Each one of these characters resides in a home he has maintained for many years, but each of the houses is made up of an original structure that has been added to or modified in some way. The cemetery-keeper’s house, for example, was intended for demolition but instead a way was found “to marry the old and the new, and reinforce the old” (209). Otsile visits these older men, and although their homes are not as he remembers them, they retain vestiges of their original forms – they have a ‘sense of place’. In addition, artefacts and ritual behaviours carry the essence of the men’s homes from the past into the future. For example, Uncle Tolo wears a “blue shirt [that has] been washed a million times [that gives] him an elegance, a dignity” (232), and his habits are ritualistic, like the daily and weekly routines of Otsile’s parents; they drink tea, and Uncle Tolo prepares his pipe sitting in his self-made chair (233). Otsile takes a picture of the old man and compares him to the rocks in the background thinking how neither “measure[d] age in years [but rather] in terms of the tragedies and events they’d experienced” (237).

Otsile is developing a renewed sense of continuity by visiting these homes as places of meaning, and in attaching nostalgic value to such things as his uncle's blue shirt, his father's chair, or their tea-drinking rituals, he considers that their 'essence' is as enduring as the rocks that feature in the photograph he takes of his uncle. Otsile's search for a place of belonging has led him steadily in the direction of ever more humble destinations. Each site he visits holds nostalgic memories for him, but the visits cannot restore his nostalgic images. Rather, what he finds on each visit to a meaningful place is a 'new' space, which only partly mirrors his remembered or imagined vision. At this stage, then, Otsile's remembrances could be considered to be a reflective form of nostalgia. He tells his uncle, "I've been through so many thoughts and feelings since I've been here. And I have so many questions" (237), which indicates that he has begun to entertain and juxtapose multiple fragments and images of the past in his contemplation of the present, and the future. As Boym puts it,

[r]eflective nostalgia does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones; it loves details, not symbols. At best, reflective nostalgia can present an ethical and creative challenge, not merely a pretext for midnight melancholia. (2001:xviii)

Otsile continues to delve into the past without insisting on the eventual formation of a 'complete' picture or a 'single plot'; he no longer requires a 'restored' version of the past. Ultimately his odyssey leads him to a cave in the Drakensberg mountains. Similar to Shala's experiences in *30 Nights in Amsterdam*, and Sangora's experiences in *The Slave Book*, it is in the dark of a cave, in the depths of the earth, that Otsile brings to a culmination his narrative journey. This is a visit to the earliest beginnings in Africa, a visit to the metaphoric 'womb' of mother earth, and where Otsile imagines that the rock paintings deliver the message that "all things await us [but we must] learn how to listen" (244).

Thus, Otsile's nostalgic impulses have eventually led him back to the beginning: to a point of departure, where he has reflected on the pain of that longed-for return and learned that, through focusing on 'details, not symbols', he can once again embrace the present and the future.

Having arrived at this 'point of departure' with the character, Otsile, the author pauses only briefly. With the publication in 2013 of another novel, *Rumours*, Serote continues to examine the process of individual development.

Rumours

My selection of Serote's novels has been informed by a progression I noticed between *Revelations* and *Rumours*. Themes of individual development and growth that are introduced in *Revelations* are continued and expanded upon in *Rumours*.

The protagonist of *Revelations* also explores nostalgic and traumatic memories of the apartheid era and, in doing so, develops from a state of profound emotional confusion to a point, at the very end of the novel, where he is ready to contemplate a spiritual awakening and envision a meaningful future. The later novel, *Rumours*, continues the theme of the spiritual journey that was introduced at the end of *Revelations* and focusses on its characters' attempts to reach back to a much earlier African tradition and culture in order to make sense of present-day circumstances. In the early stages of *Rumours*, Serote's protagonist (the former struggle activist, Keke Sello) suffers a devastating emotional breakdown, and subsequently explores ancient African spirituality and tradition in the hope of satisfying his yearning for a sense of identity, for an African-ness that has eluded him.⁸⁷

I suspect that Keke's yearning in *Rumours* reflects the author's: a yearning for an abiding 'African-ness' and a traditional, idyllic Africa. In this 'democracy-era' novel, Serote explores the feeling of anti-climax that, for some, followed apartheid's demise. Disappointment and despondency ensued when the realities of the new socio-political situation did not match entirely what had been envisioned, and he examines the nostalgia that this mood of discontent incurred: nostalgia for former times and for a version/vision of the future that never arrived.⁸⁸ *Rumours* expresses the author's nostalgia for the glory of the freedom struggle, for the nobility of the cause, but equally it expresses his sadness that what was struggled for turned into something quite different. There is also an interwoven anxiety that the 'warriors' of the struggle – and their ideals – are not acknowledged and that their contributions are not sufficiently memorialised. Serote represents these concerns via his characters: they long for a sense of identity and belonging in a place that has irrevocably changed, and they hanker after a validation of the pain and loss suffered in their earlier lives. The vehicles of these nostalgic (and sometimes ambiguous and ambivalent) emotions are the protagonist Keke Sello and the character who mirrors him: his friend Mandla.

Part One of *Rumours* charts Keke's decline. He is an MK veteran and a 'corporate warrior' who, though respected and admired both for his role in MK and for his later success and innovation in

⁸⁷ Where Otsile, in *Revelations*, is unhappy and confused, Keke, in *Rumours*, is desperate and haunted and, though Otsile and Keke both succumb to depression and the abuse of alcohol, for Keke the repercussions are devastating.

⁸⁸ Serote's earlier novels were written and are set during a time of apartheid and are concerned with the struggle against oppression and the goal of freedom and democracy for South Africa. But, as Washington points out, Serote's most recent novels are set and were published thirty years after his first. The later novels are no longer concerned only with attaining political freedom, but with how to imbue that freedom with "spiritual depth and meaning" (Washington 2015:117).

business, slides into a depression when his wife leaves him and takes their children with her. He begins to drink heavily, abandons his job and, eventually homeless, is motivated only by a nostalgic longing for a more meaningful and purposeful life. In the second part of the novel, Keke retreats to a sanctuary in Mali where he participates in several rituals and ceremonies. By surrendering to the ceremonies there, and by participating in the rituals, he gains a clarity and strength of mind that enables him to process traumatic and painful thoughts about his earlier life. The final section of the novel, Part Three, details Keke's reintegration into South African society, into his community, and into his family.

In addition to Keke Sello's story of collapse and subsequent resurrection, we have the parallel story of his friend, Mandla. Mandla's narrative provides a foil to Keke's because, although they are confronted with similar challenges, the two men's approaches or reactions are vastly different. I discuss below how Keke's overwhelming trauma is counterbalanced by both restorative and reflective nostalgia, both of which effect his healing, while, in contrast, Mandla's traumatic memories are shut out by the screen of restorative nostalgia, which eventually effects an existential crisis as his unresolved traumas recur. I begin by discussing the characters Keke and Mandla, after which I examine nostalgia in the novel with regard to places.

Nostalgia in the Novel: Characters

In the chapter on the novels of Etienne van Heerden, I mentioned the Afrikaner founding myth: the single-perspective story of the pioneering Afrikaner moving into virgin territory and taming the land. These stories are simplified versions of history that ignore complex social dynamics and highlight only the desirable side of history. African history, too, has often been recounted in uncomplicated tales and, as Jacob Dlamini points out,

[i]t is all too often taken for granted that the story of black South Africa is one long romance, starting in some golden age during which Africans lived in harmony with the land and with each other, followed by the trials and tribulations of European conquest, segregation and apartheid, and ending in triumph with Nelson Mandela, the romantic figure par excellence, taking the military salute as South Africa's first democratically elected leader. (2010:12)

In myths and simplified versions of history, time periods are often divided into neat sections or eras, people are grouped homogeneously, and the borders between them are presented as rigid rather than porous. Literary representations are more open "to acknowledge[ing] complexity and ambiguity [and] more likely to complicate the past than to freeze it in old dichotomies" (Moslund 2003:48). Serote's *Rumours* is an example of fiction that does just that. Although some of the characters in *Rumours* envision and try to restore an idyllic African experience, this novel presents a perspective on South African life that blurs the boundaries between time, place, and people, and displays a nostalgic longing

even for aspects of the past that were particularly painful (e.g. the apartheid past). Dlamini acknowledges that a longing for the apartheid past of South Africa is paradoxical, but adds that

[n]ostalgia does not have to be a reactionary sentiment. It does not have to be a hankering after the past and a rejection of the present and the future. [...] In fact, [he says], to be nostalgic is to remember the social orders and networks of solidarity that made the struggle possible in the first place. (2010:17)

Keke and Mandla have a paradoxical relationship with the past. As they grapple with the difficulties of the present, their approach to memories of the past – both traumatic and nostalgic – has an impact on whether and how they experience meaning in their lives and on how they look to the future. Beginning with a discussion about Keke, the protagonist, I look first at his relationships with two women who (whether intentionally or inadvertently) influence the recovery that follows his physical and emotional breakdown. Then moving on to Mandla, who is a parallel or a mirror image to Keke, I examine his close friendships, his family relationships, and his professional experiences.

Keke: From Overwhelming Trauma to Reflective Nostalgia

In previous chapters I discussed characters who experience trauma but whose painful memories have been repressed. For them, it is nostalgic memories – sweet memories – that arise: memories that screen the ego from painful and difficult thoughts, but which persist in evoking recollections of particular places or times until the associated trauma is acknowledged. This kind of nostalgia prompts release of latent trauma, so that ultimately both forms of memory together create a double perspective of nostalgic and traumatic memory. However, the formation of such double perspective does not always originate from sweet thoughts; the originating thoughts can be traumatic ones that are later softened through reflection. This is the case with the character Keke: although he experiences a mixture of both nostalgic and traumatic memories – a double perspective – his ‘starting point’ is his trauma.

Describing trauma as “a morbid condition produced by wounds of external violence”, and psychological trauma as “emotional shock” (2012:93) that is not physically visible, Sindiwe Magona goes on to state that trauma is “in the blood for the people of South Africa; [and that] they can neither escape it nor ignore it” (2012:93). As I mentioned earlier, traumatic memories can be either subverted by the psyche, so that the individual does not remember the event, or they can dominate one’s consciousness, thus obliterating or colouring all aspects of recall. The latter is what happens to Keke: traumatic memory dominates all aspects of his life.

At the beginning of the novel, Keke is presented as a man who is overwhelmed and debilitated by traumatic memories. The opening scenes are of a nightmare in which “[h]e had been running for a long time” (Serote 2013:1). In the dream, he is trying to decipher what is real and to distinguish between what is a “trick” and what is a “rumour” (2). Words such as ‘rumour’, ‘forgotten’, ‘confused’,

and ‘tricked’ convey his bewilderment, while words such as ‘degeneration’, ‘dehumanisation’, ‘thrashed’, ‘roaring’, and ‘force’ convey his fear and its magnitude (1-3). He wakes up from his nightmare “overwhelmed, so sad [and] filled with dread” (3) about his personal crisis which results from his inability to deal with memories of the traumatic events of his past. As an MK veteran, Keke suffers the repercussions of his past experiences as an activist and soldier, and is affected furthermore by the legacies of colonialism and apartheid.⁸⁹ As with Otsile in *Revelations*, the people surrounding Keke – his friends, family, and former comrades – all appear to have moved on from the past, and to be thriving in a democratic South Africa. Keke, however, finds that he cannot reconcile his past with his present, and that he does not feel ‘at home’ in contemporary South Africa. He has been in exile for eighteen years and has returned to a country that is very different from the one he left. In addition, it is different from the place he had envisioned, for which he had fought, and for which he had given up so much. Although he knows that change is inevitable, and that “nothing could last forever [...] to actually experience [change] was very different from merely knowing it” (16).

When Keke’s marriage breaks down (his wife, Mmbatho leaves him and takes their children with her to an undisclosed location), he suffers an emotional collapse. Shock and trauma can “result in debilitation, and [...] diminished functioning” (Magona 2012:93) and Keke now reaches this low point. He stops going to work and begins to drink heavily, retreating and isolating himself from society.

As he slides into depression Keke begins routinely to visit a tavern in Hillbrow where he befriends two women, Ami and Nomsa (49).⁹⁰ The two women are pivotal characters because although each represents a different aspect of life – Ami is a spiritual healer of sorts, Nomsa is a prostitute – each in her own way is a saviour for Keke. Ultimately, it is their interventions that induce his healing/rehabilitation; he gradually begins to move beyond his traumatic memories and to allow other nostalgic memories to surface and counter-balance his trauma-dominant recall.

Keke’s narrative – as that of the protagonist and pivotal character – is shaped by his experiences, which are in turn strongly influenced by his friendships. His nostalgic memories do not predominate until certain catalytic events occur (for example, when he becomes emotionally depleted) and certain

⁸⁹ Raditlhalo explains that historical trauma resulting from colonialism and apartheid becomes intertwined with structural trauma, which is a “continual and continuing” (2013:110) trauma. He views Tsi Malope in *To Every Birth Its Blood* as a character who experiences just such ‘continual and continuing’ trauma. Extending Raditlhalo’s comments regarding trauma in *To Every Birth Its Blood*, I contend that characters such as Keke and Mandla in *Rumours* and Otsile in *Revelations* should also be considered to be “labouring under the tormented moments of historical and structural traumas” (2013:110).

⁹⁰ A ‘tavern’ in contemporary South Africa is a drinking establishment, a bar, that has replaced the traditional ‘shebeen’ of former times. The shebeen was an unlicensed, illegal drinking place in the townships, usually run by women, that often served home-brewed beer. The tavern, as a licenced and legal establishment, has replaced the shebeen in contemporary South Africa but for many has lost the nostalgic charm and cultural connotations of the shebeen. As Keke observes, “The Twist Street Tavern was different from those Keke had grown up among in Alexander and Soweto. Those shebeens were people’s homes that were transformed at night into drinking places. This one was no shebeen, but an effort to imitate a white pub” (66).

people present themselves in his life (it is here that Serote introduces the two above-mentioned female characters, Ami and Nomsa).⁹¹ When Keke begins to explore African tradition and spiritual ritual, his nostalgic forays take both a restorative and reflective form. At this point there is a leaning towards Romanticism in Serote's writing: a "subjective dimension" (Baldick 2008:294) that creates a disconnection between the 'realistic' elements of Keke's life and the 'romanticised' narrative strand that depicts Keke as a "tormented outcast" (Baldick 2008:294). These may be creative techniques the author utilises to create an unsettled atmosphere, or could simply be a self-indulgent lapse in artistic focus. Another consideration is that the juxtapositioning of the 'realistic' and the 'romantic' here might signal that the author (perhaps subconsciously) doubts that the African/ness he envisions could ever be a complete reality and he must, therefore, resort to a slightly unreal portrayal.⁹²

Either way, the two women – Ami and Nomsa – each represent a stage in Keke's journey towards healing: the first stage is Keke's turn away from traumatic memories and towards, instead, the rosy outlook of the restorative nostalgic, while the second stage is a moderating turn to reflective nostalgia and the formation of a double perspective that allows for bitter as well as sweet memories. I discuss next, then, the effect that each of these female characters has on Keke's equilibrium.

As mentioned earlier, if traumatic memory is not acknowledged and processed, it can be subverted and screened off by more pleasant thoughts or it can dominate all aspects of life and thought. Both of these extreme reactions are represented in the character, Keke. Initially, traumatic memory dominates his psyche, until he becomes physically depleted and finds himself in a state of near-death. But because "individuals have an innate will to find meaning", as Cozzolino and Blackie point out, Keke is inspired to meditate on the past events of his life in order to "actively discover [his] own sense of meaning" (2013:40). What then happens is that he begins to focus on a range of restoratively nostalgic visions which screen off his trauma and provide him instead with a fantasy or escapist view. This limiting form of nostalgia serves (temporarily) as a "license to forget" (Hook 2012:231) and provides an easily imagined way out of real-life difficulties; it is an "imaginary figuration that attempts to remedy an impasse" (Hook 2012:232).

This process (of screening traumatic memory with restoratively nostalgic memory) is initiated in Keke when he meets Ami, a young Malian woman who is deeply spiritual and committed to leading a

⁹¹ Keke's development is similar in some respects to Zan's in *30 Nights in Amsterdam*. Zan is initially nostalgic in a restorative, protective way, but her remembering later develops to be more contemplative (or evolved) as she begins to incorporate traumatic memories.

⁹² Gagiano, discussing *To Every Birth Its Blood*, points out that some critics – she mentions J M Coetzee and Njabulo S Ndebele specifically – give "rather dismissive evaluations of the qualities of Serote's evocation of apartheid experiences and conditions" (2012:221). But, she argues, they misjudge the novel and thereby "diminish or even erase the valuable memory-work that this novel could provide for present-day and future South Africans" (2012:221). She chooses, rather, to "sharpen the delineation of the text's affective, moral, and socio-political dimensions and of its educative value" (2012:221). This is an attitude I too would like to adopt with *Revelations* and *Rumours*.

meaningful life. As the daughter of a shaman, and by extension of her father's spiritual teachings, she says, "I don't like to waste my time, because it means wasting our precious gift of life from the ancestors'" (64). Her mission – and here Serote's didactic voice breaks through – is "to break down Western barriers [...] and recreate the bridges our ancestors built so that our own home-grown communities can re-emerge in Africa'" (107). As part of her 'mission' she conducts ritual prayers for Keke and offers spiritual guidance.

Ami's ritualistic and traditional practices prompt, in Keke, restoratively nostalgic longings for a former sense of identity and meaning. Under her guidance, he begins to meditate, and through his meditation to ponder on his life and explore his painful past in an attempt to gain a sense of meaning in his life. This is a timely intervention, because, as Crystal Park points out, "[m]eaning is particularly important when individuals confront highly stressful and traumatic life experiences" (2013:61). Keke begins his meditation by questioning what its aim would be. At first, his aim is simply to escape from his painful feelings, he wants "not to feel what he [i]s feeling" (84). But soon he develops a desire to "understand what he [is] feeling. He want[s] clarity about what everything mean[s]" (84). As he settles into contemplation, however, "the past ke[eps] coming back, loaded with subjectivity" (115) and his mind returns him to his time as a soldier. Like Otsile (in *Revelations*), he is imaginatively and emotionally stuck in that role and so "his mind wander[s] back to his time in Mafikeng" (91), where he had lived and waited for orders, in a house with other MK operatives who were responsible for hiding weaponry for the armed struggle. It is interesting that these are the memories that are prompted by the instruction for him to think (during his meditation) about who loves him; because instead of thinking first of the family and friends in his present life, he is drawn, rather, to those fleeting and disjointed, but profound, relationships he had with other activists.

However, the manifestation of Keke's nostalgia is not confined just to recollections of the past; it extends very prominently to ritual and ceremony, tradition, and custom. As we know, the basis of ritual and ceremonial practice is a restorative nostalgia. Customs do change over time and evolve naturally, but when "new traditions" are adhered to as a way of restoring the past, they tend to be "characterized by a higher degree of symbolic formalization and ritualization" (Boym 2001:42) than the original customs they seek to emulate. Keke is drawn to the restoratively nostalgic comfort of the ritualistic spirituality that Ami practises because he senses a link to a traditional African way of being or living. But, in addition the rituals also forge – for him – a nostalgic restoration of the ritualistic life he had led as a soldier. Instinctively, Keke knows that this young woman has something to offer, even though he is uncertain, initially, as to what that could be. He wonders "[w]hat did [Ami] know and do that he didn't [and] what was she trying to tell him?" (84). And so, during his convalescence and rehabilitation following his assault, Keke relies on her for guidance, clinging to her as to a life-raft; it is as if he sees her 'teachings' as a last resort for him. Through his association with Ami, and in the rituals of a traditional and spiritual life, he finds a replacement for the rituals he followed as a soldier.

These rituals produce for him a “comforting collective script for individual longing” (Boym 2001:42). In this way, he erects a nostalgic “screen” (Hook 2012:233) for the traumatic memories he has of his life as soldier, and he can put off, temporarily, having to face or acknowledge the painful memories of that time.

The function of this character – Ami – has thus been to provide an intermediary role in the novel and in Keke’s life (during this first stage of his journey to healing that I mentioned earlier). Because Keke has a reverential regard for Ami, seeing her as a kind of saviour, she captures his attention and imagination, thereby facilitating his emotional transition from a state of debilitating traumatisation to a rosy, restoratively nostalgic outlook.⁹³ This intermediary function is expanded when Ami invites Keke to travel with her to her father’s homestead in Mali where Kanore, her father, operates as a shaman. He is situated in an ‘oasis’ in the depths of a jungle, isolated from the outside world. (I describe the visit to the homestead in more detail in the next section on ‘Nostalgia in the Novel: Places’.) Like Ami, Kanore too has an other-worldly aura about him – whether contrived or inherent – an aura that is viewed by Keke, as all-knowing, and all-seeing. A stereotypical African patriarch, he has many wives and many children, being the patriarchal controller who settles disputes through meetings and discussions, but he is somewhat arrogant and dismissive. The novel thus presents Ami and her father Kanore as ‘superior’ beings who can be held up as idealistic examples whom the other characters can aspire to emulate or use as yardsticks against which to measure a more realistic self.

Ami and Kanore help Keke to restore his sense of a mythical ‘African-ness’; father and daughter are embodiments of traditional African experience. As nostalgically framed characters, they answer to Keke’s deep yearning for an identity and sense of belonging as a man of Africa. He recognises in them something that he has been longing for, and he therefore surrenders to the guidance they offer. At Kanore’s homestead Keke undergoes a series of rituals that are intended to cleanse him, to open him up spiritually, and to reconnect him with his ancestors. And because Keke has thus far been completely overwhelmed by painful, traumatic memories, it is only the profoundly evocative influence of such restoratively nostalgic yearnings that can break through the strangle-hold that trauma has had on his psyche.

However, although Keke succumbs to all the practices that Kanore prescribes, he does retain some scepticism throughout his experiences at the homestead to which Ami has brought him. Initially he surrenders to the restoratively nostalgic allure of an idealistic African experience, but as he eases into

⁹³ It could be argued that, in his characterisation of Ami, Serote has intentionally created a flattened character – one that does not develop and is depicted one-dimensionally and unambiguously – so that she functions simply as an intermediary. Characterising Ami as less-than-real (or, perhaps, more-than-real) with ethereal qualities as of a divine messenger of sorts, can thus be seen as a literary device: the romanticised form of a mythical ‘faerie’ who flits around the edges of Keke’s life and his transformation/rehabilitation. However, it is perhaps also likely that, in resorting to this romanticised style, Serote exposes an inability to fully realise his restoratively nostalgic vision of an idealised ‘African woman’.

a contemplation of his past, and begins to acknowledge both bitter and sweet recollections, he gradually acquires a more balanced perspective. So, whereas his relationship with Ami has aided the awakening of restoratively nostalgic memories that are juxtaposed with his traumatic recall, his relationship with Nomsa facilitates his shift towards a more reflective view in the second stage of his healing process.

As I have mentioned, the two women, Ami and Nomsa, whom Keke befriends in the Twist Street Tavern, each had a role to play in his rehabilitation and healing, but where Ami represents an idealistic role in the narrative, Nomsa's characterisation has a 'realist', or pragmatic, function. And in those roles the women are aligned with the development, respectively, of Keke's restorative nostalgia and his reflective nostalgia: the ethereal Ami facilitating restorative forms of nostalgia; the presence of the realistic Nomsa encouraging a reflective nostalgia. The novel presents both restorative and reflective forms of nostalgia as coping mechanisms for the legacies of trauma, both for Keke and for his new acquaintance Nomsa, who is equally damaged. They each learn to cope with their painful pasts by reflecting on, and engaging with, both the painful and the meaningful aspects of their lives.

When Keke begins his process of introspection and meditation, his first aim is to escape from his emotional pain; he wants "not to feel what he was feeling" (84). He participates in traditional and spiritual rituals (in Mali under Ami's/Kanore's guidance), which are restoratively nostalgic activities that temporarily assuage the burden of his trauma. This desire soon develops, though, into the need to "understand what he [is] feeling" (84), and it is partly through his illuminating relationship with Nomsa that he acquires this depth of understanding.

Both Keke and Nomsa are deeply traumatised individuals who can empathise with each other's pain. Nomsa's personality and struggles mirror Keke's, and their friendship is mutually beneficial because each can see the other more objectively than they do themselves. When Nomsa asks of him, "What more do you want?" (55), it is a question that she could pose to herself too, because although she admits that she has friends, people who love her, and a home, she confesses that she, like Keke, is lonely and disconnected from those around her.

Nomsa also feels a certain disconnection from herself. Although she infers that she is secure in her identity, emphatically proclaiming that she is "an African woman" (62), her appearance does not support her apparent confidence. Keke sees "a tall puffed-up woman" (53) who wears her clothes as a costume, in order to play the African woman she wishes to portray; it is a persona she adopts. "Nomsa [is] into imitation": she wears false hair, false eyelashes, plastic nails, bright lipstick, coloured contact lenses, and excessively high heels (97, 119), so that, in effect, she is "wearing a disguise" (124). In addition to her appearance, Nomsa also uses language to create a protective space between herself and others. For example, she talks flippantly and shockingly about the sexual abuse she experienced as a girl (67) and is off-hand about her 'work' as a prostitute (55, 62).

Nomsa's crude facade serves two purposes: it shields her from the pain she has already suffered and wards off any further abuse or pain. It indicates, furthermore, that she regards her body as abject. The abject is "that which disturbs the self, by provoking either disgust, fear, loathing or repulsion [and applies to] either a subject or an object that cannot be assimilated" (Buchanan 2010:1). For Nomsa there is a disconnection not only between herself and those around her, but also between herself (her psyche) and her body – in other words, between body and soul.⁹⁴

Keke is fascinated by the way Nomsa regards her body as abject; it mirrors his own self-loathing. Keke's self-punishment, or self-flagellation, takes the form of excessive drinking. After his wife leaves him, he drinks to the point of oblivion, waking up to find himself lying in his own vomit and excrement, which is an example not only of self-neglect but is also an extreme expression of disgust and rejection.⁹⁵ Human beings are particularly repulsed by their own body fluids, which are "for the most part loathsome to us, [and] the intensity of that loathing owes precisely to the fact that they come from us" (Buchanan 2010:1).⁹⁶ Keke shows the extent of his self-loathing through self-neglect and degradation, and as the weeks follow, he perpetually rejects himself – his physical self – by continuing to abuse his body in this way until he is homeless, and finally he succumbs to (or perhaps even submits to) a terrible beating that almost kills him.

Keke and Nomsa thus share a tendency for self-loathing, overwhelmed as each of them is by traumatic memories. The more important link between them, though, is their mutual friend Ami, the intermediary who brings them together so that they effect change in each other.⁹⁷ Ami is also a catalyst for each of these two characters, Keke and Nomsa. In her intermediary role as a type of 'faerie' or 'angel' – as I have suggested – Ami brings them together to form a mutually beneficial friendship: mutually beneficial because Keke needs to be nurtured, while Nomsa needs to nurture.

Nomsa needs to be nurturing because she has lost her children: the source of her unbearable pain, and has no outlet for her maternal instinct. The circumstances of her separation from her children are not divulged, but in an anguished moment she asks, " 'what woman would give her children away?' " (101), indicating that she blames herself for the loss.⁹⁸ However, coupled to the trauma of this

⁹⁴ Like Zan (in *30 Nights in Amsterdam*) she inhabits a body she simultaneously rejects because her body is a site of pain and trauma.

⁹⁵ Julia Kristeva explains that human beings are repelled by certain body fluids and functions because they represent threats which must be guarded against: "Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identify that [which] comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death" (1982:71). Keke's behaviour indicates that he has abandoned the fight for life, that he no longer regards himself worthy of 'protection' against external threats.

⁹⁶ "The body's inside [...] shows up in order to compensate for the collapse of the border between inside and outside. It is as if the skin, a fragile container, no longer guaranteed the integrity of one's 'own clean self' but, scraped or transparent, invisible or taut, gave way before the dejection of its contents" (Kristeva 1982:53).

⁹⁷ In this respect Ami plays a similar role to that of the lawyer Grotius, who is an intermediary between Zan and Henk de Melker in *30 Nights in Amsterdam*.

⁹⁸ A similar situation is presented in Rayda Jacobs's novel *Joonie*, in which the character Laverne never recovers from the loss of her child/ren.

profound loss is Nomsa's nostalgic memory from her own childhood: she vividly remembers her great-great-grandmother singing to her (101). These two very different memories – one of neglect, the other of nurture – become enmeshed and muddled within her mind. Through meeting Keke the entanglement of her memories about being a child and being a child-minder (a mother) are further exacerbated as her maternal instinct responds to his vulnerability. After Keke is brutally attacked, she says, “‘I’ll never let this boy out of my sight again’” (81), indicating her protective and motherly feelings towards him. Keke awakens in her the longing to nurture another. Simultaneously, he learns that he is worthy of being nurtured, of being loved.

Although Keke sees Nomsa as a flawed individual, he also regards her as worthy of love and respect. At the same time, he recognises that he is a very similar person to her and, because he can see her worth, he is eventually forced to acknowledge his own worthiness.

The novel thus presents Keke as a character who is severely affected by traumatic experiences, but who nevertheless finds a way to cope with the burden of traumatic memories and to move forward with his life, however slowly and painstakingly. Trauma need not be entirely debilitating, and Keke is an example of someone who manages to achieve ‘life after trauma’. As Mengel and Borzaga point out,

[a]fter all, there is the phenomenon of thriving in the aftermath of trauma, or post-traumatic growth – PTG. What we mean by this is that people who have suffered multiple traumatisations in the postcolony are nevertheless able to go on with their lives. Colvin rightly remarks that studies around trauma have tended to ‘neglect the agency, resistance, resilience and creativity’ of people in times of trauma. (2012:xiv)

However, it would seem that the ability to ‘get over’ trauma – to process it and loosen its psychological grip – requires an acknowledgement of the pain and the effect it has had. Nomsa's role in the novel has been to facilitate that process and to provide an example to Keke. He witnesses how she eventually acknowledges the pain of her past without allowing it to dominate her life or to obliterate the possibility of pleasure or happiness in the present and he is thus emboldened to do the same.

Nostalgic yearnings lead Keke to a point of recognition and acknowledgement because he becomes reflectively nostalgic and ultimately concentrates on his longings rather than on the object of his longings. Turning from Keke to Mandla, we see a journey towards healing that takes a different path.

Mandla: Restorative Nostalgia and Recurring Trauma

In the opening chapters of the novel, Keke experiences an existential crisis and seeks solace with his friend, Mandla. Mandla's situation mirrors Keke's in many respects; they have come through similar

experiences and are at similar stages of life. Yet although they have both created lives in terms of career and family, while Keke now founders, Mandla seems to be thriving.⁹⁹

Mandla and his wife, Thuli, divide their family and their time between Johannesburg (where Thuli works and their children attend school), and Durban, where Mandla is a professor of architecture. They appear to lead a fulfilled and meaningful existence; they are examples of people whom Zakes Mda would refer to as “black diamonds” (2009) because they are part of the new black upper-middle class of affluent professionals. However, all is not as it seems, and Mandla’s dissatisfaction with present-day South Africa is soon apparent. As David Medalie has pointed out, “many of the more memorable [literary] works of the post-apartheid period are dystopian [...] and it is frequently the post-apartheid present, not the apartheid past, that bears the greater weight of the dystopian impulse” (2010:36). In this novel, that impulse is evident in Mandla’s utter disappointment with life in present-day South Africa. As he watches the television news and reads the newspaper (in the novel’s early scenes), Mandla rails against what he sees as distortions by South Africa’s media, which has Western biases and does not “represent his views” (5). Furthermore, the fact that the media undermine and criticize ‘the Movement’ and its (former and current) leaders angers him (6). The past, he feels, is not correctly or appropriately represented or honoured. Mandla’s frustrations are evidently representative of the author’s sentiments: that it is a “great disservice” that South Africans today “do not really know what is Umkhonto we Sizwe, who are the people who were in it, and what type of people they were” (Serote 2013: 8:30).¹⁰⁰

Mandla experiences negative emotions, which make him prone to nostalgia. His response is in keeping with the findings of Wildschut et al. who, in studying the triggers of nostalgia, found that “nostalgia occurs in response to negative mood” (2006:975). It is interesting, therefore, to note here how Mandla expresses his current discontent using language that is anchored in the past. For example, he uses phrases and words such as “the revolution” (6) and “the Movement” (6), and refers to his friends as “comrades” (7). Mandla attempts to counter his unhappiness in a dystopian present with ‘backward glances’ to an idyllic past. However, as Medalie puts it, “[b]ackward glances are suspect because there

⁹⁹ Davis and Hicks identify three possible resolutions to an existential crisis: Meaning can be affirmed “through a leap of faith in which one asserts that life is meaningful without developing empirically reasoned justifications [...] an intuitive process” (2013:168). Alternatively, foundations of meaning can be rebuilt by relying on “sources of meaning which withstand careful scrutiny and are sufficiently justified to the individual [and that] accommodate new information” (Davis & Hicks 2013:169). Another resolution is “making the determination that life is, in fact, not meaningful” (Davis & Hicks 2013:171). Throughout the course of *Rumours*, Keke resorts, in turn, to each of the above-mentioned possibilities to resolve his existential crisis. Contrastingly, at the beginning of the novel, Mandla has not (yet) been confronted with “information wholly at odds with [his] meaning in life beliefs” (167) and therefore he appears to be thriving.

¹⁰⁰ As one who was “extremely active in the struggle” (2013b: 7:20), Serote says furthermore that “when [he] became part and parcel of [MK] [he] felt that [he] was among very fine women and men who had made extremely difficult decisions and had made a strong commitment and were very determined” (2013b:8:50). This is a community to which he felt a strong sense of belonging and it is a sense of solidarity and belonging that the characters in this novel, particularly Keke and Mandla, seek to recapture in their post-MK lives.

is a possibility that they may be deemed a reactionary response to change [especially, as in Mandla's case,] when the past which provide[s] the source of the nostalgia is apartheid South Africa" (2010:36). Why does Mandla retreat to those times in particular? What does he long for that he does not have (but needs) now? In what follows, I try to decipher the clues presented by Mandla's nostalgia in order to uncover the source of his pain and longing. Nostalgia is manifest – in its restorative form – in various aspects of Mandla's life: in his friendships, in his professional projects, and in his longing for communal/extended family. Furthermore, his restoratively nostalgic outlook is indicative of unexplored and subverted traumas, which tragically recur in his daughters' experiences.

The strong friendship between Mandla and Keke is based on restoratively nostalgic emotion. Their devotion to one another is an attempt to retain or restore the "absolute truth" (Boym, 2001:xviii) of their relationship: they are 'comrades', soldiers who in their younger days faced adversity together, and who believed in a common ideal. Their circumstances are now still similar in many respects, and when Mandla feels unhappy, his reaction to his discontent mirrors Keke's. Just as Keke turned to his friend Mandla in his initial call for help, so Mandla turns to Keke. The bond they share, forged during their time in MK, is sacrosanct, and so when Mandla tells Keke, "Remember, I am your comrade. Always" (224), his words are a sincere (albeit restoratively nostalgic) reassurance that he will perpetually give and expect support. By referring to himself as 'comrade', Mandla features himself as the typical "active and central player" in a nostalgic narrative, the function of which is to "restore positive moods and feelings of social connectedness [and] feelings of affiliation" (Vess et al. 2012:274). It follows that Mandla would revisit his earlier friendship in order to feel a social connectedness and a sense of belonging that are lacking in his current life. He is (subconsciously) struggling to define his sense of identity and yearns for validation. He is concerned that, not only in mainstream media, but also in South African society in general, the former activist (such as himself) is misrepresented and that he is therefore misunderstood as an African man. That is why, in order to renew his sense of self, he turns to 'comrades' who understand him. This is a restoratively nostalgic reaction that relies on old friendships, but does not focus on why there is a longing for those earlier personal connections.

Mandla's restoratively nostalgic outlook also extends to his professional life. The architectural project on which he is working is modelled on age-old African ideals and designs. His assignment is a residential scheme, a modern block of flats, that incorporates elements of the traditional African village.

It is evident from Mandla's professional and creative endeavours that he has an ardent interest in the idea of communal living, or of life within a close-knit community. But, although he has a vision of the idyllic community, he does not imaginatively place himself in that vision/project. In his personal life, he cannot maintain a cohesive unit even with/in his immediate family. The family unit, comprising Mandla, his wife, and their two daughters, is fractured by their living arrangements (which are dictated

by their careers): Mandla is in Durban, while Thuli is in Johannesburg, and their daughters are often left in the care of their school or of a servant. It is as if the image he has of the building project – and the envisioned community – is conceived of as a separate entity to that of his own life, his own reality. For Mandla, the housing project is therefore an escapist idea, akin to a fantasy. It is, as Hook would put it, an example of “fantasmatic nostalgia” (Hook 2012:233).

Hook describes a fantasy scene as “a frozen frame in a film that brings the sequence of images to a halt just before the moment of castration” (2012:232). For Mandla, that ‘moment of castration’ would be the beginning of colonisation and subsequent apartheid in South Africa, which ruptured what he conjures up as the continuity of tradition and culture. If, as Hook suggests, “nostalgia, like fantasy, is conditioned by a certain impossibility, should we not then view it as a fantasmatic formation [...] that attempts to remedy an impasse, to make good on a lack?” (2012:232). To extend Hook’s question, if Mandla sees an idyllic and traditional communal life as an impossibility in today’s world, could the building project – the restoratively nostalgic project – be an attempt to restore or recreate something that would stand in for what he feels he cannot have? Could it, or would it, ‘make good on a lack’? Instead of reflecting on the past as fragmentary and therefore only accessible in part, Mandla sees the early African past as one idyllic whole, and therefore as wholly inaccessible. This is an example of how “[n]ostalgia in its less challenging forms turns the past into a static utopia which is irretrievably lost and cannot therefore have any meaningful relations with the present” (Medalie 2010:42). Through his one-dimensional relationship to the past, Mandla misses opportunities to benefit from elements of the past that could be ‘transported’ and adapted to, or for, the present.

His regard for family is another example of how Mandla’s restorative nostalgia causes him to view the past as an ‘irretrievably lost, static utopia’. On a particularly important occasion, Mandla experiences exactly what he has been yearning for: support from extended family. However, he does not register the importance of what happens, because he is blinded by his idealistic visions of the distant past. He fails to recognise the reimagining, or reincarnation, of what he desires as it manifests itself in the present. This occurs as he is plunged into a personal and professional crisis when the university that employs him challenges his academic credentials. Both his sense of self and the meaningfulness of his work are brought into question. In order to discuss the matter and to offer Mandla solidarity and support, his extended family gathers for a meeting at his house.

At the gathering, the senior family member who takes the lead – an elderly uncle – expresses his concern about the way in which the older, less sophisticated family members can help their younger, educated relative: “[h]ow could we participate, we who have never seen the inside of a classroom?” (11). This is a scenario that has not occurred before, so the elder relative recognises that traditional methods do not apply in the same way as they always have, and that they must be adapted to the current situation. However, the conclusion they reach is that “anyone who wants to hurt him [Mandla]

wants to hurt us”, and that the meaning of the large and extended family is “to teach us to be social, to negotiate, to share [and to] teach us to help each other” (12).

Although Mandla is emotionally affected – he feels supported and loved – his response is somewhat superficial because once the problems in his professional life are resolved, he reverts to his fast-paced lifestyle without appreciating the family solidarity from which he has benefited. He does not savour the interactions that have occurred between the generations of his kin; neither does he reflect on how this tradition of extended family life has happened in his own home and in his own life. Because he is fixated on an idealistic picture of the past, he does not consider (and takes for granted without acknowledgement) that fragments of that past are accessible to him and can be incorporated into his everyday life. In the short term, Mandla benefits from the family’s solidarity and support, but for long-term benefit he will have to reflect on what has happened. Like his elderly uncle, he must reflect on how traditional practices (such as the family meeting) can be renewed and adapted, since on this occasion “*re-flection* suggests new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis” (Boym 2001:49). He will have to consider the possibility that, as Stephanos Stephanides points out, “[n]ostalgia may have threads to the past without being the active enemy of future relationships, and may engender its own ironies on how local and national cultural identities are argued and contested” (2007:9).

It is ironic, therefore, that Mandla advises a focus on the family in response to Keke’s difficulties. His question, “How can you build a nation if you can’t build a family and a home?” (35), foreshadows the traumatic events he is about to experience. Although he is unaware at this stage, the structure of his own family is crumbling and his restoratively nostalgic approach to past and present life, which has effectively screened off traumatic memories thus far, has created an environment for his submerged trauma to resurface and recur.

As I have discussed in the previous chapter on Rayda Jacobs’s *Joonie*, unresolved trauma often recurs in subsequent generations, and in Serote’s novel, the parents’ trauma resurfaces in the daughters’ lives.¹⁰¹ In an interview, Serote commented on how the younger generation is losing touch with African culture – that they are unaware that they are “Africans living in an African country” (2013b, 24:00), a sentiment that he represents in this novel. Soon after the conversation with Keke, Mandla and his wife will be called to a meeting with the principal at their children’s school and informed that their daughters have been involved in an inter-racial group-sex act referred to as ‘the rainbow act’. Shocked at what their children have done, they are devastated furthermore that meaningful communication has broken down between them and their daughters.

In representing the breakdown of cultural continuity in this one family, Serote illustrates a “situation that has been created through the length and breadth of this country” (2013b:22:30). Casting about for

¹⁰¹ In *Joonie*, the traumas that Joonie deals with are repetitions of the unresolved difficulties that have also challenged her mother and her grandmother before her.

some explanation in order to make sense of what has happened, Mandla and Thuli consider the change in belief systems from one generation to another of their respective families. Thuli comments that one generation “believed with total conviction in Christianity, as the previous generation had believed in the ancestors and in God [while Mandla and Thuli’s] generation believed in politics” (88). They consider that perhaps this disjunction has adversely affected their girls (and others of that generation) who, as a result, appear to have acquired no sense of identity.

Although Mandla is the father of two teenage daughters and has always provided for their material and physical well-being, he is psychologically and emotionally unequipped for the role of parent and mentor. He has not had a strong sense of his own identity since the dismantling of MK, when his participation in the struggle for democracy ended. Like some of the other characters I have already discussed – for example, Otsile and Keke – the continuity of Mandla’s life was disrupted by his participation in the fight against apartheid and by his experiences as an MK soldier/activist. For Mandla, however, these emotional and psychological issues remain subconscious and therefore unresolved. As I noted earlier, Mandla has only restoratively nostalgic memories, which form a ‘screen’ in his mind that does not let him acknowledge his traumas or his current pain; accordingly, an absolute separation is created in his mind between the present and the past.

Additionally, he no longer feels a sense of belonging because the social space of contemporary democratic South Africa appears disappointingly different now; it has changed irrevocably since his youth, and furthermore the differences are irreconcilable with his earlier imagined vision for the future of the country. Mandla is like an immigrant in his own country; he has attempted to adjust to contemporary South Africa as though a stranger. In the way that immigrants in a new country are “often notoriously unsentimental” (Boym 2001:xv) about the past and the place they have left behind, Mandla is committed only to present-day tasks and to building a future. Until now, he has regarded himself as unhampered by the past and in control of his present-day situation. Furthermore, in the same way that it is typical of “[f]irst-wave immigrants [to leave] the search for roots to their children and grandchildren” (Boym 2001:xv), Mandla likewise has made no effort to teach his children about the past or about traditional practices and beliefs.

In fact, he is mired in nostalgia. But because his nostalgia is a restorative nostalgia, it “does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition” (Boym 2001:xv). Restorative nostalgia does not acknowledge the painful or the traumatic and does not dwell on the complexities of the past, and for some “the deeper the loss, the harder it [is] to engage in public mourning” (Boym 2001:xv). In Mandla’s form of recall there is a clear divide between his ‘bitter’ memories and his ‘sweet’ memories. He does not investigate or acknowledge the painful associations of his nostalgic yearnings. The consequence is that painful memories are screened off and hidden. Painful issues, however, if not addressed become submerged in the psyche, bound ultimately to recur, and Mandla’s unresolved

traumas resurface in the next generation. His daughters bear the legacy of his pain. (This is similar to the recurrence of trauma between the generations represented in Jacobs's novel, *Joonie*.)

There is always a gap in understanding and communication between one generation and its successor – commonly referred to as the ‘generation gap’ – but in times of rapid or profound change the difficulties are compounded. Normally, cultural practices facilitate the formation of a strong sense of self in the younger generation in spite of the natural gap between generations. However, during times of socio-political upheaval, the continuity of such cultural practices can be disrupted.

In Mandla's family, a chasm has opened between him and his daughters, leading to this foundering of channels of communication. Over and above the natural generation gap, the family members have been physically separated due to their living arrangements, and the reinforcement normally provided by some form of traditional culture has been ruptured. Without role models, the girls are insecure about their sense of identity and belonging. They become involved in subversive, self-harming activities that suggest a profound disconnection between their minds and bodies, to the extent that they may even have begun to regard their bodies as abject (just as Nomsa does, as previously noted). The eldest daughter is particularly affected. Ultimately she commits suicide by shooting herself; she literally ‘takes up arms’ against herself, which is the ultimate rejection of her abject body.¹⁰²

*

There are many similarities between Keke's life and Mandla's life, but what they remember (or do not remember) about the past is not identical. As I explained earlier, nostalgia can be harnessed as a positive or a negative force depending on its focus. This is because “shared everyday frameworks of collective or cultural memory offer us mere signposts for individual reminiscences that could suggest multiple narratives” (Boym 2001:53). Although Keke and Mandla have very similar ‘shared frameworks of collective and cultural memory’, their narratives take very different turns. On the one hand, Keke's traumatic memories initially dominate his recall, but by slowly incorporating nostalgic memory, both restorative and reflective, he creates a more nuanced image of his past. On the other hand, Mandla's most prominent and persistent memories are restoratively nostalgic thoughts that screen his traumatic memories, meaning that they are unacknowledged and unresolved, and that they ultimately resurface.

Ending with the death of his daughter Wanjuri, the Mandla story is representative of a type of post-apartheid writing that Boehmer refers to as a “space of persistent trauma and anguish” (2012:29) that

¹⁰² Mandla's eldest daughter, Wanjuri, is a melancholy character. She is reminiscent of the characters Tsi Malope in *To Every Birth Its Blood*, to whom Gagiano refers to as a “melancholic presence” (2012:239), and Otsile in *Revelations*, who, Kona points out, “comes across as melancholic” (2011:3)

ends on a “frozen penultimate” (2012:39). However, Mandla’s story is but one strand of the novel’s narrative, and with Keke’s more optimistic story Serote places the emphasis on an ending that is “open to slow progression” (Boehmer 2012:44). The ending suggests that Keke is learning to process his emotions (he may lead Mandla by his example). Thus in its treatment of trauma Serote’s writing is more a “literature of affect” (Cooppan 2012:54), because it appropriately and helpfully focusses on and articulates emotion – a processing of trauma, as I suggested earlier, that is facilitated by the concept of nostalgia.

Having examined nostalgia in the novel with regard to characters, in the next section I focus on Serote’s nostalgic treatment of place and space.

Nostalgia in the Novel: Places

In his treatment of space and place in *Rumours*, as he did in *Revelations*, Serote explores themes of displacement and dislocation and examines the search for home as a place where it is possible to experience a sense of belonging and a feeling of spiritual wholeness.

As in all the novels examined in this study, *Rumours* considers the fraught subject of the human need to feel ‘at home’ and the need to call certain places ‘home’ in a country where such claims are often contentious and have not always been officially possible for all. *Rumours* faces such issues primarily through the perspective of a former struggle activist whose sense of ‘home’ and ‘belonging’ is compounded by his status as a returned exile and who is now living in a country that has changed irrevocably and in unexpected ways. As Johan Jacobs makes clear,

[f]or the returned exile, the home country is no more simply the place of filiation with a natal culture than the host country of exile was simply the place of later affiliation with another culture or cause. Rather, they are places where the exile is doubly relocated, doubly dislocated. (2016:239)

A sense of dislocation, of displacement, spurs a nostalgic longing for a place of belonging. However, a nostalgic view of places is made ambiguous by the longing for particular places at specific times (i.e. spaces), meaning that although a physical place can be visited, such visits will always be restricted to the here and now. Particular places at specific times can be visited only in the imagination, the nostalgic imagination. In Serote’s novels, the characters travel in an attempt to find the spaces that will quell their nostalgic longings. Their instinct to travel in order to find a place that is emotionally meaningful is a reflection of Davidson and Milligan’s point that “place must be *felt* to make sense, [and that] meaningful senses of space emerge only via movements *between* people and places” (2004:524).

In *Revelations*, the path of Otsile’s travels forms a wide arc as he moves between continents and countries and it then spirals inward to a gathering at a cave in the Drakensberg mountains. A similar

arc is evident in *Rumours*. The protagonist, Keke, visits a series of sites, prompted by the persistence of a powerfully evocative nostalgia. However, in contrast to Otsile's journey in *Revelations*, that moves steadily inward, the trajectory of Keke's journeys in *Rumours* moves steadily outwards.

In *Rumours* the opening scene presents the protagonist alone in the dark (and in the grips of a terrifying and disorientating nightmare) in a barely furnished house, an empty shell. From this barren and confined site in Johannesburg – from the enclosed space formed by the walls of his 'non-home' empty house – Keke Sello tentatively ventures out in search of a sense of meaning and of identity and belonging. The spatial focus of the narrative gradually widens out to the city of Johannesburg and then to Durban, and thereafter to the vast expanses of the African continent. As Keke's incursions take him further afield, and as he reaches out to connect with other people, he becomes more connected to himself and to others; and he develops a "sense of place, [a] subjective and emotional attachment" (Cresswell 2004:7) to several important sites. Keke's circular route ultimately brings him back almost to his starting point in his return home from Mali to Johannesburg. As he and his wife and children attempt to regroup as a family, his house begins to resemble a true home because it becomes a meaningful place to them all.

Bearing Keke's emotional growth in mind, it is significant that *Rumours* unfolds entirely within the African continent. Paris, France, and the USA are mentioned, but not explored. (These countries remain outside the realm of the novel.) The African inwardness of *Rumours* is different from that of the earlier novel, *Revelations*, which extended its focus to South American countries. Instead, *Rumours* presents the case of a strong sense of identity and belonging fostered within the confines of Africa – at home – before the focus is extended to the global sphere.

Although there are differences in the spatial focus between *Revelations* and *Rumours*, there is, nonetheless, a marked similarity in the way that a sense of disorientation is created at the beginning of both novels (and in the trajectory that moves from chaos to calm). In the opening chapters of *Rumours* it is not clear where Keke is situated, or where he belongs, and this mirrors his emotional uncertainty.¹⁰³ Keke is initially situated in a dark and empty house, trying to make sense of a nightmare. Then, in an abrupt change of scene, he leans against a railing, looking out to sea. In both of these early scenes it is noteworthy that Keke tries to make sense of the space he is in – that he is conscious of the cultural, historical, and socio-political influences of specific sites. Through Keke's observations, the novel consistently refers to places as meaningful, and explains their nostalgically evocative nature. Keke is instinctively aware that places are influenced by people and that people in turn are influenced by the places they visit. He understands that – to cite Lefebvre – "[i]n space, what came earlier continues to underpin what follows" (2012:229). However, Keke faces the challenge of

¹⁰³ This is similar to the disorientation the reader experiences at the beginning of *Revelations*, as Otsile and Bra Shope move swiftly from place to place, fostering empathy for their sense of displacement/dislocation.

gaining an understanding not only of the places he visits, but also of his own role and significance as an individual at each site; in other words, he must consider where and how he fits in and/or belongs.

Serote's nostalgic representations of space/place in *Rumours* can best be explored by following Keke's circular route from the isolated starting point of his empty 'non-home' out into Johannesburg and Durban; then, further afield on the continent to Mali, and his return, in a full-circle, to Johannesburg where he once again creates a home. In following Keke's nostalgic and spiritual journey, we shall see how he comes back almost to his originating point, although his journey will have moved incrementally forward in a process of growth and development.

My discussion about how space/place is nostalgically represented in *Rumours* follows the "three fundamental guiding questions about nostalgia" addressed by Wildschut et al. (2006:975). In seeking to establish a better understanding of the "content, triggers, [and] functions" (2006:975) of nostalgia the critics examine "the notion that nostalgia occurs in reaction to negative affect" (2006:982) – the notion that there are certain triggers. Following this line of thought, they gather corroborating evidence for "a causal link between negative affect and nostalgia" (2006:985). Taking this as my lead, I begin my discussion of Keke's relationship with place/space by examining his feelings about (and in) the starting points of his travels and movements. What are the negative feelings that compel him to move in search of a place in which he can feel more at ease?

Once the triggers or causes of Keke's nostalgic quest have been established, his destinations can be scrutinized. These destinations – the particular sites that Keke is drawn to – represent the content of his nostalgic yearning as far as places/spaces are concerned. With regard to the content of nostalgic thought, Wildschut et al. found that "nostalgic narratives typically feature the self as central character and revolve around interactions with important others" (2006:988); the critics also found that even when disappointments are experienced, "negative life scenes are redeemed or mitigated by subsequent triumphs over adversity. Furthermore, nostalgic narratives are richer in expressions of positive than negative affect" (Wildschut et al. 2006:988-89). What, then, are Keke's expectations of the places he visits, and does he have pre-conceived nostalgic ideas of what he will find there and how he will feel? Furthermore, are his nostalgic yearnings for a place of belonging restorative or reflective in nature?

Finally I consider what functions, if any, Keke's nostalgic meanderings serve. Do Keke's experiences in the various places that he is nostalgically prompted to visit correlate with Wildschut et al.'s findings that nostalgia "bolsters social bonds, increases positive self-regard, and generates positive affect" (2006:975)?

Triggers that Compel a Nostalgic Quest for Meaningful Places

I begin my exploration of the novel's nostalgic representations of space/place by considering the 'triggers' that prompt a 'return' to certain places, as exemplified in the experiences of its protagonist, Keke. As I discuss further below, Keke is searching for a place of belonging, a place where he can

establish a sense of identity, and where he can feel at home. But before I examine his journeys and destinations, I would like to take a closer look at the originating spaces of his journey, the starting point, to ascertain the cause of his discontent. Why does he not feel at home? Why does he not feel a sense of belonging? There are three important sites that trigger his quest to find more meaningful places: firstly, his house that is not a home, secondly the shebeen he frequents, a place of non-belonging where displaced people (like himself) meet, and finally the derelict squat that he is eventually driven to inhabit, which is both a non-home and a place of non-belonging. Keke experiences the residues of trauma and a sense of *Unheimlichkeit* at these sites, and – together – they provide the discontent, the negative affect, that triggers his subsequent journeying.

The initial ‘point of departure’ is a barren space. Keke’s house was (he thought) a home filled with family and love; but there has been a ‘forced removal’. In this case of forced removal, however, instead of Keke himself being removed from his home, his home has been taken away from him; or rather, the people, objects, and artefacts that made his house a home have been removed. His wife has left him and taken the children and all of their household effects with her. The essence of ‘home’ has been removed from the house and he has been left alone in a site of trauma. His house is a site of trauma because not only is he negatively affected by the recent loss of his family and the subsequent aching loneliness, but also he has yet to confront the unresolved traumas that brought him to this point of desperate unhappiness in the first place.

All that remains for Keke are nostalgic memories of the life he envisioned when he first bought the house for the family: “[h]e loved the house, but now it was an empty shell” (17). It is an empty shell with an atmosphere of confusion and despair, which manifests itself vividly in Keke’s nightmares; he dreams that something terrifying and threatening is chasing him. Central to the turmoil of this nightmare is a threat to Africa’s independence; the idealised vision of a pan-African state is under siege by powerful European and American forces that are antagonistic to the ‘African Renaissance’. As the narrator in the dream insists, “[t]hey planned to fight the African Renaissance, to cut Africa up into pieces and then rule it” (1). This nightmare starkly indicates Keke’s unquelled dread of oppression and his feelings of homelessness, of not being at home (i.e. *Unheimlichkeit*). He has spent his life fighting oppression, and although peace and democracy have been realised, the trauma/legacy of oppression lingers. Keke has thus far been able to ‘screen’ off these traumatic memories and feelings by producing the semblance of a family and a home, but now even that flimsy protection has been stripped away, and unresolved trauma overwhelms him. The dark bedroom in the empty house becomes for him a bunker in which he hides fearfully.

But human beings crave a sense of meaning. As Cozzolino and Blackie put it, “individuals have an innate will to find meaning and that meaning is found as a function of agency, engagement, and self-direction” (2013:40). Furthermore, considering that “nostalgia occurs in response to negative mood and the discrete affective state of loneliness” (Wildschut et al. 2006:975), it is understandable that

Keke is prompted by a nostalgic yearning to seek out meaningful places to visit. Therefore, even in this state of crisis Keke instinctively seeks out places he can (re)visit in the hopes of creating or finding some sense of meaning for himself.

Nostalgic feelings, a longing to belong somewhere, draw him out of his lair and, as I discussed in the previous subsection, his instinctive destination is the coastal city of Durban where he visits Mandla, his friend/comrade. Mandla's situation is similar to Keke's because he is also living away from his family, albeit in different circumstances. He works in Durban, leaving his family behind in Johannesburg, ostensibly for greater stability, and is in effect a migrant worker. So both Keke and Mandla live in spaces that are not homes and these spaces, these 'non-homes', are the starting point for the treatment of place/space in the novel.

As Keke wanders along the promenade in Durban, the reader is privy to his ruminations about place, and in keeping with his tendency (which I mentioned earlier) to be keenly aware of social influence and layers of memory at particular sites, he observes here that the streets are named after "people whose acts, from the time they arrived, chilled his blood" (27). As he leans on a railing observing the Indian Ocean he comments on the city's various names – "Durban was also called eThekwini [and, sometimes,] Shaka's city" (27) – which indicate the shifts of culture and power that have each left their mark on this place. In further awareness of the general history of the place, he thinks, too, about the last time he was in Durban – "eThekwini was bringing all this back" (20) – when he was being transported as an imprisoned activist. Finally, bringing his attention back to the present, he considers the poverty represented by the homeless couple he witnesses arguing over a dustbin. (This is also a foreshadowing of his own impending homelessness.)

After this visit, on returning to Johannesburg "the optimism Keke had felt with Mandla in Durban evaporate[s] the moment he close[s] the door of his Melville house" (45). Keke has lived in empty houses before, in "[s]afe houses, [as] they were called then" (45), but those were empty houses that encapsulated a sense of purpose because they were used as part of the struggle for independence. In contrast, Keke merely exists in his current house, having lost everything else, including his sense of purpose. His 'home' at this stage is a reflection of himself, because having lost his sense of purpose he feels like an empty shell. Remembering the other empty houses in which he has lived – the safe houses he shared with comrades – he is reminded of the sense of belonging he felt amongst similar people. He yearns to belong somewhere again but does not know where that place of belonging could be.

Compelled by the thought that "[o]ne day he would find where he belonged" (52) and by the question of "who could he keep company with now?" (53), Keke ventures out to the Twist Street Tavern, a shebeen in Hillbrow. Yearning for a sense of identity, he is drawn to this multi-cultural, social space whose clientele consists of many differing representations of African identity: "the city was home to Africans from all over the continent" (62), and in the tavern "[h]e could hear snatches of so many

languages – Sesotho, isiZulu, Afrikaans, Swahili, French, Portuguese and English” (53). Twist Street Tavern is particularly attractive to Keke because it is a place where displaced people congregate – people who are dislocated, just as he is. So, there is a type of bond between this disparate group of people, but it is an uncanny sense of belonging. They share similar restoratively nostalgic memories, as each remembers having once belonged somewhere.¹⁰⁴ The patrons of the Twist Street Tavern each have a haunting, uncanny memory of a place where they can now no longer be, except in the nostalgic imagination.

Keke is so severely traumatised, however, that the respite offered by the shebeen/tavern cannot compensate for his pain. He finally comes to live in another ‘non-home’, with people who share a sense of belonging only in their despair. He moves in with “over a thousand homeless people” (76) at a squat, a derelict hospital building in the city, which is ironically situated “opposite the Number 4 jail, in the area recently renamed Constitution Hill because it housed the Constitutional Court” (76). (The squat’s very existence is a contradiction of the idea of justice espoused by the court.) It is here, in the squat, that Keke finally ‘hits rock bottom’, where his fight runs its course. As he says,

‘I was staying at this place, like I told you. They wanted me to pay rent, but I refused on principle because I thought nobody owned the place. All the people in it had been rubbished by the system and had taken refuge there, and they’re poor. Why should they pay rent? And to whom? It was sheer robbery and thuggery, and I wasn’t going to submit to that. My whole youth was consumed with fighting oppression and thuggery. On political grounds I was fighting against illegitimacy, oppression and exploitation, and that’s exactly what this was, backed by violence.’ (95)

He pays another price for his views, though. The ‘landlords’ have him savagely beaten up and he next finds himself a patient at a (functioning) hospital. As the above passage indicates, it is at this stage that he finally faces his trauma: the devastating cost and seeming fruitlessness of his life’s work. He is therefore predisposed for nostalgia, and in response to his utter despair and the exploitation he witnesses, he forms a new idealistic nostalgic vision – a restorative image. ‘Leapfrogging’ over the devastating memories of his own past, and the history of living memory (i.e. apartheid and colonialism), he looks beyond to a much earlier traditional and idealistic Africa.¹⁰⁵ It is a mythical place he longs to see or experience and it is this longing that prompts his journey to Mali.

The Content of a Restoratively Nostalgic Vision: The Quest for an Idyllic Africa

I have established that nostalgic longing for particular places in this novel is triggered by a general mood of discontent with current conditions, unresolved trauma from personal experiences and socio-

¹⁰⁴ This feeling is similar to that explained by Otsile when he is in Santiago in the opening scenes of *Revelations*.

¹⁰⁵ Frankish and Bradbury have found that in multi-generational homes where trauma has been experienced, stories told to the younger members of the family “often erase or silence this recent conflictual history and, instead, articulate nostalgic connections with a more distant or remote past” (2012:300), which I think of as a type of mental ‘leapfrog’ action. Keke uses this technique in the stories he tells himself, which protects his self-image because “as social actors we continuously fashion for ourselves [...] stories that tell ourselves and others who we are and who we want to be” (Frankish & Bradbury 2012:305).

historical factors, as well as the characters' feelings of loneliness. But once nostalgic feelings have been triggered, on what do they focus? How do such emotions manifest themselves? The content of the characters' nostalgic vision – what they yearn for – is a restorative imagining of a mythical, idealised Africa. This mythical place takes shape in Keke's imagination through the visions created by Mandla's architectural project and through Ami's talks about her father's homestead in Mali.

Mandla is a professor of architecture and is working on an experimental housing project. It is a block of flats that incorporates modern construction techniques and materials but has a traditional African design. The project is organised for communal living, and based on the idea of the extended family – “*leloko*” (121) – as firmly entrenched in its layout: “The building is circular, five storeys high, with a playground in the centre [...] that's visible from all the flats, for security” (122). The plan thereby “combines practicality, philosophy, and heritage” (122), and Mandla describes his development as an “African Renaissance oasis” (90). His very words here are nostalgic: the idea of an oasis, which is, literally, a fertile area in the desert, refers back to Biblical images and suggests a place of reprieve from harsh conditions, a retreat; whereas a ‘renaissance’, as a ‘revival or rebirth’, infers the chance to go back and begin again. That Mandla refers to the residential project as an ‘African Renaissance oasis’ implies that he envisions it as a safe refuge, and as a place of renewal and elevated thought. With his architectural design, he aims to recreate, or restore, an idyllic traditional African community as he imagines ancient African communities to have existed and functioned. Mandla's descriptions bring to mind the mythical era of a “merry pre-colonial Africa” (Dlamini 2010:12). It is an uncomplicated and simplified view of African history that imagines the past as a “golden age during which Africans lived in harmony with the land and [with] each other” (Dlamini 2010:12).

Keke is of course privy to Mandla's vision, but because the project is in its conceptual stages it is still a nostalgic fantasy (as I discussed earlier). In contrast, when Keke listens to Ami talking about her father's homestead in Mali, it is talk of a place that has the allure of an idyllic past, but one located in the here and now. Keke is drawn to this site, the shaman's homestead, with the desire of (re)connecting to a place where he feels he belongs – to a place he believes to have been an ‘authentic Africa’. And so he travels to Mali. His visit to Kanore's homestead propagates the myth – which Dlamini (2010) refers to – of Africa as an idyllic place, in that Keke's story is one of a troubled man (Keke) who retreats to the solitude and perfection of the jungle and is renewed. This is therefore a restoratively nostalgic journey, but because “[r]estorative nostalgia does not regard itself as nostalgia”, Keke regards it, rather, as a return to “truth and tradition” (Boym 2001:xviii).

However, the novel does not confine its nostalgic outlook to Keke's restorative view. The focus of Keke's journey to Mali, as seen through his eyes, is on the (apparently) untroubled homestead, the peaceful solitude, and the simplicity and purity of life there. In parallel with this place of tradition, though, is the wider social space that the novel presents: a brief view of the city, Bamako, reveals its links to the other parts of Africa (to Europe and beyond) via air travel, and in the hotel multiple

cultures are represented: people who are in transit. Also there are sightings of soldiers, who represent the ‘rumours’ about interference by outside forces. A taxi driver corroborates the rumours when he tells of his encounters with unknown travellers and soldiers: “strange white men with American or British accents [and] black men who [a]ren’t locals” (133), men who are not tourists but possibly are soldiers. In this way, the novel presents a strange entanglement of real and imagined occurrences: Keke visits a real place, but is actually attempting imaginatively to revisit a place of times past, while at the same time there are hints and rumours of a disturbing reality that corresponds strikingly with the contents of Keke’s nightmare at the beginning of the novel.

An uncanny process of retreat and expansion seems to be occurring simultaneously. Keke is retreating spiritually and emotionally in order to ‘restore’ himself, while at the same time his horizons are expanding and he is acquiring a broader, more global perspective. Initially, however, he blocks out these ‘realistic’ elements of the journey, focusing entirely on his retreat and restoration.

Arriving in Mali they have “a long drive ahead” (132) in order to reach the shaman’s place. The transition, as they travel from urban to rural spaces – from city to grassland to jungle to clearing – moves Keke forward physically, but it is as if he is simultaneously moving back to an earlier, quieter, and slower time. They travel in a “roaring, screeching, leaping and thudding” (132) kombi-taxi, which much later “slowed, then stopped” (133), leaving them to find their way further along a footpath. At this stage, Keke’s surroundings appear to manifest his nostalgic expectations, and although he has inklings of homesickness for the home he has just left, he pushes those feelings aside and immerses himself in this restoratively nostalgic experience.

He finally arrives at the homestead, which is isolated from the ‘real’ world and is thus in keeping with the fantasy/myth:

At long last [Keke] entered a space in the jungle, and suddenly there was life – about thirty or so thatched brown rondavels enclosed a large circular area filled with men, women and children as well as sheep, chickens and crops. [He] had arrived. (133)

This homestead corresponds with – or is a manifestation of – Keke’s utopian imaginings and of the vision provided by Mandla’s planned project. Like the project, this homestead is formed of circular enclosures, surrounded and protected “by trees [and] tall rustling reeds that waved in a gentle breeze” (162, 134). Within the circular and enclosed space “the men, women, children, and animals [had] created an atmosphere” (139) that Keke realised “had another rhythm that he would have to learn to understand and relate to” (134). This observation – that they had ‘created an atmosphere’ – is in keeping with Lefebvre’s (1991) assertion that space is produced by human beings. Soon, another aspect of the nostalgic allure that the place holds for Keke becomes apparent: in addition to the homestead’s restoration of a traditional lifestyle, its organisation and day-to-day running also bears resemblance to the patriarchal and male-dominated operations of an army. So Keke’s visit to the

homestead is a nostalgic restoration in two ways: firstly, it restores a ‘traditional/mythical’ space; and secondly, it is a recreation of a military-style space.

But although it is this restorative-type nostalgia that has drawn Keke out of his traumatised state, he does not remain stuck with that singular view.

Functions of Nostalgia: Reflecting on Home and Meaningful Places

Keke feels homesick for South Africa as soon as he arrives in Mali.¹⁰⁶ Before he leaves South Africa, he longs for a traditional ‘authentic’ Africa, but once he is away, South Africa is the home for which he longs. In the hotel in Mali “he fe[els] isolated” (130), and upon arriving at Kanore’s homestead, he is “plunged into a deep longing for [his friend], Mandla, for the hills and ravines of eThekweni and the wide ocean” (133). One third of the novel, the middle section, is set in Mali, and Keke cultivates a double perspective of ‘home’ and ‘away’, of ‘here’ and ‘there’, during his stay. Thus, over the course of the narrative he perceives ‘home’ in a number of ways: home ‘before’ the journey, which is an isolated/isolating view; home ‘during’ the journey, which gives him a double perspective and a clarity of distance; and home ‘after’ the journey when he returns home to South Africa with new insight. By viewing each place, in turn from a distance and in proximity, he gains some insight into the meaningfulness of space/place.

Keke has travelled to Mali hoping to find a meaningful place where he can feel a sense of belonging. And he does find a sense of meaning while there. Despite feeling intensely homesick and ‘out of place’, Keke recognises in Mali an uncanny similarity “in many ways to the rural areas he had lived in in Botswana, Swaziland, Mozambique and even South Africa” (134) while a soldier.¹⁰⁷ And so, although Keke feels “unsettled [and] out of place here” (137), when the villagers perform a ritual dance he is inspired to take ‘a leap of faith’. He stands up and joins the dancers as they move and chant: “He couldn’t describe what was happening to him. It felt like the start of a whole new journey” (137).¹⁰⁸ In this way he finds a sense of meaning while *in* a place, rather than simply having found a place that is meaningful. It is a sense of meaning that he can take away with him.

Keke’s Mali visit begins as a restoratively nostalgic trip, but because of his distance from home, he gains a double perspective which leads him to a contemplation (on the need to belong and the need for a sense of identity) that is more reflective; ultimately, he dwells more on the sense of longing than on the object of his longing.

¹⁰⁶ The homesickness Keke feels away from South Africa is like the homesickness Henk de Melker experiences when he arrives in Amsterdam in Van Heerden’s *30 Night’s in Amsterdam*.

¹⁰⁷ This is the same uncanny feeling of recognition that Otsile and Bra Shope experience during their travels, especially during their time in Santiago (in Serote’s *Revelations*).

¹⁰⁸ Davis and Hicks say that “One potential resolution to an existential crisis is to affirm meaning through a leap of faith in which one asserts that life is meaningful without developing empirically reasoned justifications. Individuals resolve the conflict between wanting to believe that life is meaningful and having that meaning challenged by simply deciding to believe without requiring a strictly reasoned justification” (2013:168).

Thus far, I have suggested that the triggers for nostalgia with regard to places in *Rumours* are the discontents with the present, and that the content is a restorative attachment to an imagined traditional and mythical place. But what function has been served by the nostalgic return to traditional or mythical places? Has nostalgia eased Keke's yearning – to which I pointed earlier – for an African-ness that has hitherto eluded him? Has nostalgia helped him to gain any understanding of whether and how he belongs in the places in which he is situated?

Nostalgically dwelling on the meaningfulness of particular places, Keke does reach a point of deeper reflection; and in visiting places that he is nostalgic about, he finds a sense of meaning within himself. This is because a function of nostalgia is that it “bolsters social bonds, increases positive self-regard, and generates positive affect” (Wildschut et al. 2006:975), which has enabled Keke to see beyond his traumatic memories. A sense of meaning and belonging can be sought by re/visiting a meaningful place, but if the sense of meaning is elusive and a satisfying sense of belonging cannot be wholly recuperated in one particular place, the search need not be abandoned altogether. Instead, rather than the longed-for object, the feeling of longing itself can be examined (and a sense of belonging that has been experienced earlier can be recuperated from ‘the rubble’ of scattered memory). This is Keke's experience.

Mandla's project and Kanore's homestead are idealised spaces that evoke in Keke restoratively nostalgic emotions for a sense of belonging, but which also serve the purpose of prompting him to take a ‘leap of faith’ towards finding a sense of meaning for and within himself.

When Keke then returns to Johannesburg, it is with a sense of meaning and purpose; he is ready, not simply to return home, but to create a home. A home, in Ami's words, is “a place where you search for inner peace, where your mind, body, and spirit can come into harmony, where you can find tranquillity within yourself” (100) and this is the type of home Keke and his wife Mmbatho are creating by the end of the novel. One of the functions that the emotion of nostalgia can serve is that of enhancing inter-personal communication. Those in a “nostalgic condition” – as Wildschut et al. refer to it – “report greater confidence in their ability to initiate interactions and relationships, disclose personal information, and provide emotional support to others” (2006:989). Returning from Mali, Keke is in a ‘nostalgic condition’ and can therefore better understand and communicate his desire to create a home with his family, which will also be a social space for them to nurture other relationships. Therefore, having proclaimed his need and desire for a home as a meaningful space, he and his formerly-estranged wife, Mmbatho, go through a series of rituals in order to integrate the past, present, and future. The home they create becomes a nurturing space for themselves and others. It is a place of ease and comfort, which – as they share meals – is suffused with “the heat and smell of good food” (211). While music that is culturally meaningful – by the likes of Zahara, Hugh Masakela, Jonas Gwangwa (227, 267) – plays in the background, they are able to share thoughts and ideas in relaxed

conversation. The home now often comes “alive with conversation – on the sofa, in corners, on the floor, in the kitchen – a tapestry of voices, laughter and silences” (262).

This relationship with space and place remains vibrant as the novel concludes. Ultimately, in the closing scenes, Keke and Mmbatho take a trip to Botswana, revisiting places they had known before, in a time of strife but that they now experience afresh in a time of peace (273). Keke also revisits yet another space that has haunted him from the past: he returns to Mozambique – this time on a mission of peace and reconstruction for the African Union (AU).

In terms of space in this novel, the author thus moves from a representation of emptiness to representations of idealistic space and, finally, to representations of more realistic lived-in spaces. The initial empty spaces of Keke’s bare house give way to the idyll of Kanore’s homestead, which is a manifestation of the ideals of Mandla’s architectural project. Finally, a more realistic, rather than an idealised, approach to space is presented as Keke attempts to (re)build a home, and a personal and professional life for himself and his family in contemporary South Africa.

*

On a broad scale, *Rumours* promotes a pan-African solidarity, hinting that South Africa has lost touch with its status as an African country and that links with other countries on the continent can restore and strengthen that identity. It suggests that pan-African travel and communication would enhance and broaden an ‘African’ sense of identity on the continent and in South Africa. When Ami returns to Mali, her mother talks to her about her travels within Africa, saying: “we allowed you to go so you could grow, not become a stranger here. You grow for us, for yourself and for Africa” (134). Similarly, the novel suggests that Keke’s journey abroad has allowed him to grow for himself, his family, and for Africa.

*

Villa-Vicencio and Soko have said that,

for Serote, art, memory, and exploration are part of the healing and empowerment process that is needed to enable a nation, depleted by conflict and suppression of human creativity, to discover its identity and the inner resources that will enable it to meet the challenges of alienation, poverty, and defeat. (2012:250)

Through my exploration of these two novels, I have shown that Serote’s contemporary writings are indeed commemorative of the past, but also that – as nostalgic reflections that convey a sense of meaning – his novels, like the Freedom Park project, are ‘living memorials’ that look not only to the past but to the future as well.

Chapter 6 – Ronnie Govender’s *Song of the Atman* and *The Lahnee’s Pleasure*

Ronnie Govender, like the other authors examined in this dissertation, has written prolifically over a decades-long career. Best known as a playwright, he has also written a collection of short stories, two novels, and a memoir.

Govender writes about the South African Indian community: its origins and history, its struggles, memories, and experiences. The South African Indian community originates from immigrants who first began to arrive in South Africa in 1860. The first group, mostly Hindu, were brought to the Natal colony as ‘indentured labourers’ to work on the colonial sugar cane plantations, and, regarded as a cheap source of labour, were treated little better than slaves. Under contract for five years – and referred to colloquially as ‘girmityas’ or ‘girmits’ – they were free to leave their ‘employers’ at the end of the term, either to return to India or to seek other employment; or, alternatively, ‘contracts’ could be renewed.¹⁰⁹ In addition to the indentured labourers, another group of Indian immigrants, predominantly Muslim, began arriving after 1870: known as ‘passenger Indians’ because they paid for their own passage, they were unattached to employers and without contracts – not girmityas, but instead independent traders and shopkeepers. However, by the 1940s “the vast majority of Indians living in South Africa [...] were descendants of the indentured labourers, who numbered approximately 150 000” (Bose 2015:237), so that indenture has understandably “been an important influence on economic, social and political life in South Africa” (Betty Govinden 2009:288).

That influence is seen in literature too, and “[i]n the same way as we have literary sub-genres such as the Afrikaans plaasroman (farm novel) or the crime novel, we are acquiring a discernable literature of indenture” (Betty Govinden 2011:287). The terms “plantation literature” or “sugar texts” (Stiebel 2016:7) are also used to describe South African Indian literature “which has as its spatial focus sugar farms or plantations” (Stiebel 2016:8). Govender’s writing, however, focusses more on later generations, on how the diaspora of Indians in South Africa developed after the system of indenture was abolished. He highlights the experiences and conditions of the generations who lived, or live, with

¹⁰⁹ Betty Govinden explains the system of indenture thus: “Indentured workers came in accordance with an agreement (*gimit*) or contract concerning their stay and were referred to as *girmityas*. They worked for sugar farmers in Natal – farmers who were mainly English. A near-feudal system of labour operated, with the indentured workers being recruited to work for a particular employer and being bound by contract to live on the estate of the employer for a stipulated period of time. This is seen by many historians as not unlike slavery” (Betty Govinden 2008:72). Furthermore, when discussing indenture, “the words *gimit* and *girmityas* are being used more widely now, in formal speech and in literature, whereas previously they were used only orally and informally” (Betty Govinden 2009:288).

the legacy of migration and indenture, and his writing is part of the valuable ‘memory work’ of South African Indians that records and recuperates early memories of the community in South Africa.¹¹⁰

In doing so, Govender has experimented with various literary forms. Not only has he written in various genres, he has also, from time to time, adapted some of his own writings from one form to another. For example, he has transformed short stories to plays, and has rewritten one of his plays in the form of a novel. In addition, some of his writings have blended various genres, making it impossible to confine them definitively to any one particular genre. For example, *Song of the Atman*, although described as a novel, is in large part a biography, whereas *In the Manure: Memories and Reflections*, which is Govender’s memoir, is written in the third person and in the style of a novel. By experimenting and blending genres Govender tells his stories (the stories he seems compelled to tell) from several perspectives, and foregrounds different aspects of the place and community he memorialises.

The concept of memorialising is a key issue here, since memorials, as already discussed in previous chapters, are manifestations of nostalgia. By harking back to the past and to a place that can no longer be revisited and to a community that has since changed, Govender’s plays, novels, stories may be said to be quintessentially nostalgic memorials.

A distinct example of his propensity for nostalgic writing (an example that will serve as a starting point) can be seen in the ‘Introduction’ to his memoir/autobiography, *In the Manure*, where he relates how his name was chosen. His parents had selected the names ‘Sathieseelan Gurulingum’, meaning ‘man of truth’ and ‘teacher’, but an uncle intervened and requested (with various motivations) that the name ‘Ronald’ be included. Govender’s parents agreed and, dropping the name ‘Sathieseelan’, registered his birth and his name as Ronald Gurulingum Govender. He says that it is to his “eternal regret” that the name ‘Sathieseelan’, or ‘Sathie’ for short, was left out as he considers ‘Sathieseelan’ to be his “original name” (Govender 2008b:9).

This short passage gives the impression that Govender is nostalgic for another self, or another version of himself, and that he envisions what ‘might have been’ if circumstances had been different. The episode furthermore evokes a nostalgic image of the family following ritual cultural practice in choosing a name by consulting the traditional book of names, the Panjagum, while also heeding the

¹¹⁰ Govender could be seen as one of the pioneers of South African Indian literature. He began writing as early as the late 1950s, but only “[s]ince 1994 [has] South African Indian writing by the descendants of both indentured and passenger Indians [...] flourished” (Betty Govinden 2009:289). After 2010, when the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the first indentured labourers was commemorated, there was a further upsurge in writing about that time. Since then, as Stiebel (2011) points out, there has been a “growing number of fictional texts by South African Indian writers, many of which have as their topic the subject of indentured labour” (Stiebel 2011:78).

opinion of the extended family.¹¹¹ At the same time, such practice attests to the strong (and perhaps negative, but definitely inevitable) influence of outside societal forces. It is a brief scene that captures both the bitter and the sweet aspects of nostalgic memory.

There are many more examples of nostalgia in Govender's writings (biographical and fictional) and in this chapter I endeavour to pinpoint the triggers for, and the content of, his nostalgic longings, and to conclude what purpose or function, if any, has been served.

To do so, I focus on his novels (as I have with the other authors featured in previous chapters): *Song of the Atman* (2006) and *The Lahnee's Pleasure* (2008a). *Song of the Atman* tells the story of a young man's search for identity in the decades from the 1930s to the 1960s as he travels along South Africa's eastern coastline between Durban and Cape Town; the latter, *The Lahnee's Pleasure*, focusses on a sugar estate community in Durban in the 1960s.

Before I move on to an analysis of these two selected texts, however, I offer an overview of Govender's oeuvre and discuss the critical reception of his writings in general.

Govender's Oeuvre

Govender began writing in the late 1950s and early 1960s with a collection of short stories – a collection to which were added stories over the years, but which was put away in a drawer while other projects took precedence, and finally published only in 1997. There was also a play that was staged in 1962. His most recent publications have been a memoir and a novel, both published in 2008, and he has also continued to stage and restage theatre productions¹¹²

In this brief overview of Govender's writings, I present his works in the chronological order of writing, and by date of first performance in the case of some of the plays. This takes into account the point made by Annamalai that “[p]lays by ‘educated’ South African Indians have generally been written for performance and not publication” (1998:11-12).¹¹³

Govender's literary career began in 1962 when he attended a three-week theatre workshop “on various aspects of the theatre” (Govender 2008b:147) presented by Krishna Shah in Durban.¹¹⁴ Shah invited

¹¹¹ “Hindu names derive from the Panjagum, which is said to predict one's path in life according to the astrological alignments at the time of birth” (Govender 2008b:133).

¹¹² *Your Own Dog Won't Bite* was staged at the Sun International Resort's Sibaya iZulu Theatre in August 2015.

¹¹³ In Govender's case it appears that *The Lahnee's Pleasure* was his only published play and that, indeed, it “is one of the few plays by Indian playwrights ever to be published in a booklet” (Hansen 2000:259).

¹¹⁴ Krishna Shah was a “graduate of The Indian Academy of Dramatic Art [who] moved from acting for the stage to directing” and who spent time in the USA “exploring western trends in theatre”. Regarded as “[p]ossessing the right credentials and skills, he was invited to direct” a production in South Africa and afterwards held workshops for aspiring actors, writers, and directors (Annamalai 1998:123-4).

Govender to the workshop after he had read an article that Govender had written for *The Leader* newspaper about one of Shah's plays in Durban. During the workshop Govender wrote his first play, *Beyond Calvary* (1962). It is about how two people of different faiths (one Hindu, the other Catholic) fall in love, and about their "spiritual search beyond the symbols" of their religions (Govender 2008b:153).

After writing *Beyond Calvary*, Govender continued to write plays throughout the 1960s when time permitted (he was then a full-time teacher and part-time journalist). *The First Stone*, his second play, was written "in the early hours of the morning" and was, he says, "a hurried attempt – a melodrama about infidelity" (Govender 2008b:161). *His Brother's Keeper* followed: a play that was based on a singer, Eddie Gratino, who was a friend of one of Govender's brothers. Gratino had told them the (untrue) story that he was an American who had been adopted by West Indians. Based on Gratino's 'story', the play, *His Brother's Keeper*, is about a young African man who passes himself off as American and whose life becomes complicated when his brother exposes his true background.

Another of Govender's plays about exposure is *Swami*, which was first staged in 1966, and is based on Govender's experiences working on the *Guardian* local newspaper. The paper's editor, Kunnabiran Pillay, had a "personal vendetta" (Govender 2008b:104) against Swami Nischalananda who had established the popular Ramakrishna Centre in Durban. The paper "sought to expose the Swami [Nischalananda] as a charlatan in sensational front-page stories" (Govender 2008b:104). Govender's play dramatises the story of the Swami, who ended his life as a broken man and whose body was found "lying face down in the shallows of the Umgeni River" (Govender 2008b:170).

Continuing to draw on his first-hand experiences, Govender wrote one of his best-known plays, *The Lahnee's Pleasure*, during the 1970s. This play was first staged in one act, later rewritten in two acts, and in 2008 published in the form of a novel with the same title, *The Lahnee's Pleasure* (discussed in greater detail later in this chapter). Govender drew inspiration for this tale from his visits to the White House Hotel in Mt Edgecombe, when he was working as a sales and marketing man for South African Breweries. He describes the establishment as "a real working class pub [in which] the rustic atmosphere, the earthiness and spontaneous camaraderie of its patrons appealed to [him] immensely" (Govender 2008b:187).¹¹⁵ The play features a group of men in a bar discussing the hard times that have befallen one of the patrons, Mothie, whose daughter has run away from home with an unsuitable lover, and the trouble that Mothie is having getting help from the police to search for her. For the first time in South African Indian theatre, "patois was transcribed on to the stage" (Govender 2008b:188) and Govender presents working class characters "replete with all the normal human failings and strengths, [...] asserting their dignity as human beings" (Govender 2008b:193).

¹¹⁵ This opinion seems in keeping with his wish to propagate "indigenous theatre" and to move away from theatre that had "bourgeois tendencies" (Annamalai 1998:136).

The Lahnee's Pleasure does not have an overtly political message and, as Govender puts it, “wasn’t a political diatribe” (Govender 2008b:193), but two of his other plays written during the 1980s were decidedly political. *Off-Side!* (1984) and *In-Side!* (1985/6) appealed to audiences because of “the popular political content found in the presentations” (Annamalai 1998:235).

Also written during the 1980s, *At the Edge* is a play that Govender adapted for the stage from his collection of short stories (discussed further below). The first staging of *At the Edge* was at the Asoka Theatre in Durban in 1987 and it would go on to further stagings at the M L Sultan Cane Growers’ Hall in Durban and the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town. It was also presented at the Grahamstown Festival and – together with the play, *Over My Dead Body*, which was also adapted from the short story collection – at the Edinburgh International Festival. Yet another of Govender’s plays adapted from the short story form is *1949*, which portrays an act of heroism that happened “[d]uring the so-called ‘Cato Manor riots’ [when] several Africans sacrificed their lives to protect their Indian friends” (Govender 2008b:47).

More recent plays, written and performed in the 1990s, include *Too Muckin’ Futch* (1995), *The Great R31m Robbery*, *Who or What is Deena Naicker?* (1996), *Back-Side!* (1998), and also *Back to the Faith* (1999) “which cleverly combines a critique of fundamentalist Muslim intolerance toward art with negotiations of love across religious and community boundaries” (Hansen 2000:266).

In listing and discussing Govender’s various plays, I have made mention several times of his collection of short stories. Govender wrote most of the stories in the late 1950s, after his family left the vicinity of Cato Manor, but did not attempt to have them published at that time. Some of the stories, as already noted, were rewritten for the stage, but the stories as a collection were published only in 1996, as *At the Edge and Other Cato Manor Stories*. The stories are mostly “based on real people and events” (Govender 2008b:89).¹¹⁶ “The Incomplete Human Being”, for example, is about losing a cultural language, as Govender himself did to “his eternal regret” by dropping out of Tamil school. He describes this loss of language as a “cultural amputation” (Govender 2008b:62). “Poobathie” is the fictionalised account of a child from the Harry family, who rented rooms from Govender’s father and from whom the community kept their distance because the family was without caste and very poor. The lead character in “Over My Dead Body” is based on Sooboo Rajah, an easy-

¹¹⁶ A robust and self-sufficient community developed in Cato Manor when many formerly indentured labourers bought small pieces of land from subdivided portions of Sir George Cato’s Cato Manor Farm. However, discriminatory laws such as the Pegging Act, the Land Act of 1913, and the Group Areas Act of 1950 brought about enforced segregation, and in 1956, when the Group Area Act came into force, “Cato Manor was rezoned into a white area. By 1958, 180 000 people were forcefully removed” (Singh 2009:28) to other areas. “Following the forced removal of 180 000 people from Cato Manor in the 1950s and 1960s, a shroud of dispiritedness descended on their victims. The majority, helplessly resigned to their fate, attempted to pick up the pieces in makeshift townships far away from their places of work, in Chatsworth, Wentworth, KwaMashu, Umlazi, Claremont and Phoenix” (Govender 2008b:202).

going sports administrator who surprised a young Govender with his “unmistakable steeliness” and determination not to lose his house/property in Cato Manor (Govender 2008b:88); while the story “1949” (also rewritten as a play) explores an act of heroism when neighbours intervene and attempt to protect one another.

Continuing to mine the past for inspiration, Govender turned his hand to prose writing again in the new millennium. In 2006 he published the novel *Song of the Atman*, which is a fictional biography of his uncle, Chin Govender, followed in 2008 by a memoir/novel, *In the Manure: Memories and Reflections*, and the novel-adapted-from-play version of *The Lahnee’s Pleasure*.

As a popular and prolific writer, Govender has attracted significant critical attention, as will be seen from the following overview.

Literary Criticism

Much of the critical reception of Govender’s work concentrates on his role in South African Indian theatre¹¹⁷ (Naidoo 1997; Annamalai 1998; Hansen 2000; Singh 2009; Bose 2015), but considerable attention has also been given to his short stories (Brown 2005; Betty Govinden 2009; Singh 2009; Pillay 2014; Chetty 2016), and more recently to his novels (Singh 2009; Samuelson 2010) and life writings (Betty Govinden 2009; Pillay 2014). There is also significant exploration of and comparison between the various genres or forms of Govender’s writings (Brown 2005; Singh 2009; Bose 2015:187) and of his experimental use and blending of these forms.

As already noted, Govender has written in a variety of genres, has adapted some of his material from one form to another, and has blended forms within single texts. Particularly notable is that several themes from Govender’s earliest writings, such as the search for identity, belonging, and home, carry through consistently in each of the forms or genres he utilises, and have developed throughout his oeuvre. Literary criticism of his work also follows such a trajectory and the continuity is an important thread in my brief overview of the literary criticism of Govender’s writings.

Each literary form has its own advantages for the storyteller, and critics have commented on Govender’s clever exploitation of differing formal opportunities. Thavashini Singh, discussing *The Lahnee’s Pleasure*, points out as an example that a novel has certain advantages over a play: a novel “allows opportunity to explore the environment in which the characters live and to uncover further points of interest in terms of the story” (2009:64), which is what Govender achieved by re-writing his play as a novel. Similarly, Neilish Bose compares Govender’s short story “1949” with its theatre

¹¹⁷ Also referred to as ‘Indic’ theatre, “to distinguish it from the theatre of India” (Singh 2009:1).

adaptation, and suggests that “theatre as a medium offers the opportunity to create specific versions of history and community identity not visible in prose literature or the novel” (2015:235).

Different literary forms can offer different perspectives (or further and multiple perspectives) of the same (or similar) story, and in Govender’s case, the ‘story’ is that of the Indian immigrant (and his/her subsequent generations) in South Africa and the immigrant’s need for a sense of identity and belonging.

The problems in defining identity begin with terminology. In a discussion about South African Indian theatre, Sathasivan Annamalai (1998) tackles the terms ‘Indian’, ‘South African Indian’, and ‘Indianness’, highlighting the complexities and entanglements of a South African Indian identity as it is reflected in theatre and as Govender grapples with the issue.

The search for a sense of identity, I suggest, is Govender’s primary theme: both the identity of the individual and the identity of a community: the collective South African Indian community. The consistency of this theme (search for identity) throughout Govender’s writings supports Muthal Naidoo’s contention that “[i]n the ‘Indian’ community [...] the search for identity underlies all cultural, social, and political activity” (1997:31).

Govender hints at the ambiguity of his own personal sense of identity in an anecdote he tells about being introduced as playwright to an audience of over 600 people in Chennai, India, (before a performance of *At the Edge*): “As he walked to the mike he could sense the questions – ‘Who is this strange animal – he has a Christian name, Ronnie, he looks Indian, but he is from South Africa?’” (Govender 2008b:208).

It seems, then, that Govender’s point of departure in addressing the question of identity is his personal quandary, but commentary on his work makes apparent his willingness to explore multiple facets of identity. Lindy Stiebel lists Govender as one of a group of writers who present “an affirmation of South African Indian writers’ distinctiveness and a celebration of differences” (2016:14), and Duncan Brown, discussing Govender’s short stories, points out that the stories

resonate with larger claims about South African Indian identities, without simply essentialising or valorising them, and without constructing them as identities of exclusion or glossing over areas of difficulty or prejudice; questions of alienation, belonging, immigration, rootedness, exclusion, exoticism and indigeneity swirl through the narrative landscape of [Govender’s short story] collection. (2005:108)

It would appear that in Govender’s stories the search for a sense of identity by the individual falls within the larger context of community and society. When an individual searches for a sense of identity, the question of belonging inevitably arises, and with it the reverberations of community. Govender’s earliest writings – his short stories – revisit the community of his youth.

The South African Indian community is not homogeneous, however; it is complicated by the many “differences between religions, languages, customs, class, and political affiliations that exacerbate internal tensions within the community” (Naidoo 1997). That was true in the 1950s (the setting of the short stories) and it continues to be the case post-2000; Thomas Hansen argues that “the Indian ‘community’ [is not only] faced with a deep crisis of identity in the post-apartheid scenario, [it] is also caught up in a crisis of representation” (2000:256). This is the kind of crisis that Govender challenges in his play, *Back to the Faith*, for example, which manages to “comment on current debates on Indian anxieties and on the proper place of Indians in South Africa” (Hansen 2000:266).

Govender has thus explored the community, and critics have in turn explored how he represents the various aspects of the community in his writings. They have focussed on Govender’s representations of the various areas that Naidoo (1997) pinpoints as being contentious areas of difference in the community. There are commentaries, for example, on his treatment of religion, language, and political affiliation.

On the subject of religion, Naidoo (1997) cites Govender’s first play, *Beyond Calvary* (1962), which is about love between two people who are of different faiths, while Hansen, as I have just mentioned, comments on *Back to the Faith* (2000:266), which again places two people of different faiths in a complicated intimate situation. We note that these plays, both exploring the theme of religion, were written nearly forty years apart, which supports my claim that Govender has followed and developed themes across the full trajectory of his oeuvre.

In regard to Govender’s use of (or attitude to) language, Naidoo begins by explaining the development of language in dramas produced for ‘Indian’ audiences. In the 1940s there was concern to “preserve and propagate Indian languages and cultural values” (Naidoo 1997:32), and “vernacular theatre tended to reproduce received Indian traditions, and formed part of the artistic expression of the community” (Naidoo 1997:32).¹¹⁸ In the 1950s Indian audiences began to enjoy both vernacular and English/Western theatre, but by the 1960s there was a “development of an indigenous drama” (Naidoo 1997:34): drama written locally and with local content. As an example, Naidoo mentions here Govender’s *Beyond Calvary*. Govender’s brand of indigenous drama includes the use of local language, dialect, or patois.

Both in his plays and in his prose, Govender uses what Brown describes as an “oral-inflected mobility of storytelling, a carnivalesque chorus of voices” (2005:109); these are the voices that readers are invited to listen to in the Prologue of the short story collection: “Listen, my friends, listen to the voices of Cato Manor” (Govender; qtd in Brown 2005:111). Brown points out furthermore that there are

¹¹⁸ The term ‘vernacular drama/theatre’ means drama presented in vernacular languages. As Naidoo points out, several language groups were represented in the Indian community in South Africa: “Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Gujarati, and Urdu among others” (Naidoo 1997:30).

many examples of “oral storytelling” by characters in the stories and of “oral histories [being] handed down from parents to children and other family members” (2005:114) but also that, in his use of local language, Govender has been carefully “concerned to distinguish legitimate uses of patois/dialect from those which are ignorant or insulting” (2005:120). Similarly, Betty Govinden (2009) remarks that in the novel *Song of the Atman* Govender’s “English [is] influenced by Tamil syntactical structure”, while *The Lahnee’s Pleasure* (the play) “has accrued landmark significance in capturing in stage-speech a working-class South African Indian accent” (2009:289). Hansen also points to language use in the play *The Lahnee’s Pleasure*, which he says “took popular working-class idioms to the stage” (2000:259). He describes the characters as speaking “South African Indian ‘low’ English” in dialogue that “brilliantly portrays the style of storytelling prevailing in the community at the time” (Hansen 2000:259).

The natural dialogue also reflects a unique and communal sense of humour. Taking on this self-deprecating humour that came to be a characteristic feature of Indic theatre “Govender invigorated [the] genre” (Hansen 2000:261) with his political satires such as *Offside!* and *Inside!* Although in Annamalai’s opinion Govender “clearly opted for the more subtle or indirect use of politics in his writing” (1998:341), his repertoire, says Singh, “validates the argument that it is difficult to separate politics from art” (2009:93), and Mesthrie makes a similar comment about the “inescapable political content” (2011a:438) of South African Indian writing, referring specifically to Govender’s *At the Edge* as an example.

At the Edge is based on a political act of eviction and displacement. The original short story was written after Govender’s family were forced to leave Cato Manor because of the Group Areas Act. This profound experience is ostensibly the foundation of all of Govender’s writing. Pillay claims that “[f]undamentally, Govender’s writings have been informed by his experiences of living in Cato Manor and seeing his childhood home, and all that was familiar to him being taken away” (2014:63). Indeed, Govender displays a profound sense of attachment to Cato Manor, manifest in what Brown sees as a “mythologising impulse, [that is] evident in the linking of Cato Manor with two [other] sites of removal” (2005:111): namely District Six and Sophiatown. Chetty similarly notes the links that Govender makes between these “sites of suffering”, commenting that “Govender’s prose works and plays reconstitute the vital memory of multi-racial living in a way that contributes to the new national identity” (2016:58). Pillay, on the other hand, feels that Govender endeavours to “recreate Cato Manor as he knew it” because it has been irrevocably changed and he can “now never go back [to it as] ‘home’ ” (2014:4). The place that Govender imaginatively revisits is thus a historical site, a site of memory, and Govender is frequently cited as a historical writer or as a writer of ‘memorial’.

The play *1949*, for example, “offers history to those who do not have memorials within the nation” (Bose 2015:240) insofar as Cato Manor, the place from which the characters in the play emerge, is a place whose history has not been memorialised in the way that has happened with District Six and

Sophiatown.¹¹⁹ Looking in particular at *1949* and *The Lahnee's Pleasure* (the play), Bose makes the point that “Govender [has] constructed a strategic notion of Indian history and ‘culture’ ” (2015:236) by “chronicling the social history of Indian communities in South Africa” (2015:241). Govender offers, in a literary form, history that is known but “not recorded in any history book or taught in any school”; it is a “shared history” and a “popular history” that enables later generations to understand a “different history” (Bose 2015:242).

Betty Govinden comments on the way that “the history of earlier times is being recalled and re-interpreted” in South African Indian writing: although Govender does not write specifically about indenture or its historical phase he “shows how indentured life in South Africa signalled a continuing struggle for ‘Indian’ recognition and identity” (2009:292), particularly so in *Song of the Atman*.

There is a legacy, or a residue, of indenture whose effects continue to be felt long after its termination. Naidoo speaks of a “residual culture” (1997:31), which I see as mirroring the ‘residual culture’, or ‘residual memory’, that I discussed in relation to Rayda Jacobs’s *Joonie* (in which the novelist shows how the residue of slavery in the Cape pervades the South African psyche).

Residual culture and memories perpetually evoke a nostalgic longing, and it is Govender’s return to the memories of those people, places, and times that I next consider. Critical attention has until now chiefly been focussed on the people, places and times that Govender imaginatively visits. My more particular interest is in the nostalgic sense of longing and loss that is present in these depictions.

Song of the Atman

Ronnie Govender grew up listening to stories about the various members of his large and extended family. The stories about his uncle, Chin Govender, made a particularly deep impression on him and his first novel, *Song of the Atman* (2006), is based on Chin’s life.¹²⁰ Betty Govinden describes *Song of the Atman* as a “wide-ranging Bildungsroman of a life filled with vicissitudes [and set] against the landscape of twentieth-century South Africa” (2011:289). It introduces Chin as a young man from a poor Cato Manor family and follows the progress and challenges of his life: from undertaking his first job as a clerk at an accountant’s firm in Durban to his success as a businessman and hotel-owner in District Six, Cape Town.

¹¹⁹ Could Bose be suggesting that Govender’s play/short story supplies a ‘literary memorial’? Bose’s comment is reminiscent of Gagiano’s note (see Chapter 5) on “commemorative dimensions” in Serote’s *To Every Birth Its Blood* (2012:222).

¹²⁰ Govender explains the term ‘atman’ in his memoirs as follows: “The mission of the soul or atman is to become eventually part of the paramatman or Godhood or Truth, eventually to enter a state of expanded consciousness” (2008b:22).

Betty Govinden categorises a “discernable literature of indenture” as a sub-genre of South African literature, and although Govender’s novel does not concern itself directly with the theme of indenture, it is in her view “the narrative of indenture that propels *Song of the Atman*” (2011:289). The novel covers a period of approximately forty years from the 1930s to the 1960s and also reaches back briefly to the 1910s and 1920s to explain how the earlier generations arrived in Durban as indentured labourers and subsequently established themselves in South Africa. In telling the story of one man and one family, the novel explores recent history and living memory in an attempt to reclaim (or clarify) a sense of belonging in postcolonial, post-apartheid South Africa. It traces the legacy of indenture and foregrounds its effects on contemporary South African society and culture.

Song of the Atman is the story of a South African Indian man who is a descendant of immigrants and indentured labourers. Although Chin has never been to India, he has a strong connection to his Indian culture and heritage. As a second generation immigrant, he strives to understand his position in South Africa and struggles with the shame and degradation inherent in poverty, especially since his family’s poverty results directly from the conditions and the legacy of the system of indenture that brought them to South Africa in the first place. Chin endeavours to rise above the challenges that face him. He leaves his home in Durban in search of a better life, arriving at a point, in his mature years, where he is confronted with situations he had never anticipated and attitudes very different from his own. To find a sense of meaning in his life he has to re-evaluate the past, the present, and (sense of) the future: a process that is accelerated by his relationships with his nephew Guru and his son Devs.

The characters in the novel are nostalgic in various ways, revealed in contradicting images of past and future, all to be contemplated simultaneously by the reader. These images are shown against the backdrop of a constantly changing South African landscape that also features various nostalgic memorials, home spaces, and artefacts.

Nostalgia in the Novel: Characters

In the novel’s exploration of nostalgic memories of the past the author examines both disappointments and aspirations. Of earlier generations, he says, “we have much to learn from these hardy souls” (Govender 2008b:218). Chin, the protagonist, is presented as one such ‘hardy soul’. He is a character who is held up as a hero, as an inspiration to many, a man who succeeds despite adversity. But ultimately he is shown also to be flawed, damaged, and challenged. He is simply a man searching for meaning in life, and for a sense of identity and belonging. Over decades/generations, South African Indian identity has gradually altered from an emphasis on ‘Indian’ to an emphasis on ‘South African’, as immigrants and their descendants became ever more assimilated, and this (often uncomfortable) transformation is reflected across the extended time frame of the novel from the 1930s to the 1960s. Annamalai points to the 1960s as a period when the term ‘South African Indian’ became appropriate,

but adds that even so “this would apply only to a section of the community, as ‘Indians’ generally attempted to retain their ‘Indianness’ as much as they could” (1998:6-7).¹²¹

Towards the end of the novel, Chin is aghast when his nephew, Guru, declares that he is “not Indian, [he is] South African” (Govender 2006:309) and asks him angrily, “What the hell are you if you’re not an Indian?” (310). This, I believe, is the crux of the matter and the trigger for the nostalgic content of Govender’s novel: the need to know and understand the origins and meaning of one’s identity, and the compulsion to search for that meaning in the times and places of the past.

I focus here on two characters – Chin and Guru – both of whom are in search of a sense of identity and belonging. They are both, furthermore, nostalgic in a ‘restorative’ manner. But the objects and nature of their nostalgic yearnings are different – Chin yearns for an idealised ‘Indian’ identity, Guru for an idealised ‘South African’ identity – and neither of them finds satisfaction or resolution from their own rigidly held views.¹²² On the contrary, such views restrict them.

Although each of these characters is nostalgic in a restorative way, the novel presents their contrasting perspectives as two possible approaches to the question of South African Indian identity and belonging and in the process (within the contrast of their perspectives) introduces a third or alternative view: the notion that if the search for a South African Indian identity is to draw on the past, then it will be beneficial to focus on the complexities of the past (rather than on any one single story) in order to reconcile and integrate the past with the present.¹²³

Keeping the focus on Chin and his nephew Guru, we may ask: what are the people, times, and places for which they yearn? What are the triggers for their respective longings (and the objects of those longings) from which we can ascertain the functions that nostalgia has served? I invoke once again Hook’s caution that nostalgia “maintains no inherently progressive potential”; that rather, “it is what we do with fantasy or nostalgia that counts” (2012:233). Instances of nostalgia give valuable clues of the more profound memories and emotions that the protagonists mask, for nostalgia’s value lies in its interpretation. Bearing these thoughts in mind, the following discussion seeks to uncover the meanings behind memories and emotions: via a close reading of Chin’s and Guru’s nostalgic longings.

¹²¹ Annamalai explains that “[a]lthough the Group Areas Act altered the lifestyle of Indians to a significant extent, many of the communal cultural practices continued, albeit in a modified form. This phenomenon has been the hallmark of this community in South Africa over many years and continues to this day” (1998:7).

¹²² As Samuelson points out, “The claiming of an ‘Indian’ identity within and alongside South African citizenship has been and remains a fraught practice. South Africans of Indian descent were first recognised as a South African population group in 1961, more than 100 years after the *SS Truro* deposited its first consignment of human cargo on the shores of South Africa. Under apartheid (1948-1994), many ‘rejected Indianness’ in order to assert a unified South African – or ‘black’ – identity in the struggle against white domination” (2010:273).

¹²³ Commenting on Govender’s approach to identity in his writings Bose points out that “in his late apartheid context [Govender] carries forth a tradition of destabilising any fixed notion of Indian identity simply for its own sake and so forms another portion of the evolving historiography of the multicultural and insurgent literary spaces of the edges of empire” (2015:243-244).

Because the novel revolves around the life and times of the character Chin, it seems appropriate to focus – first – on his own nostalgic yearnings, before analysing the stories people tell about him and how Guru’s imaginings contrast with Chin’s. Although the narrative style of the novel keeps the reader remote from the inner workings of Chin’s psyche, the author does provide sufficient information for the reader to glean some insight. However, as is the case with Bra Shope in Serote’s *Revelations*, there is a public view of Chin that is formed by those around him. The family and community who know him as a young man – and who surmise what happens to him after he leaves their sphere – have an external and impersonal, but firmly established view. In their midst, that view affects how the young Guru reacts to his uncle. Ultimately, when Chin’s and Guru’s views prove incompatible, the choice between rejection or reconciliation must be confronted.

Homesick for an Idealised Traditional ‘Indian’ Identity: Chin’s Story

In *Song of the Atman*, the Chin character ‘comes down with nostalgia’ when he is away from his family and home – when he is ‘adrift’ in a state of self-imposed exile. This nostalgic mood is understandable because, as Dlamini puts it, “it is usually when people feel themselves adrift in a world seemingly out of control that they come down with nostalgia” (2010:16).

The novel relates the life story of Chin Govender, a young South African Indian man from Cato Manor in Durban who, after an altercation with his older brother, abruptly leaves his close-knit family to live the life of a wanderer. As an internal migrant, he moves from Durban to East London, then further afield to Port Elizabeth, and finally, to Cape Town. He does eventually return to Durban, twenty-seven years later: wealthy and materially successful, but spiritually and emotionally depleted.¹²⁴

The humiliating confrontation that triggers Chin’s departure occurs when he opens his own paypacket, instead of handing it over intact to his brother Jack. All Chin has done is simply to buy himself something small to eat because he has forgotten to take his packed lunch to work, but Jack is so incensed that he slaps his brother. After the death of their father, Jack had assumed the position of head of the household and takes responsibility for the welfare of the family. He collects the paypackets of all the working members of the family and manages their meagre finances. This is a system that would have operated in many similar households in Cato Manor of the 1950s, and was

¹²⁴ I refer to Chin variously as a migrant, a wanderer, an exile. He ‘migrates’ from city to city within South Africa in search of a sense of identity and a place to which he can belong, taking an unplanned, ‘wandering’ route. I also use the term ‘exile’ to describe his journey because it shares certain features with exilic existence. According to Edward Said, the word “originated in the age-old practice of banishment [and because] the exile lives an anomalous and miserable life, with the stigma of being an outsider” (2001:181), which is a description that fits Chin’s condition even though his exilic condition is self-imposed.

necessitated by the impoverished conditions in which most families found themselves as a legacy of the indenture system: a system that predisposed them either to poverty or to the working classes.¹²⁵

Because of the many restrictions placed on Indians at that time, progress was slow. Success required individual grit, determination, and reliance on the further support of the diasporic community. Chin's father's story is one such tale. Having originally arrived in Durban as an indentured labourer, he had bought a small piece of land in Cato Manor at the end of his contract (paid for out of his wages as a court interpreter). Here, together with his growing family he eked out a living as a market gardener.¹²⁶ But the patriarch's early death leaves the Govender family in straitened circumstances, and Chin, now under the control of his older brother, feels powerless and disenfranchised as he grows to adulthood; he feels trapped in a hierarchical social system designed to keep him infantilised and subservient. For Chin, Jack represents an extension of the ongoing tyranny and oppression that is perpetuated by the legacy of indenture and by the trauma and shame of poverty. Towards the end of the novel, Guru observes that "[o]ver the years, many had been broken into accepting their inferior status as if it were divinely ordained" (311). However, it is Chin's refusal to accept such a status that inspires him to run away and to search elsewhere for independence and a sense of identity.¹²⁷

In narrating Chin's experiences as he migrates from Durban to various other cities in South Africa, the novel mimics the travails of the migrant worker, as beset by Chin's forebears: painfully away from home, yet unable or unwilling to return.¹²⁸

Chin leaves no trace of his whereabouts and makes no contact with his family for almost three decades. Although he physically leaves his family and community, he remains psychologically and

¹²⁵ At the end of their contracts many indentured labourers had found that they were financially no better off than when they had arrived. Additionally, after 1893, the government's objective in Natal was "to force them to re-indenture or return to India [failing which the government sought to] legally subordinate non-indentured Indians so that Whites would feel secure" (Desai and Vahed 2007:337). Therefore, it was extremely difficult for Indians to stay in Natal but also difficult for them to prosper because, as Betty Govinden points out, "[p]eriodically from 1885 there were various anti-Indian laws that ensured segregation, discrimination against Indian trading and land rights, restrictions of movement, and withdrawal of political rights" (2008:78). Furthermore, not only were Indians denied the vote, but after 1895 they also had to pay an annual £3 "residence tax" (Desai and Vahed 2007:338).

¹²⁶ Through this fictional family "Govender captures the lives of the Indian settlers [showing, for example,] their struggles to get a social and economic footing in a country where setbacks were experienced at every turn" (Betty Govinden 2009:292).

¹²⁷ Commenting on (what he sees as) the South African-Indian's need to combat a feeling of inferiority, Naidoo explains that "[a]partheid culture gave us [Indians] a sense of inferiority, disempowerment, and a concern for self-preservation at the expense of human rights. In other words, many 'Indians', even after the official demise of apartheid, are still struggling with the status of victim. Those who repudiated the role of victim developed a fighting spirit, which took them outside the community and into alliances across ethnic barriers. In the 'Indian' community, therefore, the search for identity is an ongoing process and underlies all cultural, social, and political activities" (1997:31).

¹²⁸ A cognate point here is that those who came to Natal as indentured labourers were prompted by discontent to leave their homes in search of a better life. As Desai and Vahed point out, "[t]hose who 'agreed' to indenture were often propelled by desperation as the British spread their tentacles throughout India" (2007:9).

emotionally bound to them. What sustains him during his lengthy absence are the nostalgic memories of the very world and people he abandons: memories of community, family, and his mother. He longs for the sense of togetherness he had felt within the family as a boy when his father was still alive, and yearns for the support of the community, for its values and its culture. So, we note again that the trigger for nostalgia “occurs in response to negative mood and the discrete affective state of loneliness” (Wildschut et al. 2006:975). Chin’s negative mood is manifest in his sense of dislocation, his lack of a sense of identity, and his need for a place of belonging. These feelings of nostalgia may be a reaction to a more profound, pre-existing condition of discontent inherent in the Indian diaspora and the attendant legacy of indenture.

Homesickness sets in shortly after Chin has run away. Arriving, destitute, in the city of East London, he secures accommodation and a job as a waiter. But then he “suddenly felt lonely and homesick, wondering what Chellamma [his sister] was up to. Of all people, he missed Baijnath [his former employer]” (98).

Plagued by homesickness and restlessness, Chin is unable to settle in East London, the first place of his relocation. Following a brutal attack when his affair with his married landlady is discovered, he moves on to another city, Port Elizabeth, where he gravitates towards the established Indian community or diaspora. Here “he beg[ins] to encounter a few Indians and immediately his feelings of loneliness le[ave] him” (107). Finding accommodation with an elderly Indian couple who tell him, “you are one of us” (108), he begins the restoratively nostalgic process of attempting to recreate an environment of family and community, a ‘restoration’ process that continues as he finally settles in Cape Town, where he establishes himself in business and attempts to settle down by involving himself with people and activities reminiscent of his former life.

In Cape Town he gathers a new, surrogate family around him: his Indian landlady, for example, also becomes a ‘mother figure’ to him. She even refers to him as her “son” (193, 194, 201). In business, he enjoys mutual loyalty with his partners and employees. They all look after one another, like family members, and in the manner of the nostalgically idealised community of Cato Manor that he left behind.

Professionally, he succeeds by dint of a shrewd business sense, learned from his parents’ market garden and from his former boss’ accounting firm, coupled with diligence and attention to detail. In this way, the novel nostalgically portrays the values of the diasporic community from which he comes, so that – although some may see him as a maverick – it is actually by adhering to, and drawing on, instilled cultural values that he survives and prospers. Hard work, determination, and sound ethics ensure his financial success and the respect he subsequently earns.

A surrogate family does not satisfy his longing, however, and the desire for a family of his own surfaces. It is therefore considerations of marriage and children that compel Chin to return home to

Durban. He believes that it is only in Durban's Indian diasporic community that he will meet an ideal marriage partner, because he envisions a partner who meets certain cultural expectations. He has had two serious long-term relationships thus far: with Greta, who is a white German immigrant, and with Grace, who is classified as Coloured. As inter-racial relationships, both would have been prohibited by the laws of the time and needed utmost discretion.¹²⁹ However, Chin does not acknowledge the relationships even amongst his close and trusted friends and although he is strongly attached to both women he feels no sense of commitment to either. This is because he is conditioned by a nostalgically driven outlook on life, by his rigid cultural beliefs, and because his vision of family and marriage is restricted to the cultural parameters of his 'Indianness'. When Grace gives birth to his son Devs, Chin takes financial and material responsibility for him but does not acknowledge the child as his own. He can accept a son of his own only as an Indian child. Likewise, he can envision himself as married only to an Indian Hindu woman.

He therefore goes back to Durban, to his Cato Manor neighbourhood, with marriage in mind, encouraged by those who tell him to "get married to a nice Indian girl" (201) and who assure him that they will "look for a pretty Tamil girl for [him]" (228). The impetus is to reconnect to his Indian heritage. Although he returns and observes tradition in his choice of wife and marriage ceremonies, however, he cannot reconstruct the feel of the family of his youth. He enters a marriage of convenience with someone he does not really know, simply because she 'fits' his restoratively nostalgic vision of family, but the relationship does not evolve as he had imagined it would.

In many ways, Chin's journey mirrors that of the typical Indian immigrant. Although he is perpetually homesick during the 27 years that he is away, Chin has resisted a return to his original Durban home and family, just as many indentured labourers did not return to India after their contracts expired. When he finally goes back, he finds that things (people, situations) have changed, and so has he. Thus the novel indicates that, for the indentured labourers and migrants who came to South Africa, a return 'home' would never have been entirely possible; as Desai and Vahed put it, "[h]ome for these wandering exiles was no more [as] the place of exile was the place of home" (2007:9). In fact it is never possible for any migrant or any wanderer to return 'home'; the physical place can sometimes be reached but the earlier time is lost forever. The closest that one can come to a return is in the reconciliation of 'then' and 'now' as a simultaneous image within the imagination, which Boym describes as being like the "double exposure, or [...] superimposition of two images – of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life" (2001:xiv).

¹²⁹ The Immorality Act of 1927 prohibited sex outside of marriage between white people and people of other races. In 1949, The Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act banned marriage between whites and other races and later, between any couple of differing race (bearing in mind that after 1950 all residents in South Africa were registered within designated racial categories according to the Population Register).

However, such a double exposure would be what Boym calls ‘reflective nostalgia’, and Chin is not yet able to consider (simultaneously) a more painful or uncomfortable image; he clings instead to his one-dimensional ‘restoratively nostalgic’ vision. Like Laverne in Jacobs’s *Joonie*, Chin needs to ‘screen’ the pain of being dislocated and does so with his restoratively nostalgic memories.¹³⁰ “[M]uch of nostalgia might be shown to possess [what Hook calls] a defensive function” (2012:226). It is that defensive function that Chin utilises to deal with the difficulties he experiences as a self-imposed exile. Furthermore, the protective images he has of community and family solidarity buffer the trauma he has inherited as a second-generation Indian immigrant.

There are similarities too between Chin and Floris Moolman in Van Heerden’s *Ancestral Voices*. Like Floris, who longed perpetually to return to the family farm and be recognised as a Moolman, all of Chin’s efforts are centred on a desired return to his Indian family and community. Chin fears that, outside of that familiar sphere, he is irrelevant, that he ceases to be; hence his question, “what the hell are you if you’re not an Indian?” (310). The profound sense of rejection he felt after his altercation with Jack is similar to Floris’s when his father had rejected him. Floris could only see himself as a traditional Afrikaner and as a ‘Moolman’. Similarly, all of Chin’s longings are aimed at regaining his Indian identity, family, and community. Only many years later, after Guru has served as a catalyst in his life, does Chin concede that this vision – of an idealised Indian identity and family unit modelled on nostalgic memories of the past – brings no satisfaction, and cannot be sustained. He arrives at a point where, if he is to overcome the pain of dislocation, he must contemplate the ambiguities and contradictions of the past; he must go beyond frozen notions of cultural fixity. As with Laverne (in *Joonie*), he reaches a turning point in his life. His incentive is his paternal love – finally realised – for his mixed-race son Devs. I will return to this point later.

In discussing Chin’s journey and examining his nostalgic longings (an internally focussed view) I have foregrounded his need to identify with his kinsmen, his strong attachment to his ‘Indianness’, and his need to belong. However, my insights about Chin – as an individual, and relating to his inner psychological life – depend on attention to the text, on our ‘reading between the lines’. This is because the narrative style of the novel retains a certain distance between reader and protagonist. Chin is not easily revealed. Rather, we, the readers, view Chin through the reportage of people who are nostalgic in their own aspirations.

*

¹³⁰ Chin’s nostalgic memories could also be referred to as “regressive” (Hook 2012:228) or “static” (Medalie 2010:39).

The view that others have of Chin, the way he is perceived by the people in his community and family, contribute to the predominant perspective of this novel. As a literary form, the novel presents an author with a range of choices regarding narration and focalisation that will determine how close or how distant the reader feels to or from the characters. Going by Gerard Genette's definition of narrative 'mood' – "One can tell more or tell less what one tells, and can tell it from one point of view or another" (1980:161) – Govender's chosen point of view creates distance between reader and main character: he tells the story using third-person narration tempered by what Genette refers to as "external focalisation" (1980:189-194). Accordingly, the narrator tells less than the character knows (which is in fact the situation that pertains between the author and his uncle). Rather than taking advantage of fictional licence to create a fully imagined character, the author has remained within the parameters of reality (as would apply in a biography). As he explains: "[t]his is as close to a biography as the structure of a novel will allow" (Govender 2006:325). Thus, Govender hints at an inherent tension between the two literary forms of the book.

It seems that Govender has been reluctant to presume too much, perhaps out of respect – or even reverence – for his subject, and furthermore that he strives to maintain the mystique of this family 'legend'. Getting 'close' to the main character, by imagining an internal voice, Govender could run the risk of revealing a weaker, more flawed man than perhaps he was prepared to contemplate. Resistance to that opportunity suggests that the author has had recourse to a static nostalgia with the aim of keeping a desired image intact; that he has used nostalgia as a shield. By foregrounding the 'external view', the view that others in the family and community have of Chin (which I discuss next), the author seeks to memorialise a static collective memory.

*

An 'external view' of Chin arises from the many 'stories' that are told about him in the collective voice of his lost Durban family and community. Govender recounts in his memoirs that "Cato Manor [his 'home'] was full of legends" (85) and the narratorial voice in *Song of the Atman* presents Chin as the kind of persona often featured in the types of stories that the author listened to in his youth: someone of legendary status.¹³¹ Part of the 'legend' is Chin's financial and business success: he is shown to grab opportunities along the way, sometimes serendipitously, but most often due to his charm, intelligence, and audacity.

¹³¹ Duncan Brown highlights an excerpt from the Foreword of Govender's short story collection to explain Govender's mode of storytelling: "Ronnie spent his entire youth in Cato Manor, with his mother and grandmother spinning masterful stories for him and his siblings. His interest in theatre and storytelling was certainly fuelled by the impression these childhood stories made on him" (2005:114). Brown also cites examples of oral storytelling and oral histories from Govender's short stories and says that "the orality is very much that of a community of modernity, shaped by media such as radio and television" (2005:114-115).

Such success stories are inspirational to those immigrants who have not quite, or not yet, attained the success they were hoping for. Many of the immigrants who settled in Cato Manor came to South Africa in search of a better life, in hope of a kind of ‘South African Dream’ – analogous, one might say, to the ‘American Dream’.¹³² For those still struggling, the good fortune of others is held up as confirmation that the dream is indeed possible. Chin’s is one such inspirational (if biased) story.

The success ‘legend’ begins with Chin’s life as pieced together from the information that the community has at its disposal: the details about his life while he was still at home in Durban and that people know as ‘fact’. Of course, for a restoratively nostalgic story in which Chin is to be portrayed as a hero, positive reflections are selected that establish the general perception of Chin as a boy capable of creating a better life. In an exchange between Chin’s teacher and the businessman Baijnath about Chin’s possible employment, the teacher confirms that Chin “‘is bright and his handwriting is very good [and that he has] never known him to make a mistake’”(24). This endorsement secures the seventeen-year-old Chin his first job, seen as an early indication of his capacity to overcome uncertain prospects: “a bright lad who’d done well at school [but one whose family] couldn’t afford to send him for further studies” (36).

More evidence that he was a righteous and deserving young man is provided by his dutiful behaviour vis-à-vis his family and in particular his deference to his elder brother, Jack. Jack is the patriarch of the family, having taken the place of their deceased father (the quintessential indentured labourer mentioned in the previous section). Witnessed by the family, Jack strikes Chin in a fit of temper, but Chin maintains his respect for his elder by not fighting back:

The palm of the former South Africa champion’s right hand smashed into the side of his face, staggering him. As he steadied himself, he gripped the back of the chair. In an instinctive reaction he was about to lift the chair and hurl it against his brother. He struggled mightily to keep the chair down, saying to himself, ‘This is my brother, my elder brother, I can’t do that.’ Instead he stared at Jack for a full minute. It was a moment mixed with malevolence and regret. (80)

This scene serves to illustrate Chin’s values, his self-control and respectful demeanour, and to show that he retains the moral high ground. This defining and pivotal moment shifts the trajectory of Chin’s life story, but it is described only in this one brief paragraph. The dramatic scene is not entirely “erased or silenced” (Frankish & Bradbury 2012:300) as traumatic episodes often are when recent history is relayed by an older generation. The humiliating and one-sided fight that deeply traumatised Chin is most certainly glossed over and suppressed as an active memory in the story that the family and community tell. It is relegated to the margins of the narrative, and so when Guru hears the stories

¹³² ‘The American Dream’ is a term initially used in connection with immigrants to the USA. It suggests an aspiration for freedom and opportunity, and for prosperity that is achieved through hard work. This simple but sometimes idealistic dream could be the inspiration for immigrants from anywhere in the world for people who leave one place and go to another with the fervent hope of a better life.

of Chin's early life, he is not encouraged to consider whether Chin's reaction might have been melodramatic or reckless. Instead, the 'legend' moves smoothly onto the next exciting stages of the story to speculate about what happens after the altercation between the two brothers: that is, after an altercation that has propelled him out of the home that he has always known.

From this point on, "the mythologising impulse" (Brown 2005:111) is evident as Chin's tale takes on the tone of an urban 'folktale' in which the young man goes off to 'seek his fortune'.¹³³ Subsequently, the narrator presents Chin's story as an embellishment of meagre facts, the first of which is Chin's 'brave' decision to continue on the path he has chosen and not to turn back. His initial reaction to leave home so abruptly (in the dead of night) could be seen as melodramatic. When contextualised, the altercation that Chin has with his brother is seen against the backdrop of a family and community that experiences emotional trauma as a chronic condition.¹³⁴ As Borzaga puts it, trauma can result not just from a single event, but also from "a series of conditions in which [...] life unfolds" (2012:68). The environment in which Chin grows up and that has shaped him – the "larger biographical, political, and cultural context" (2012:67) – is a site of trauma. The occasion of the argument between Chin and Jack is entangled in the profound degradation that earlier generations of Indians had suffered (in South Africa, as well as earlier in India). Chin's pain is thus embedded within the pain of an already traumatised community and diaspora. When trauma is so conceived, it highlights the "strength and resilience" (73) of the individual.¹³⁵

Through what people believe to be his "strength and resilience" Chin survives in spite of his many hardships; the community tells of him sleeping on a park bench (97), walking to work barefoot (97), being beaten up by angry locals and landing in hospital in a near-death condition (102). But through it all he always remembers his mother's wise words and her lessons, and he turns to prayer (103). Chin overcomes all hardships and challenges, just as signalled by the earlier stories of his potential; he secures a job as a waiter and ends up being regularly promoted until finally he himself becomes a hotel manager. To these successes are added his ability to attract powerful women, his supposed prowess as a lover, and his personal elegance. He is even admired and venerated when he goes fishing:

¹³³ Hansen notes that in his plays *Offside!* (1984) and *Inside!* (1985) "Govender was drawing on the narrative structure of the great Indian myths, where clashes between giants is a commonly used narrative device" (2000:262). It could be surmised that Govender subtly draws on those myths in *Song of the Atman* too, and that the family and community are influenced by such tales in their embellishments of Chin's story.

¹³⁴ A high suicide rate among Indians in Natal is recorded in the era of indenture. Pillay points out that because of the "appalling conditions that Indian indentured labourers had to endure [...] suicide statistics rose dramatically" (2014:43). Desai and Vahed also comment that "many, too many, took their lives" (2007:14), while Mamet states that "[t]he situation in the colony was so bad that it had the second highest suicide rate of all the colonies receiving indentured labourers at the time" (2007:32). The novel's mention of the "Hanging Tree of Umhlali" (88) infers that even in the 1950s many still succumbed to a terrible sense of despair and resorted to suicide.

¹³⁵ Borzaga suggests furthermore that "a neglected field of studies is *post-traumatic growth* and the survival strategies creatively imagined and practised by people" (2012:74).

he would “attract a small appreciative crowd around him, pulling in the elf, or shad as he’d known it in Natal” (184).

Thus, through the lenses of various characters, we are presented with an idealised rags-to-riches story of a successful Indian immigrant/migrant in South Africa. It is an idealistic fantasy of self-advancement, and it is a story that enthralles the impressionable Guru in the narrative present. Guru meets the uncle about whom he has heard so much when Chin returns home to Durban in search of the wife with whom he can begin his ‘traditional’ Indian family. But why is Guru so impressed with Chin’s story? What circumstances make him susceptible to a nostalgic fetish?

Shifting Towards an Idealised South African Identity: Guru’s Role

Both Chin and Guru are nostalgic in a restorative mode but their longings take different shapes. They have grown to adulthood in the same place, Durban, and have experienced similar challenges but at different times (a generation apart). Like Chin, Guru is also in search of an identity, but whereas Chin longs to assert or retain his ‘Indianness’, Guru wishes to confirm his ‘South Africanness’. As we know, “nostalgia occurs in reaction to negative affect” (Wildschut et al. 2006:982), and Guru’s nostalgic longings and imaginings are initiated by his uncertainty about his sense of self and the changing environment in which he matures.

He is part of a South African Indian diaspora that is rapidly transforming. With each successive generation the emphasis in the diasporic identity has shifted from the Indian-dominant image of the ‘Indian in South Africa’ to one which puts greater emphasis on the South African influence – a diaspora that sees itself as ‘South African-Indian’. Like many members of his generation, Guru is looking to the future and identifying himself firstly as South African, and only secondly as Indian. Within the Indian community, however, this process of change is obstructed by the older generation’s more traditional view, even though South Africa is in a process of profound political transformation.

Guru does not have a clearly defined sense of identity because he resists the narrowly defined Indian identity of earlier generations; at the same time, he does not yet have a clear vision of who he is or wants to be, and neither does he have a role model to emulate. Things start changing when he is confronted with the man who will become his mentor and ‘hero’: his uncle Chin. Guru sees in Chin a man who has broken away from the cloying hold of Indian culture and society. In Guru’s eyes Chin is a maverick.

Guru grows up hearing the ‘legends’ of the mysterious disappearance of his uncle, so that when, decades later, the uncle reappears, it is as if a hero has returned. For Guru, who grows up in a constricted and impoverished environment, the older man represents an ideal of freedom and opportunity, of strength and self-sufficiency. Chin had vowed to return only when “he was his own boss, completely independent” (95), which in the eyes of a young South African Indian man (such as Guru) in the 1950s seems near-impossible, the stuff of legend. Legends and myths, by presenting

people as heroic, formidable beings, are a restoratively nostalgic way of presenting the past. Walder makes the point that “restorative nostalgics try to restore the past [by] turning history into tradition and myth and monument” (2011:11). I argue that Guru, as a restorative nostalgic, is so profoundly affected by the stories he hears about his uncle, that Chin becomes for him an idealised embodiment of his own aspirations. Guru’s admiration for Chin reminds us of Otsile’s fascination with Bra Shope in Serote’s *Revelations*: a longing for a comforting example of how to live. On the assumption that Guru’s nostalgia is triggered by his ambivalent sense of self, it can be surmised that the fetish he devises serves a protective function against the unthinkable state of entirely losing his sense of identity. Guru’s is a fetishistic nostalgia, “a loving relation to a version of the past which is often recalled and that takes on both a cherished status and a protective function” (Hook 2012:231).¹³⁶ It protects him from the fear and pain of having to renew his sense of self – the fear that such a self might be alienated or self-alienating.

But how does Guru’s fear and his subsequent nostalgic longing manifest itself? I argue that it takes the form of a fetish, a fantasy which is projected onto his uncle and hero, Chin. Nostalgia being a “romance with one’s own fantasy” (Boym 2001:xiii), Guru’s ‘fantastical’ imaginings of Chin’s life initially give the younger man a vision with which to map his own future, while ‘fetishisation’ of Chin as an idealised role model is a blue-print for his future self that ensures – so he believes – that he will enjoy a sense of belonging within an admiring family and community. Guru admires Chin’s persona and wants to emulate him, but this fetish cannot be sustained, as will become apparent when Guru’s nostalgia is examined more closely.

After Chin has come back to Durban, temporarily, for his traditional marriage, he returns to his life and his business in Cape Town, and he invites Guru to travel to Cape Town to stay with him. The invitation to stay with the man he so much admired, his hero, is irresistible to the young man. But when he lives with Chin on a day-to-day basis, Guru finds that the flesh-and-blood man of reality cannot live up to the legend.

Guru had always looked up to his uncle, ever since that first day when he’d come back from the dead in his shining new limousine and his Bond Street clothing. Now he was suddenly a man of straw, a philanderer who denied his own son, who was ashamed of his own child. (305)

The long-held image is shattered and Guru comes to regard the ‘real’ Chin with “utter contempt” (310).¹³⁷ However, instead of reflecting on his disappointment – and examining the disparity between his nostalgic fantasy and the reality of the man he knows in the present – Guru chooses to remain in

¹³⁶ An alternative description could be the “mythical nostalgia” that Boym mentions (2001:34).

¹³⁷ Thus, Govender’s multi-faceted characterisation of Chin fulfils the responsibility that Betty Govinden calls for in ‘literature of indenture’: “Recounting the indentured experience entails a responsibility for writer, critic, and reader [because] [t]he value of work of this kind in South African literature, and particularly in the case of South African Indian writing, is that it offers an interrogation of the shifting politics of identity, now based on mythmaking, now on cold reality” (2009:299).

thrall to fantasy, to retain a restoratively nostalgic view. The important point here is that Guru utilises nostalgia's protective function. Focusing on a nostalgic fantasy about a legendary figure, someone strong and heroic, he can ignore his own fears of insignificance and the meaninglessness of life. But when Chin no longer fits the mould Guru simply redirects his gaze, casting about for a new object on which to project his fantasy. He becomes enchanted instead by a fiery political activist, Devs, his cousin (and the son whom Chin does not acknowledge as his own). Guru discovers a 'political home' in the African National Congress (ANC) in Cape Town and re-focusses his need for a utopian future on those whom he regards as heroes of the political struggle, and on Devs in particular, who "although still only a teenager, had gained a reputation for being a fearless student activist" (283). Guru also pledges allegiance to the ANC's armed wing, uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), trying to convince Devs that he is sincere: " 'don't you think that I mean it, that I feel very strongly about this?' " (303)¹³⁸

Guru's involvement with the anti-apartheid struggle adds a previously unforeseen dimension to the question of belonging of the South African Indian subject. When he declares, "I'm involved, whether you like it or not" (303), he implicitly rejects the 'in-between' status of the postcolonial subject and asserts his right to belong in South Africa as a third-generation immigrant. Guru's assertive opinion and actions are contrary to those of his uncle. Chin claims that the South African Indian is, indeed, 'in-between'. "What more do you want? [Chin asks him] Indians are caught in-between. If the black people get into power you won't have a chance" (309). Chin's words and actions do not fit the image of the heroic figure that Guru had hoped to meet. Guru rejects Chin, but cannot resist the nostalgic vision.

Guru's over-zealous enthusiasm for 'the Cause' (the ANC's political cause) indicates a nostalgic attachment to the idea of a 'homeland', since immigrants, Boym maintains, "often share a peculiar inferiority-superiority complex, believing themselves to be more dedicated to the ideals of the adopted homeland than the natives themselves" (2001:343). But Chin's perspective – wanting to preserve the original culture – can also be seen as nostalgic in the same way that "early-twentieth-century immigrants from Russia and Germany [in America] believed that they preserved their native culture better than Russians and Germans who stayed in the old country" (Boym 2001:389). Chin, and others like him, strive loyally to preserve an Indian culture. This is another example of how Chin and Guru are both restoratively nostalgic, yet in profoundly different ways.

Ultimately, Guru's all-or-nothing approach proves fatal. Although it is repeated twice in the space of two pages that "[t]here's no place for heroes" (303, 312), the fetish of heroism is entrenched in Guru's psyche and he dies for the Cause, shot after refusing to talk under torture when captured (314). It is an outcome that is true to Guru's ideals as a hero and to the nostalgic tone of the novel. Thus, Guru's

¹³⁸ In the 1960s, the African National Congress (ANC), the outlawed/banned political party, concluded that "non-violence, which [they] had always regarded as a tactic rather than a principle, had run its course" (Clare 2010:404). An armed wing was formed, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), which means 'The Spear of the Nation'.

social utopia has provided a protective function that he has managed to maintain in the face of adversity.

Like Laverne in *Joonie*, Guru has screened off traumatic and troubling thoughts. His fantastic imaginings of Chin's life have given him a vision with which to map his future; his fetishisation of Chin as an idealised role model has been a blue-print for his future self. Later, those same functions are indirectly served by his admiration for his cousin Devs, the political activist, and by the structures of MK and the armed struggle. Although bitterly disappointed by his hero (Chin), Guru has still been able to cling to his dream, because nostalgia, as Boym puts it, "is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (2001:xiii).

Because Guru has never confronted his psychologically submerged negative and traumatic feelings, therefore, such feelings remain unresolved at his death. His restorative nostalgia has taken a regressive form, frozen in unresolved expectations; his nostalgia has not assumed a more progressive form of reflections.

Juxtaposing Chin's and Guru's Restorative Nostalgias: The Double Negative

Both Chin's and Guru's nostalgic thoughts may have been restorative but each is rooted in different visions. Considering their respective nostalgias simultaneously – as the reader is compelled to do – what insights does the novel offer in presenting the reader with these contrastingly nostalgic visions? For both characters, the past is a refuge, since the present is full of regret, unhappiness, and discontent. Wallowing in restoratively nostalgic understandings of the past, neither resolves – or truly acknowledges – discontent. What we see, to put it in Medalie's terms, is that "[t]he baser forms of nostalgia partake of idealisation through memory and desire [...] without interrogating it" (2010:40).

Only towards the end of the novel is there an inkling of reflection on the past by one of the main characters: in the final chapters, Chin is now older and wiser, although subdued, with Guru (his nephew) having died and Devs (his son) a political prisoner. Chin begins, late in life, to reconsider his opinions. The sense of identity he has longed for still eludes him; his son is imprisoned and their relationship remains unacknowledged; and his amassed wealth is dwindling, due to political circumstances and his own lethargy. His choice now is either to ignore these painful realities and persist in the rigid opinions that have contributed to the status quo, or to consider alternative ways of understanding himself.

Guru has been a catalyst for Chin, shocking his uncle with his alternative opinions about identity and his unconditional acceptance of Devs (Chin's son) as a family member. The most profound shock for Chin is of course Guru's violent death in the political Struggle.

With the inner confrontation within himself as Chin reflects on the clash between his views and Guru's, Chin can no longer disregard Guru's beliefs: the two visions begin to overlap in his mind,

developing into a ‘double perspective’. Contrastingly, for the younger Guru the two images have long been incompatible, and when his original admiration for Chin vanishes he simply changes the object of his nostalgic longing. Guru remains emotionally fixed, statically attached to his romance, whereas Chin begins to grow and develop incrementally as he tentatively entertains both perspectives (his own and Guru’s) simultaneously and moves towards a new way of considering his past and his Indian/South African identity in the present and for the future. Chin opens up to other ways of life, he broadens his vision regarding his identity and sense of belonging.

I stress that Chin’s progress remains tentative; his is not the robust ‘interrogation’ suggested by Medalie’s definition of an “evolved nostalgia” (2010:40). Even as he attempts to connect with Devs – the son he has failed to acknowledge because Dev’s mother is not Hindu – he adheres doggedly to his own broader cultural conditioning. To bridge the gap between himself and Devs he performs a traditional and spiritual ritual, hoping that by ‘passing the Atman’ to Devs he can link their lives spiritually. The ritual involves the singing or recitation of an ancient song:

the song of life, the unbroken melody passed on from parent to child, the abiding melody of the soul, of the Atman; the melody his mother had passed on to him, the melody that any parent passes on to a child with unwavering love, enabling a feeling of wholeness, enabling one to reach out, to conquer, to take from life what one needs and even what one wants. [This is] the eternal music of life, the music of the soul, the song of the Atman, intrinsic to his being. (319)

Mutual acceptance between father and son becomes contingent on a spiritual understanding between them, as embodied in a ritualistic gesture. Chin proffers ‘the song of the Atman’ and expects that Devs will symbolically accept it to sanctify their relationship.

As Chin finally faces up to his son Devs and attempts the ‘passing on of the Atman’, the broader arc of the novel opens up to the possibility of a fuller reconciliation of the past with the present. Like Otsile in Serote’s *Revelations*, Chin has consistently hidden behind restoratively nostalgic memories, and only towards the end of the novel, when faced with disillusionment, can he begin to allow for multiple identities.

One could suggest, furthermore, that a ‘double negative’ has been utilised in this novel. Johan Jacobs borrows the term “double negative” (2016:247) from photography, for his exploration and discussion of diaspora and it seems apt also for my discussion of *Song of the Atman*. In photography, double negative is a method whereof two negatives result in the formation of a positive:

a positive image is a normal image and a negative image is a total inversion of a positive image, in which light areas appear dark and vice versa. When a negative image is created from a negative image, however, a positive image results – like multiplying two negative numbers in mathematics. Similarly, in rhetoric, a double negative is an affirmative constructed from two negatives – for example, ‘Neville is never not ironic’. (Jacobs 2016:247)

The double negative here is made up of the two men's restoratively (regressive) nostalgic views, which for the novel, for the reader, finally offers a reflectively (progressive) nostalgic view.¹³⁹

*

Returning to my earlier question as to what nostalgia has brought to the fore in this novel, it is pertinent to reiterate what Walder has said about the value of nostalgia as an analytical tool:

the rosy, sentimental glow most commonly associated with nostalgia is only part of the story, and [...] pursuing its manifestations with a proper sense of the complex of feelings and attitudes it engages, and the contexts upon which it draws, reveals its potential as a source of understanding and creativity. (2011:3)

Chin's and Guru's nostalgias are 'only part of the story'. The nostalgias have in fact protected them from the full awareness of the traumas in their lives. In examining their nostalgias, we are led also to examine their traumas.

Each character's difficulties have been dealt with differently. Guru has clung to his statically nostalgic way of thinking until the end, and so his story ends with a repetition of unresolved trauma. It is an example of what Boehmer has called a "stuttering repetition[, a] reiteration of further sorrow" (2012:29): a trend she has observed in post-apartheid South African literature.

Chin's story, however, with its final glimmers of hope, gives us a change from the pattern of endlessly repeated trauma. Boehmer refers to David Scott who suggests that stories are needed in post-apartheid literature that "emphasize accidental living-on more than conclusive and end-stopped resolution, that vision of the future that is onwards and upwards from the present" (Scott; qtd in Boehmer 2012:43). I believe that with the conclusion of Chin's story Govender presents the reader with some hope of a future that is 'onwards and upwards'.

In conclusion, I have observed that the novel presents fragments of images that are restoratively nostalgic, glimpses into characters who hold regressively nostalgic opinions, and stories that are static in their utopianism. Looked at separately, these instances create the impression of a restoratively nostalgic view. On second reading, when all the instances of nostalgia are seen together as part of a larger mosaic, as they are in the novel, they present a reflectively nostalgic view. Therefore, *Song of the Atman* is ultimately a reflectively nostalgic novel.

In Govender's writings, and in this nostalgic novel, I believe the central point to be a search for identity. Having examined the characters' nostalgias, I reinforce that argument now by discussing how

¹³⁹ I use the terms 'negative' and 'positive' here as terms of binary opposition to differentiate between the two forms of nostalgia, 'restorative' and 'reflective', and not necessarily to place either term in hierarchy to the other.

Govender has represented place and space. I show how the search for identity is also a search for places of belonging, for places that can be called home.

Nostalgia in the Novel: Places

When Indian immigrants first arrived in South Africa in the 1860s, they did not envision a long-term commitment to the country. Indentured labourers were employed on five-year contracts and generally believed that they would save money and then return to India. ‘Passenger Indians’ also came to South Africa for a temporary period only, their general intention being to profit from various businesses before returning to India.¹⁴⁰

However, a long-lasting (albeit ambivalent) bond formed, and Ronnie Govender’s *Song of the Atman* explores the development of the South African Indian relationship with the landscape of South Africa. The novel portrays nostalgic attachments to both India and South Africa and explores the double consciousness that is required if habitation is to be harmonious. For indentured labourers, “[t]he pull of the familiar never disappeared [but it was a] contradictory pull” and, although many decided to remain in Natal at the end of their contracts, they found that “[t]he new rarely seemed to completely satisfy longing for the old” (Desai and Vahed 2007:400). For those who did go back to India, “return was followed by a yearning for Africa” (Desai and Vahed 2007:400). Often, for migrants, there is no satisfaction in returning to the original location; there is always a longing to be in the other ‘home’, for, as Boym puts it, “a modern nostalgic can be homesick and sick of home, at once” (2001:50).

This state – of being simultaneously ‘homesick and sick of home’ – perfectly describes Chin’s condition in the novel, which follows the trajectory not only of his emotional development (discussed earlier), but also of his physical journey – his migration from Cato Manor in Durban and along the east coast of South Africa, to Cape Town.

While searching for a sense of identity, Chin also looks for a (new) place of belonging and endeavours – in a series of locations – to recreate or restore a home for himself. He yearns to feel ‘at home’ somewhere. But being ‘at home’ is, in Boym’s words, “a state of mind that does not depend on an actual location”, because what we actually long for when we long for home is a “sense of intimacy with the world” (2001:251).

With regard to space, then, the novel exposes the long-term, multi-generational sense of displacement experienced by South African Indians. It explores the immigrant’s plight of being between homes when the former home (a specific place at a specific time) has been lost forever, but the new place has

¹⁴⁰ Many had “dreams of a better life and [the] opportunity to save money and return to the village as ‘success stories’” (Desai and Vahed 2007:9).

not yet been accepted as home, meaning that the immigrant does not yet feel 'at home'. This 'in-between' state inevitably arises for immigrants because emotional 'arrival' seldom occurs at the same time as physical arrival. Although there has been a physical departure and a physical arrival, emotionally there has only been a departure. Emotionally, the immigrant still anticipates reaching home, existing meanwhile in the psychologically liminal state created in the space between the departure point and the destination.

The novel presents Chin in this predicament – stuck in a liminal state between departure and arrival – but suggests that home can be reached via an alternative route: via the nostalgic imagination. I ask: why is Chin affected by the immigrant's dilemma of being between homes? Why, as a second-generation immigrant, does he not yet feel at home? And how do Chin's interactions with various places reflect the novel's nostalgic approach to space and place?

To answer these questions, I consider how the novel reflects India as the absent and lost home, and how India is prevalent in all aspects of the story, even though the novel is not set in that country. It becomes apparent that while the journey between India and Africa has not yet culminated in an emotional arrival, it has nonetheless given rise to a profound longing for home, a longing that – despite a general reticence on the matter – is evident in the community's nostalgic cultural habits. Because many immigrants never fully deal with the pain of displacement and dislocation, a satisfying emotional arrival remains unfulfilled, even for subsequent generations such as Chin's. I trace Chin's physical and emotional journey to show how he attempts to recreate a migratory experience, to mirror his father's journey, in the hope of finally arriving at a destination where he feels at home. Finally, a focus on the novel's representations of physical places that are 'liminal spaces' – some symbolic, others meditative – highlights the challenges Chin faces in his search for an emotional home, the challenge being that he must eventually move through, or beyond, liminality if he is to develop emotionally.

I start with a discussion of the most obvious places of interest for the South African Indian immigrant, namely South Africa and India, and with a delineation of the novel's spatial and temporal contexts.

Continents and Countries: Homelands and Heartlands

The story's spatial and temporal frame, embracing Durban in the 1930s and Cape Town in the 1970s, is introduced in the novel's first twenty-five pages. The Prologue gives a glimpse of the story's ending, which is set in Cape Town in the 1970s, but Chapter One swiftly moves back to the beginning of the story in Durban in the 1930s. With this sudden shift from one time and place to another, Govender creates an unsettling atmosphere of dislocation that also establishes the sense of displacement that is prevalent throughout the novel. Starting from Durban in 1930, the author proceeds to trace the protagonist's internal migration between Durban and Cape Town over a period of forty years. It is a migration that might be seen as Chin's attempt to recreate his father's migratory

experience – his father having travelled from India to Durban as an indentured labourer – but which could also be seen as an *extension* of his father’s journey – because although Chin’s father departed from India and physically arrived in Africa – there has not yet been a completely satisfying psychological sense of arrival. The delay of an emotional arrival has affected Chin even though he is of the next generation, inspiring him to begin a new journey in the hope of finally arriving at a place of belonging.

Over a period of forty years, Chin moves along the Indian Ocean sea-board of South Africa, from Durban to East London, to Port Elizabeth, and finally to Cape Town. Throughout his journey, he continuously longs for his childhood home in Cato Manor, Durban, a place that appears so often in Govender’s writings that Pillay describes it as a “heartland for Govender [and] the locus for his nostalgia” (2014:106).¹⁴¹ In this novel, the protagonist’s (Chin’s) initial homesickness appears to be triggered when he leaves his Cato Manor home in Durban in the 1930s, but in actual fact a generalised yearning for home has been a pre-existing psychological condition in his community, and is therefore embedded in his psyche. This is because the place he leaves behind (Cato Manor) is itself a site of longing, a place founded by a displaced and dislocated diaspora community: having arrived from India as indentured labourers, they had always been haunted by the ‘pull of the familiar’, and had always longed for their home in India.

India – the country, the continent, the ‘homeland’ – is most important to the story but is hardly mentioned or explored in the novel. India is referred to only in some of the older characters’ fleeting memories. For example, Chin’s mother remembers how, “long ago in Thanjaoor in faraway India, her own mother had held her” (86), and his father tells him about how he had arrived in Natal “as a young man with his parents from Thanjaoor” (28). However, these older characters do not dwell on memories of their former homes in India, making only brief comments rather than reminiscing at length. Boym has observed that denial of one’s original homeland is typical for first-wave immigrants for whom, it seems, “the deeper the loss, the harder it [i]s to engage in public mourning” (2001:xv).

Although India is outside of the novel’s geographical parameters and the older generation do not have any intention of returning, Indian culture permeates all levels of the narrative. Nostalgia is manifest in a multitude of allusions to traditional ceremonies and customs, to spiritual practices, and to music and food, all of which pertain to India and Indian culture.¹⁴² The ache for another time and place is

¹⁴¹ “For anyone who is familiar with Govender’s work, [it is apparent that the] repetition of characters, incidents, and setting, in particular the use of Cato Manor, is the norm. This supports the claim [...] that Cato Manor is a ‘heartland’ for Govender [and that] this space is the locus for his nostalgia” (Pillay 2014:106).

¹⁴² For example, ceremonies are performed on several auspicious occasions (21, 59, 216, 255, 293), and woven into the daily life of the characters are Hindu prayer rituals and temple visits (65, 79, 137, 221 to mention only a few). The nostalgically evocative activity of sharing a meal and preparing food is also a recurring reference: there is briyani to celebrate a new job (36), the varieties of fish that are an important staple meal (22, 42), the individual recipes and cooking styles of various characters (113, 203, 224), and the all-important spices (307) for

assuaged by these nostalgic practices because a restorative form of nostalgia gives the illusion that faraway times and places are less distant. Indeed, as Boym has said, “[d]istance is compensated by intimate experience” (2001:44).

Although there is no mention of a desire to return to India, the spirit of India is imported into all aspects of life. The idea of a cultural ‘home’ is inherent in these practices and artefacts so that, in essence, India has been brought to Durban. What the novel seems to ask is: if *this* place – the spatial setting of *Song of the Atman* – is not India, can it yet be a place of belonging? Is it a place to be ‘at home’?

Having established that nostalgia for India profoundly influences the novel’s representations of place (even though India is outside of the novel’s spatial parameters), it follows that the most important and influential arc of movement in this story is the move from India to South Africa. Even though the journey from India to Africa has already occurred, the characters are profoundly affected by the dislocation from one continent to another; such dislocation forms part of their cultural and psychological history. Subsequent generations of immigrants are often deeply affected by the initial, life-changing journey that brought them to the new country, despite not being present to witness or experience it first-hand; an uncanny feeling lingers, a feeling of ‘unhousedness’, or of being between homes.

According to Boym, it is the subsequent generations of immigrants who are most prone to nostalgia: “First-wave immigrants are often notoriously unsentimental, leaving the search for roots to their children and grandchildren” (2001:xv). Bearing Boym’s observations in mind, it is important to note that Govender’s Chin is a second-generation immigrant – his father “had come to the country as a young man” (28) – and that Chin did not experience the original journey himself but is nevertheless deeply affected by it. As I explained in Chapter 2 (Theoretical Concepts), ‘affect’ is sometimes used as a synonym for emotion but it differs from ‘emotion’ in that it is beyond our control. To cite Ruth Leys once more, ‘affect’ can be described as a “non-conscious experience of intensity [that is] prior to ideology, intention, reason, meaning, and belief” (2012:8,9). Although younger generations may not have experienced migration first-hand, they may nevertheless feel the deeply submerged pain of displacement and dislocation: they experience it affectively. It is a traumatic legacy that they must bear, for as Viljoen, Lewis, and Van der Merwe point out, “[d]isplacement can be experienced as a most traumatic event [that] dislocates and alienates and interferes with identities” (2004:16). In addition, we know that subverted trauma is bound to be repeated unless it is acknowledged and dealt with.

those who are “chilli-literate” (43). I give only this brief selection of examples as there are too many to mention here.

It is significant, then, that Govender does not tell the ‘indenture story’ in *Song of the Atman*, telling instead a story that represents a reaction to it. Chin’s reaction is to mimic his father’s actions: he leaves his beloved but unsatisfying home and goes in search of his own idealised home, his place of belonging. Chin’s movement away from home (from Durban to Cape Town) is a re-enactment of the migrant’s original odyssey (from India to Durban); it is intended to foster an understanding of the process of migration, thereby to find meaning. Govender’s story is a nostalgic retelling of the immigrant’s tale: nostalgic, because it aims to provide an imaginative repeat experience of migration for the subsequent generations who did not experience the initial migratory journey first hand.

As I have already suggested, Chin’s journey can be compared with his father’s earlier journey in two different ways: firstly, it can be seen as a repetition (as I have just indicated), or it can be seen as an extension of his father’s journey, a continuation of a journey that has not yet culminated in an emotional arrival at a new home. When Chin becomes homesick, we might ask: which home does he long for? Is it simply for his family home in Durban, or is it in fact for his family’s original home in India? Has he inherited a sense of longing from his immigrant parents?

In Govender’s representation, Durban is the protagonist’s cultural and spiritual place of origin, as well as his physical and geographical starting point, but – when the stories of the two journeys become entangled within the imagination, when Chin’s journey is considered together with his father’s – Durban becomes conflated as ‘homeland’ or ‘motherland’ with the originating point of India itself. Thoughts of Durban are entwined with thoughts of India, so that visions of two places become superimposed. As Viljoen, Lewis, and Van der Merwe have explained,

[g]eographical space is tied to emotions as well as ideology. Geographical space refers to a physical space, but it can never be divested from that which ascribes meaning to that physical space, among others the ideology and emotions tied up with memories of that space. (2004:15)

The original Indian immigrants have inscribed their culture, together with their sense of longing, onto this new place (Durban) to such an extent that it has become embedded in the environment. The children of immigrants and indentured labourers who grow up in Durban are therefore still deeply influenced by an Indian way of life, because the place and the culture have become one. For Chin, as a second-generation South African Indian, the very essence of India and his own Indianness are interwoven with memories of, and feelings about, his home in Durban’s Cato Manor.

Therefore, when Chin leaves Durban, and with every further move that he makes, he moves simultaneously forwards and backwards: physically forwards, towards his nostalgically imagined home in the future, and emotionally backwards, retreating to memories of an idealised family home from his past.

Cities: Departures and Transitions

As Chin leaves one home in search of another, certain questions arise: for example, on what is Chin's restoratively nostalgic vision of home based? How has Govender depicted the typical Cato Manor family home? I address those questions now in order to reveal the trauma and insecurity that is associated with the nostalgic image of the cosy family cottage, and to discuss the repercussions of Chin's attempts to recreate, or continue, his father's odyssey and to restore the idealised home as he travels through a number of different cities. Furthermore, I consider why his romanticised attachments to the past prevent him from finding the 'home' he desires.

The Cato Manor neighbourhood that Govender depicts was originally (historically) settled by immigrant families from among those choosing to stay in Natal after their contracts had expired. While under contract, indentured labourers lived in company houses provided by the sugar-estate employers, but these were only temporary homes and when contracts ended, those who chose not to return to India had to find their own accommodation. Attempting to create a permanent abode, many bought small plots of land and erected cottages.

In the novel, Chin grows up in a house "which had begun life as a one-bedroomed wood and iron cottage [which his father] had almost single-handedly put up [...] choosing the best second-hand corrugated iron for the walls and the roof" (46). Although it was simple, the family felt strong and united there: all major decisions were made around the dinner table and "there resided a firm commitment [that] they were a family, and [that] all other considerations took second place" (79).¹⁴³ The cottage was situated on a plot of land where their father had "planted a market garden" (30) from which he had "built up a steady trade selling vegetables and fruit to the housewives on the Berea (20)". By farming (even on a small scale), by digging into the earth, he had attempted to put down roots, forging a physical relationship with the land.

However, the situation remained precarious. As mentioned earlier, Indians were restricted with regard to land ownership by discriminatory laws (e.g. the Land Act of 1913 and the Pegging Act of 1943). Furthermore, even though many people came to own plots of land, ownership was perpetually threatened by poverty and the difficulty of paying off long-term loans, not to mention the looming threat of possible re-allocation, or re-zoning, of land. These were the precarious conditions and insecurities on which Cato Manor was founded, conditions that compounded the earlier traumas undergone by this already-embattled community. Having survived dangerous sea voyages and having endured at least five years of what some historians have called slave-labour conditions, the formerly indentured labourers who were bold enough to eke out a living in Cato Manor had to deal with conditions that exacerbated feelings of inferiority and victimhood. This is the legacy of indenture that

¹⁴³ Chin's family home is reminiscent of the humble house that Rayda Jacobs depicts in her novel, *Joonie* (as discussed earlier).

duly burdens Chin in the novel. Chin is profoundly affected by this legacy but the trauma is unacknowledged, and because it remains submerged in his consciousness, it is bound to recur. This is why Chin's search for home is fruitless, his existence perpetually transient.

Chin has clearly been affected by the place in which he has grown up, but (to reiterate a point I have already made) people and places influence and shape one another. As Viljoen, Lewis, and Van der Merwe explain,

[t]he very spaces we occupy form our identities, and these identities determine our perceptions and representations of those spaces and varying spatial experiences. We can thus view the relationship between space and identity as a symbiotic relationship, a mutual dependency creating meaningfulness. (2004:12)

However, "symbiotic" implies a mutually beneficial state, and no such balance is evident in Chin's relationship with his environment, as his home place (Cato Manor) has come to have a stifling influence that damages his individuality and his agency.

Subsequently, Chin is affected by the diminished Indian cultural presence in each of the cities in which he is to stay. In some cities, the Indian community has a stronger presence than in others making some places more conducive, and others less, to his sense of belonging. Outside of Durban, Chin expects less cultural support but more personal freedom. Like the pioneers in Van Heerden's *Ancestral Voices*, Chin is looking for a less prescriptive environment, a place on which he can make his mark. However, when Chin leaves his home place, he is plunged into a state that his father endured earlier in his life: he becomes 'unhoused', and from then on, longs perpetually for a real home.

As a result of this *Unheimlichkeit*, over the course of his subsequent forty-year journey, Chin moves through a series of temporary homes and places of transience as he searches for a place of belonging fashioned on his lost home. He remains *en route* for decades, living and working in a series of hotels, and unable to settle because his nostalgically imagined destination is always out of reach.

He quickly moves away from his first temporary home in East London, a city that does not have an established Indian community and where he is treated with suspicion. Further along the coast, he is welcomed by Port Elizabeth's "small Indian population [most of whom] lived in South End" (108). As a migrant, he is in his element among the diasporic community because diaspora, in Jacobs's words, is "an ongoing process of displacement, migration, and relocation" (2016:5). Years later, Chin will buy a plot of land (in Port Elizabeth) for the cultivation of a vegetable market garden, a nostalgic homage to his father's dream to put down roots. By purchasing and owning this piece of land, he forges a tenuous emotional connection with his late father's vision of belonging. However, Chin's investment is only a partial commitment, as he delegates care of the land to another family member rather than assuming responsibility himself. Ultimately, Chin moves on to Cape Town, where he establishes his own hotel: Govender's Modern Hotel.

Chin's developing relationship to place can in fact be mapped through his career as a hotelier. By nature of their business, hotels are places of transience – places where people come and go at short intervals, but always with the intention of moving on. Chin's work in hotels begins in East London, at the Royal Hotel. With its name, its architecture, and its clientele, it is “a piece of Olde England” (96): a mock-Tudor hotel that represents all the British colonial pomposity that he is trying to escape. In Port Elizabeth he lives and works at another hotel, the Hotel Cologne, which, as its name suggests, also has a European atmosphere and clientele. In later years Chin becomes the manager and co-owner of the Hotel Steynsrust, in Cape Town. His social mobility suggests a growing personal investment (emotional as well as financial), as also indicated by the hotel's name with its clearly local South African resonance. Eventually, Chin moves closer to a sense of permanence and personal commitment when he opens his own hotel, Govender's Modern Hotel (202), in District Six, Cape Town. With his own name prominently displayed on a solid brick and mortar structure standing on unequivocally African soil, he seems finally to proclaim, ‘I am here. Look what I have achieved.’

For all the impressiveness though, none of the hotels has been able to replace the sense of belonging or the solid homeliness that the wood-and-iron cottage in Cato Manor used to convey. Chin has held onto a restoratively nostalgic image of that family home, an image that has idealised the warm memories, while overlooking the associated traumatic memories, with the result that he still does not feel a proper sense of belonging. The novel thus keeps the notion of home in abeyance; it perhaps even goes so far as to suggest that Chin's desire for a settled home may be futile, because, when Chin finally attempts to root himself in one place (by setting up his own hotel), his vision is thwarted: the land on which the hotel is built is rezoned by law, effectively dispossessing him and forcing him to move on yet again.¹⁴⁴

Chin's nomadic lifestyle is a clear indication that Chin yearns for an idealised home and that his nostalgic feelings are associated with unacknowledged traumas: the painful legacy of indenture and the sense of displacement that second-generation immigrants inherit. These are recurring traumas – because not dealt with – and they trigger in Chin a nostalgia that is manifest in a transient lifestyle and a series of temporary homes. Compelled always to leave but unable to find his destination, Chin remains in limbo.

Focusing more closely on the liminal spaces (physical places and psychological states) that are presented in the novel, I next consider how and why Chin must move through them in order to develop.

¹⁴⁴ During the late 1960s and the 1970s, over 60 000 inhabitants of District Six were forcibly removed from the area. Chetty claims that, “[a]fter liberation [...] [s]ites of suffering and pain such as District Six, Sophiatown, Cato Manor, or Robben Island had to be reconciled with the collective memory of the nation” (2016:58). Brown comments on the representation of sites of removal in Govender's short story collection where, he says, there is a “mythologizing impulse, evident [...] in the linking of Cato Manor with two [other] sites of removal [i.e. District Six and Sophiatown], which have been extensively valorized in popular discourse [but which are] offset by a specificity of reference to the Cato Manor community and its infrastructure in [the book's] introduction” (2005:111).

Coastlines, Beaches, and Islands: Liminal Spaces and Arrivals

The sense of being in limbo which envelops its protagonist, is evoked from the start by the unsettling opening scenes of the novel. In the prologue, the year is 1967 and Chin is on a boat, somewhere unspecified, with sea-spray blowing into his face.¹⁴⁵ However, the scene shifts suddenly, in Chapter One, to a book-keeper's office in Durban in 1930. This disruption of place and time sets the general tone of the novel, inducing a sense of displacement. There is an immediate and startling contrast between 'then' and 'now', and between 'here' and 'there'.

As the story unfolds – from its beginning in Durban, in 1930 – Chin's subsequent quest for meaning and home is played out in the liminal spaces of the traveller's existence: in the spaces after departure, but before arrival. To reiterate, Chin becomes homesick when he leaves Durban, but his nostalgia is an extension of his diasporic community's inherent sense of longing for their former home in India. Durban is ostensibly Chin's departure point, but this is simply the departure point of his personal journey, while his individual journey is only one stage of a broader diasporic migration. Psychologically, he is still a diasporic subject, an immigrant who has left one home and anticipates reaching another. Mentally, therefore, his departure point is from India; he is still 'in transit' because he has not yet arrived in Africa (emotionally) as a new place of belonging. Although Chin leaves Durban, he always retains a symbolic connection: during the course of the novel, his geographical journey is mapped along the coastline of the country in a continuous, unbroken line that starts in Durban and ends in Cape Town. His route along the shore can be compared to the stretching of a metaphorical 'umbilical cord' between himself and the 'motherland' (Durban/India) as he moves steadily further away, but remains tethered.

Vertically, the coastline can be seen to link the various cities in which Chin stays. Horizontally, the coastline is representative of a border between mainland and ocean. In postcolonial studies, dividing lines often represent a threshold, a limen, and in this novel, the coastline and the beach represent an important threshold between the land and the ocean. To extend that thought, it is also important to recognise that the ocean represents a vast liminal space between Africa and India.¹⁴⁶

Chin often spends time on the beach, in East London, in Port Elizabeth, and in Cape Town, where he goes fishing, just as he did in Durban. It is an activity reminiscent of his old life that not only provided additional food for the household, but was also an activity to be enjoyed with others as a communal sport. The beach is furthermore a space of contemplation and meditation for Chin (not unlike his

¹⁴⁵ Meg Samuelson comments that "[a]t first glance, the reader may expect to be transported into the passage from India" (2010:276).

¹⁴⁶ 'Liminality', as a term, "derives from the word 'limen', meaning threshold. [...] The importance of the liminal for post-colonial theory is precisely its usefulness for describing an 'in-between' space in which cultural change may occur: the transcultural space in which strategies for personal or communal self-hood may be elaborated, a region in which there is a continual process of movement and interchange between different states" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2007:117).

mother's visits to her temple), a space representing a symbolic connection with India via the expanse of the Indian Ocean over which most Indian families' forebears had travelled to arrive in Durban. For those who have crossed oceans, Stephanides says, there is sometimes "the desire to be remembered by the sea, which is nostalgia for the permeability of borders" (2007:10). In the narrative present, fishing affords Chin a symbolic and imaginative connection with his past across time and space. Furthermore, Chin's past (his lived experience) echoes his ancestors' (his father's) history; in shadowy memories of the earlier journey – the migration from India to Africa – the beach is a symbolic (as well as a literal) border. Therefore, the beach is a space where "the nonlinear relationship between departure and arrival" can be contemplated (Stephanides, 2007:10).

Does contemplation in this 'neutral' space help Chin connect to his broader environment, to feel a sense of belonging? Viljoen, Lewis, and Van der Merwe suggest that such spaces are vital because:

subversion and transformation especially take place in the in-between spaces, [and liminal] space is crucial for the adaptation and transformation of identities. (2004:21)

But even though Chin uses the in-between space of the beach to contemplate the meaning of his life, he remains in limbo. When he loses his hotel which is on expropriated land in District Six, his wife begs him to "petition the authorities to give them alternate premises" (318). But he "show[s] little interest" (310). Instead, he spends ever more time fishing on the beach, "even in the foulest weather" (319), indicating that he feels little sense of commitment to his surroundings because his gaze, his nostalgic focus, is still directed over the ocean – the Indian Ocean – at a far distant home in the past.

Only when Chin *crosses* the threshold does inner development begin. He has been living in the liminal spaces of a traveller's existence, but until this point, his sense of identity and belonging has remained stagnant. However, when he is motivated to leave the mainland to visit his (at this stage, still unacknowledged) son in prison on Robben Island, he crosses the symbolic border (of the coastline) moving into the vast liminal space of the ocean.¹⁴⁷ It is here, on the ocean, that the "adaptation and transformation" (2004:21) to which Viljoen, Lewis, and Van der Merwe refer, is initiated. Chin then moves through a succession of liminal spaces that are catalytic for his development: first of all, he is exposed to the vast openness of the ocean; secondly, he reaches the highly symbolic Robben Island; and thirdly, he and his son reunite in the sterile visiting room at the prison.

When Chin crosses the coastline, he travels into a space that represents both his past and his future. This short voyage to Robben Island recreates his parents' migratory voyage between India and Africa, restoring a nostalgic connection to his Indian heritage. At the same time, he travels towards his future, breaching the psychological divide between futility and purpose, for he makes this crossing to forge a

¹⁴⁷ Robben Island – its Dutch name means 'seal island' – covers an area of five square kilometres and is situated approximately 7km off the coast from Cape Town. Since the 17th century, various controlling authorities have used the island as the site for a prison. From 1961 until 1991 "Robben Island was most notorious as a political prison for the leaders of the anti-apartheid struggle" (Deacon 2004:309).

connection with his son. Of course, their meeting will be fraught with tension, because for Chin to fully embrace the imprisoned Devs, who is not Indian, as his son, he will have to embrace his own South Africanness, something he has grappled with his whole life. That is why this brief sea crossing is so important; it affords Chin a reprieve from the psychological conflict he suffers about his sense of identity and belonging that until now has been demanding his greater commitment. In the liminal space of the crossing, he can extricate himself from an ‘either/or’ binary choice and perhaps envision a new solution. As Viljoen, Lewis, and Van der Merwe have said,

[t]he ambiguity of [the liminal space] lies in the fact that it does not belong to either one or the other, but is formed by the dialectic between the two. Although ambiguous, this space is most illuminating in the discourse of identity. (2004:18)

There is no easy resolution, however. Chin reaches Robben Island, a site that is not only a liminal space but also a highly symbolic site for South Africans. It forms part of, yet as an island is apart from, South African soil. In recent history, the notions of democracy and freedom were incubated on the island where some of the most influential political figures of the Struggle were imprisoned.¹⁴⁸ Today, Robben Island is recognised as a symbol of renewal and rebirth but also as a place of profound pain.¹⁴⁹ It is therefore significant that Chin’s nostalgic and traumatic sensibilities converge when he visits Robben Island: that his personal struggles reach a climax at this site of national symbolism. It is a site fitting for emotional rebirth, for ideological recalibration. Robben Island marks a point at which Chin can choose either to remain mired in the past, clinging exclusively to his Indian identity, or to accept his dual identity as South African/Indian and commit to South Africa as his home. Furthermore, by reuniting at a site of such national importance, both Chin and his son (with their different ethnic/cultural backgrounds) are incorporated into a broad and inclusive South African narrative.

Chin must leave Robben Island – he is visiting an inmate – but this could be the point where he chooses to form a new, reflectively nostalgic perspective on his life, a perspective that incorporates fragments of past memories together with present realities to form a double perspective. Whether or not Chin makes a decisive adjustment is left to the reader’s imagination, however, because the book ends on this ambiguous note.

¹⁴⁸ Deacon notes that since the early 1980s much public attention has been focussed on Robben Island “as a place of detention and a crucible for leadership. [...] A number of former Robben Islanders were key negotiators and politicians working for the birth of a democratic nation in 1994 and became leaders in the new democracy” (2004:312). Hoelscher and Alderman go so far as to say that “few places are as electrified with symbolic power and political contestation as Robben Island, [and that the site has] considerable importance for national identity” (2004:348).

¹⁴⁹ There are a number of published memoirs and academic articles about prison life on Robben Island, one such being the memoir by Moses Dlamini, for example, whose opprobrium is made plain in the title of his memoir, *Hell-Hole Robben Island: Reminiscences of a Political Prisoner in South Africa* (1984). Because of its profound significance, by the 1990s Robben Island “had become a place of pilgrimage and homage” (Hoelscher and Alderman 2004:348).

The final scene has the two men face-to-face in the prison visiting room (Chin and his son, Devs). It is a bleak picture at first glance, but appears more hopeful on closer inspection, because in that dismal place a lifetime of emotions passes between them. The visiting room is an extraordinary space – a time and place apart from normal life – in which a unique transformation can occur. Although until this point, nostalgia has been a regressive emotion in Chin’s life, he now draws on fond memories of Devs’s childhood and introduces cultural practices (such as his recitation of the ‘song of the Atman’) into their meeting. In this way, he incorporates fragments of their past into their present experience, instinctively invoking a reflective nostalgia – nostalgia in a form that helps emotional integration.

The end of the novel thus presents a symbiotic meeting between places and characters: first of all, in crossing over the shore, however briefly, Chin has been able to cross an emotional borderline; secondly, the unique environment has allowed them (he and his son) a space to form an emotional and meaningful connection; thirdly, the meaningfulness of his relationship with Devs helps Chin to accept South Africa as his home, and the possibility of a meaningful future. Stephanides (writing about nostalgia in Cypriot poetry) suggests that we exhibit nostalgia for the future “by putting our tongues in the cracks and insisting on the non-linear relationship between departure and arrival so that arrival lies not in a particular end but in the process of cultural translatability” (2007:10). The ending of the novel may be ambiguous and inconclusive, but it is hopeful in suggesting that Chin could have reached a sense of belonging and arrival.

The Lahnee’s Pleasure

For each of the four authors I deal with in this dissertation I have selected two novels: the author’s most recent novel together with an earlier novel. For Govender, the selection has been predetermined, because he has thus far published only two novels: *Song of the Atman* in 2006, followed, in 2008, by *The Lahnee’s Pleasure*.¹⁵⁰ Strictly speaking, *The Lahnee’s Pleasure* is Govender’s most recent novel. However, although *The Lahnee’s Pleasure* (in its form as a novel) was written and published two years after *Song of the Atman*, it had in fact appeared many years earlier in the form of a play: a socio-political satire, first performed in 1972 and published in 1976 (Govender, 1976). It is a story, therefore, that has been told both before and after *Song of the Atman*. For my purposes, I examine the novels in their order of publication and, although I focus on *The Lahnee’s Pleasure* as a novel (not in its earlier form as a play), my discussion is mindful of the history and evolution of this piece of writing.

¹⁵⁰ The *Dictionary of South African Indian English* gives the following definition of ‘lahnee’: “One’s employer, usually in a shop, factory, or in other business, a rich person (often male), a person of means, a White man” (Mesthrie 2011b:132).

As a novel, *The Lahnee's Pleasure* has the framing device of a Prologue and an Epilogue which 'bookend' the novel's main narrative. This structure makes it obvious that the past is being reconsidered from a present perspective, thereby foregrounding stark contrasts as the narrative oscillates between the two time periods. A double vision of the two time periods is achieved – 'then' and 'now' – and also of two differing places, 'here' and 'there'.

A brief word here, about the narrator and the novel's humorous tone: a novel, unlike a play, usually utilises a narrator, which is a device that can create particular effects. This novel has a third-person narrator, who is not present in the narrative (i.e. he is not a character). The narrator's cultural background, moreover, is unclear because, although he speaks of the Indian community with an insider's familiarity, his diction and tone are strongly influenced by a colonial English accent (possibly suggesting that the narrator sardonically mimics colonial-style manners). The contrived, imitative style is lightly used, however, and the overall tone of the novel is humorous, almost tongue-in-cheek. Much of the characterisation and conversation is exaggerated for comic and dramatic effect, and some of the situations are farcical, humour being a well-known trait in Govender's writings.¹⁵¹ The narrator furthermore uses the self-conscious, metafictional device of speaking directly to the reader (23, 26, 32); nevertheless, the narrator remains impersonal by sometimes referring to himself as "we" (Govender 2008a:15, 37, 54). These narrative style choices – which give the reader the feeling of looking in from the outside – suggest that the author does not want to get too 'close' to the characters for fear of unsettling their restoratively nostalgic, static habitation (as, I suspect, is also the case in *Song of the Atman*).

Having indicated in the previous section how *Song of the Atman* is nostalgic in its recreation of the migrant's experience, I contend now that Govender retains the strain of nostalgic reminiscence in the novel, *The Lahnee's Pleasure*. The first indication of nostalgia is the author's return to a story that he had already told (back in 1976), in the form of a play. The question arises: what compels the retelling of this persistent and evocative story, a story that the blurb on the back cover describes as "poignant [and] bittersweet"? Like much of Govender's work, *The Lahnee's Pleasure* is a literary memorial to the Indian community of Durban, a recording of their language, politics, culture, and hardships, particularly those of the working class.

Following his intention of memorialising the Indian working-class community, this story is set almost exclusively in a segregated bar at the White House Hotel on the Mt Edgecombe Sugar Estate in Natal during the 1960s. A regular patron, Mothie, arriving at the bar to drink at an irregular time – it is a weekday morning when he should be at work – and tells the barman and another patron about a crisis that he is facing. As the three men talk, they are interrupted from time to time by the 'Lahnee', the

¹⁵¹ Hansen, commenting on humour in Govender's work, uses words such as "satire" (2000:262), "ethnic farce" (2000:264), and "comedy" (2000:266) to describe Govender's style.

manager of the establishment, who also gradually becomes embroiled in Mothie's problems: Mothie's daughter has run away with the village lothario, but Mothie is getting little help or sympathy from the local police (as already noted). Over the course of several hours, as they drink, talk, and ponder Mothie's problems, the socio-political issues of the day come to the fore, along with the way that each of the men deals with his challenges. In an additional sub-plot, the Lahnee suffers humiliation as a consequence of his wife's infidelity.

Govender's novel is a 'slice-of-life' depiction of a unique Indian community. In what follows, I discuss his nostalgic depiction of the people and places of this 1960s sugar estate, seeking to understand the paradoxical yearnings inherent in the narrative. I examine the cause and content of nostalgia to ascertain the connection to, or displacement from, a controversial period in South African history.

A possible starting point is a comment the narrator makes in the Prologue, where he exclaims that "everyone knew their place in Mount Edgecombe, as they did everywhere else in the OLD SOUTH AFRICA, and thus there was this very special brand of LAW AND ORDER" (2). The capitalised "LAW AND ORDER" and "OLD SOUTH AFRICA" suggest a hankering on the part of the narrator for bygone orderliness no longer to be found in the novel's present (in the 2000s) – an apparent nostalgia, however inconceivable, for the bygone era of social injustice. As Jacob Dlamini explains, "to be nostalgic for a life lived under apartheid [...] is to yearn [...] for order in an uncertain world" (2010:14). When circumstances in the present are too uncomfortable to bear, or so distressing that the future cannot be envisioned with any comfort, the mind has a tendency to retreat to the past, even if the past were traumatic. The mind then resorts to a form of psychological trickery, submerging unhappy memories and providing instead a circumscribed, domesticated version of the past to which an individual (or a community) can comfortably retreat.

The narrator of *The Lahnee's Pleasure*, however, does not blot out all the unpleasantness of the past. He makes it clear that the 'orderliness' he remembers was not simply a matter of the community being well-organised or well-behaved, but was in fact the result of rigidly controlling rules and adherence to prescribed social roles; it was based on the understanding that "everyone knew their place" (2), a sinister notion implying not only social limitations and restrictions, but also physical limitations.

What I shall show is that, although the narrator is prompted to retreat to a rigid and cosy memory of a particular time and place (South Africa in the 1960s), his larger vision ultimately refuses to remain static. Gradually, unpleasant memories start insinuating themselves into pleasant memories, so that a healthier, more balanced nostalgia (in a reflective, contemplative mode) starts to develop.¹⁵² As we shall see, the narrator hankers after people and places in the past; but in telling his tale, he exhibits a

¹⁵² I am reminded here of Otsile's repeatedly thwarted attempts (in Serote's *Revelations*) to freeze a particular image (memory) in his photographs.

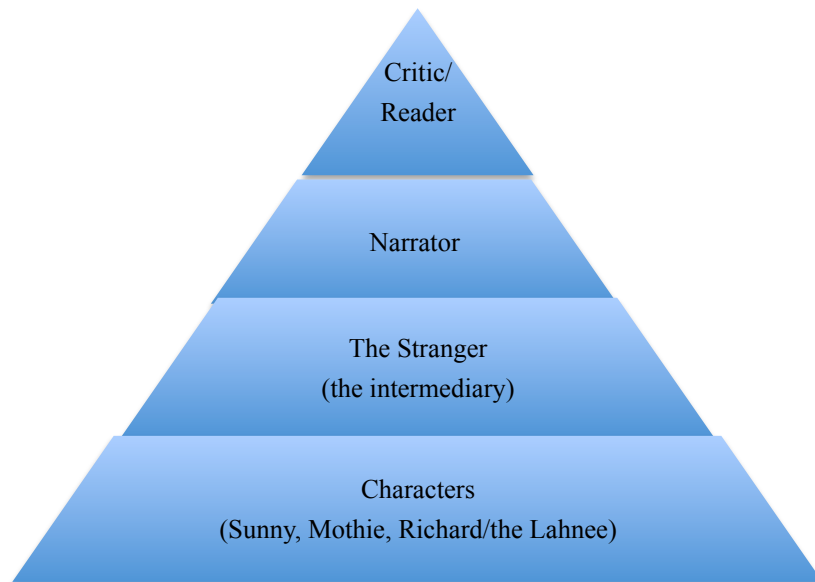
more critical, reflective nostalgia that tempers his irrational sense of longing with an acknowledgement of the associated trauma of the past. As a third-person external narrator, and with the benefit of hindsight, he is at a remove from the characters who are firmly embedded in the narrative and who tend, therefore, to offer naïvely idealised versions of their reality. The reader perceives the discrepancy between the characters' 'embeddedness' and the real world of apartheid, and is alerted to this irony because the narrator has shaped the story as a story of the past about which he is partly nostalgic. The narrator's perspective is thus presented as a relatively objective view. The narrator's role as intermediary (between past and present for the reader and for the characters) will become clearer from the character analysis in the next section, where I examine the novel's nostalgic depiction of particular 'types' who – because they “kn[e]w their place” and adhered to their given roles – appear, at least to the narrator (and from the novel's present-moment perspective), as reassuringly 'know-able' in the present circumstance.

Nostalgia in the Novel: Characters

I mentioned earlier that in *Song of the Atman* the author creates an external and somewhat detached view of the characters, which suggests that he seeks to memorialise a statically nostalgic image. *The Lahnee's Pleasure* also gives an external perspective of its characters; it is an approach that allows only limited insight into their individual psyches; an approach, moreover, that the author has used in order to restore a particular kind of nostalgic image of the characters.

The action occurs in a bar-room setting, and involves four characters: Richard/the Lahnee (hotel manager), Sunny (barman), Mothie (tractor driver), and the Stranger (a travelling salesman).¹⁵³ The Stranger acts as a bridge between the narrator (in the 2000s) and the characters (of the 1960s). To add to my earlier explanation about the narrator, a brief note can be inserted here about reader and character perspective, and mediation of information. This involves levels of insight that are set out diagrammatically in the figure below.

¹⁵³ The hotel manager is a character referred to by more than one name, or nickname, in the novel. Some of the characters refer to him simply as 'the Lahnee', but the narrator refers to him as Mr So-So. His name is in fact Richard, although the reader never learns his surname. For the sake of clarity, I will refer to him as Richard/the Lahnee. Another character is not named at all but referred to only as 'the Stranger'. He is a travelling salesman who arrives in the neighbourhood on a business errand.



At the apex of the various levels of insight is the critic/reader, positioned as having the widest view. The narrator, in turn, has a less objective view than the reader/critic, but knows more than the characters. Embedded in the narrative, the characters – Mothie, Sunny, and Richard/the Lahnee – have a limited perspective, confined to the sugar estate of the 1960s. The narrator’s viewpoint is far wider than that of the characters because, in the present (the 2000s), he has the advantage of viewing the past (1960s) with hindsight. An additional viewpoint – wider than that of the characters, yet more limited than that of the narrator – is provided by the Stranger, an intermediary character who, as I have mentioned, serves as a bridge between the characters and the narrator. Although also a character in the text, the Stranger’s perspective is broader than that of the other three characters in the bar (Mothie, Sunny, and the Lahnee) because he is an ‘outsider’ from beyond the borders of the sugar estate, someone more sophisticated. He is, however, embedded in the same time frame (the 1960s) as the other characters, which means that his outlook is more limited than the narrator’s. The reader/critic’s perspective of the characters and the events of the narrative is mediated via each of these levels.

The three locals – Richard/the Lahnee, Sunny, and Mothie – are comfortable with each other, resigned as they are to their respective roles in society: a situation which seems to endorse the narrator’s contention that “[y]ou could only have Law and Order if people knew their place” (6). Their respective roles in life have been determined by various factors, including colonial labour relations, the indenture system, and apartheid: factors that will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections. On this particular day, Mothie’s personal crisis (his daughter has gone missing) unsettles the status quo, while in addition a stranger appears on the scene asking questions that challenge the joint complacency of the locals. As the day progresses and the crisis is dissipated, the men discuss current problems and swap stories about the ‘good old days’.

To examine how they are affected by selectively nostalgic memories, and also how the novel depicts them in a nostalgic light, my focus will be on two character sets: the first set has two characters,

Mothie and Sunny, working-class and Indian; the second set has just one character, the hotel manager Richard/the Lahnee, who is an Englishman. As sets, these represent apartheid classification categories to be kept apart: categories with grossly unequal social power and agency. I consider next how the novel portrays nostalgic images of both sets of characters, and I interrogate the characters' own nostalgic yearnings, commenting also on their associated traumatic memories. I look first at the two working-class characters, Mothie and Sunny, and then move on to Richard/the Lahnee.

Working-Class Men: Continuity, Community, and Retrospection (Mothie & Sunny)

Mothie and Sunny are both working-class men, the type of men who hold a job for life, remaining loyal to their employer as the generations before them have done. Sunny, a barman at The White House Hotel, is proud of his long service: “‘You know, bru, twelve and a half years I’m working here’” (98). He is proud, furthermore, of his working relationship with his boss, even though Richard/the Lahnee (the hotel manager) constantly refers to him as a “blithering idiot” (15) and even though he in turn cheats on his boss and his customers by serving ‘short tots’ of liquor while charging the full price. Having “learnt his trade from his father who had worked at the same bar” (99), he recalls how his father taught him the job, which he says is “the best way to learn” (99); from his father he has learnt not only the job at hand, but also the petty acts of subversion that ensure his survival in a system designed to keep him in a subaltern position.

Mothie, who is a generation older than Sunny, has worked as a tractor driver for thirty years. He also takes pride in his relationship with his boss and in the high esteem in which (he believes) his ‘lahnee’ holds him. “‘My lahnee likes me’” (127), he states, with an air of exaggerated dignity that is at odds with the “forlorn figure of a sugar worker, in well-worn overalls” (99). This example of stoic dignity (despite the downtrodden reality that his appearance indicates) conveys the narrator’s affection and admiration for Mothie’s powers of endurance.

As the plot unfolds, the two men, Mothie and Sunny, spend most of a particular day together in Sunny’s bar. There is one other customer in the bar that morning: the travelling salesman referred to as ‘the Stranger’ who witnesses a scene of distress. Mothie is in despair because his daughter has gone missing and he is drinking himself into a stupor. Sunny is affected by his friend’s desperation and is motivated to raise questions about the meaning of life. In reaction, both resort to nostalgic reminiscences of their respective youths. Just a generation earlier, life seemed simpler, slower, and more pleasant. “Arreh, our time, man, our time!” exclaims Mothie (107). As they wait helplessly for news of Mothie’s daughter, “[t]he mood [i]s right for reminiscence [...] for harking back to the good old days, for heart-warming, if not much-embroidered, flashbacks” (132). In this nostalgic atmosphere, Sunny talks about his late father, Kista, a man with minimal education, who during his lifetime

became foreman at the Sugar Mill [...] chairman of the Silver Stars Football Club, a trustee of the Mount Edgecombe Temple, secretary of the Mount Edgecombe Thirukooth

Dance Company and a member of the Mount Edgecombe School Building Committee.
Top of that he had fifteen children. (45)

Sunny's father is the epitome of the capable, self-sufficient South African Indian working-class citizen, his list of accomplishments a testament to the community's many endeavours in pursuit of upliftment and solidarity. While Sunny extols his father's many achievements, Mothie tells less lofty, but equally affectionate, stories about Kista. He remembers how he and his friend would spend their light-hearted, carefree Saturday nights drinking and dancing together: "Saturday night! Your father [...] and me [...] dancing time, we'll dance the Natchannia together" (47). These memories project a cosily nostalgic image of working-class Indian men that indirectly incorporates Mothie and Sunny too. In talking nostalgically about working-class men, they are also indirectly describing themselves to the reader.

As Mothie and Sunny reminisce about the past, their nostalgia thus serves two novelistic purposes. Firstly, via their conversations, the novel presents a nostalgic image of the two as types of the generic Indian working class. Secondly, their nostalgia has a protective function for them as individuals; as their memories move backwards through time, the process helps them to cope not only with their current crisis but also with the ongoing day-to-day traumas of their lives. Nostalgia, functioning as a protection from trauma, helps them to maintain a sense of meaning in life. As Crystal Park explains in regard to trauma and meaning-making, "people tend to shift their focus or opinions to maintain a sense of homeostasis in their sense of meaning. [In addition,] to maintain an overall sense of meaning, people can draw on sources of self-esteem, affiliation, certainty, and symbolic immortality" (2013:65).

The novel thus depicts Mothie and Sunny in a 'restoratively' nostalgic way while they themselves are 'regressively' nostalgic, not only because the difficult conditions of their lives prompt their retreat to the past, but also because what they choose to remember shields them against other more traumatic memories. As I have shown with each of the previously examined novels, nostalgic memories are invariably associated with traumatic memories, which in this novel are exposed via the device of an 'outsider' character/focaliser: the Stranger.

Having initially intended just a quick visit for a drink at the bar, the Stranger lingers, intrigued by Mothie's unfolding crisis. As the afternoon in the bar progresses, the strain of Sunny and Mothie's day-to-day living becomes apparent, especially when witnessed from the perspective of the Stranger, who as a newcomer is more detached from their situation. The Stranger's viewpoint foregrounds, for example, Sunny's constant cautioning of his friends/customers to keep quiet, because " 'Lahnee's next door, man' " (107). Sunny worries about disturbing his boss, but is equally concerned that he might look foolish to the (white) people on the other side of the dividing wall (112). When Mothie drunkenly ignores his warnings Sunny shouts, " 'You making us a fool! You got no sense? You like white people must laugh at us? You got no shame' " (112). The outburst expresses Sunny's need to protect himself (and Mothie) from painful degradation, indicating that he feels a sense of shame. This sense of shame

is a reflection of the “sense of inferiority [and] disempowerment [brought about by] apartheid culture” that, according to Muthal Naidoo, is prevalent in the South African Indian community (1997:31). But what is most important for Sunny, for his self-preservation, is his job. He is dependent on his job not only for the wages but also for his company-loaned house and for his social reputation.¹⁵⁴ “My job comes first,” he tells the Stranger (134), which explains why he is such a stickler for the rules. As the narrator notes, “[t]his was [Sunny’s] domain and there were certain unwritten laws [that, if broken, turned him] into a small-time tyrant” (100).

The Stranger, observing with the fresh eyes of an outsider, foregrounds Sunny and Mothie’s situation, exposing their complacency while also emphasising the painful emotions and historical traumas that keep them (and other men like them) in a cycle of servitude. He observes that they are in what Ashcroft would refer to as a “subaltern [position], subject to the hegemony of the ruling classes” (2007:198). As the three men discuss the various problems that occupy their minds – trying to buy property, the state of the hotel’s toilets, the importance of education – the Stranger tries to make Sunny “see things as they [are]” (135). He wants Sunny to face reality, to challenge injustice, and he’s exasperated that “Sunny just [is]n’t listening” (135), as if he doesn’t understand. Meanwhile Sunny is, of course, painfully aware of the discrimination and inequality they all face; he is just not yet ready to confront the truths that the Stranger wants exposed. When the Stranger points out that “‘the trouble is we let them get away with it’ ” (134), Sunny’s reply is simply, “‘what can you do, bru?’ ” (134) – an attitude that exemplifies the victimhood, lack of agency, and helplessness that are legacies of both the indenture system and apartheid. The novel thus foregrounds the “sense of inferiority” (Naidoo 1997:31) that many experienced under apartheid. Sunny chooses instead to accept short-term solutions, challenging the system with petty subversive acts. Sunny’s approach is to make the best of the situation rather than profoundly to challenge it, an approach he has learnt from his father.

The Stranger feels an obligation to broaden Sunny’s and Mothie’s horizons and is frustrated that they do not seem to understand him; ironically, he is in fact the one who does not understand them. As Sunny and Mothie reminisce about the past, it is obvious that nostalgia serves a protective function for them and that it helps them to attach a sense of meaning to their lives; it is also obvious that the Stranger, increasingly impatient and frustrated as he is, fails to understand that Mothie’s and Sunny’s nostalgic memories help them to deal with the pain of the present. What the Stranger fails to see is that the two men’s stories reinforce their solidarity and help to bolster the comforting illusion that the past was orderly and happy. With Mothie’s daughter gone missing, the unsettling event might have disrupted the perpetuation of their traumatic histories. The daughter’s disappearance marks an extraordinary day, potentially a turning point in their attitudes, as was the case for characters in some of the other novels examined.

¹⁵⁴ “To inherit the tenure of the council house from his father, he had to be in the employ of the Hulett’s Sugar Estate, serfdom in perpetuity” (49).

The novels of Van Heerden, Jacobs, and Serote include catalytic events that prompt the character/s to consider situations anew. In *30 Nights in Amsterdam*, Henk's trip to Amsterdam is a catalyst that brings to the fore his submerged traumatic memories, while his presence in turn prompts a change in Zan's recollections. In Jacobs's *Joonie*, a pregnancy is the turning point; in Serote's *Revelations*, a death prompts change for Keke. In Govender's earlier novel *Song of the Atman*, Chin reconsiders previously fixed attitudes when he is compelled finally to acknowledge and accept his biological son.

But characters, people, are not always ready, or indeed able, to accept change when it happens – which is the case with the traumatised Laverne (in Jacobs's *Joonie*), and which, in *The Lahnee's Pleasure*, is the case with Mothie and Sunny. The two men are unable to alter the course of their lives at this potential turning point (Mothie's daughter disappears; the Stranger appears). In the meantime, their lives must follow the patterns created by history and by their fathers. (In the event, the situation with the missing girl is quickly diffused when Richard/the Lahnee steps in to call the local police and the girl is found unscathed at a neighbour's house.) So although the Stranger's promptings and the events of the day have given them pause for thought, there is no change in their behaviour. Indeed, the situation appears hopeless because their story ends on a farcical note with them literally singing and dancing to traditional Indian music, for the Lahnee's pleasure!

Mothie's singing hit the highest decibel count he could manage. Offkey, offbeat, what the hell! The break was welcome for the lahnee, who joined in, clapping as Sunny hammered out a canny beat on the counter and Mothie danced the Natchannia with gusto. (166)

Although this scene marks the end of the main (1960s) narrative, and is the reader's last encounter with these characters as they were at that time, the last word which follows in the Epilogue gives the novel new meaning and a more hopeful endnote from the perspective of a democratic South African present. In the Epilogue, the story acquires a nostalgic relevance, reviewing as it does Mothie's and Sunny's apartheid-era experiences from a 'post-apartheid' perspective.¹⁵⁵ In general, when looking back at the past, the vantage point of the present incorporates the experience and knowledge that has since been acquired. This incorporation of experience leads to overlaps between 'then' and 'now' because psychical time is circular rather than linear. In this novel, in which the past is revisited, there is what Hook refers to as a "recontextualization [that] relies on a double temporality" (2012:235). Hook uses the term "apartheid *Nachträglichkeit*" (2012:234) to refer to the "idea that the true significance of a past event will only be realized in a subsequent future, once triggered retroactively" (2012:235). With 'retroaction', or *Nachträglichkeit*, there can be a sense of simultaneity between past event and current reaction; in other words, there can be a delayed reaction to the past event. In

¹⁵⁵ When it was performed as a play in the 1970s, *The Lahnee's Pleasure* would have been more urgently political than its novelistic version in the post-apartheid era. In contrast to the 1976 play, the 2008 novel is more nostalgic because it has an added Prologue and Epilogue that frame the main events and describe subsequent developments.

retelling this story in novelistic form, and by including an updated temporal frame of reference in the form of a prologue and epilogue, Govender uses a double perspective between ‘then’ and ‘now’ to foreground South African Indian working-class characters, while relegating once-authoritarian figures to the margins. I suggest, therefore, that Govender’s novel is a nostalgic reconsideration, an example of “apartheid *Nachträglichkeit*” (Hook 2012:234).

Bearing the author’s nostalgia in mind, together with Hook’s notion of post-apartheid *Nachträglichkeit*, let us now consider another character, Richard/the Lahnee.

Richard/the ‘Lahnee’: Longing for a Sense of Identity and the Need to Belong

Richard/the Lahnee is the manager of the White House Hotel, an Englishman who holds sway over the other characters in the novel, not only by virtue of his position as manager but also because, as a white man under apartheid, he takes advantage of the discriminatory legal and political orders of the day. The ‘lahnee’ label applies to his position in society as a white man and to his position as manager in the business enterprise of the hotel, and it is the name or title that the other characters use when referring to him. In addition, the narrator refers to this character as ‘Mr So-So’, a disparaging epithet inferring that he is a mediocre person, not particularly worthy of the narrator’s (or the reader’s) attention. For the purpose of analysis he is referred to here as ‘Richard/the Lahnee’.

The novel’s main plot depicts Richard/the Lahnee as an obnoxious boor (shouting orders at Sunny, insulting Mothie, arrogantly taking charge of the situation with the police), but the sub-plot (his wife humiliates him by having an affair with an African employee) depicts him as a blustering, ineffectual fool. However, the characterisation is not restricted to petty tyrant or cuckolded fool because even memories of ‘the lahnee’ are affected by the narrator’s nostalgic view of the past. From the vantage point of the 2000s (a post-apartheid perspective), Richard/the Lahnee’s place in the narrative of the novel is reconfigured from what it was in the earlier play (1976). The sense of power previously attributed to him is diffused. The character’s own nostalgia is manifest in his speech and actions, and the novel’s ambivalent portrayal of Richard/the Lahnee extends into a portrayal of the British community’s collective nostalgia, which so profoundly affects Richard’s sense of identity and belonging.¹⁵⁶

In the Prologue, the narrator begins the story by expressing his strong feelings about Natal’s British community in the narrative present, deriding them for their dogged determination to maintain their “very special brand of law and order” (2). He presents them sardonically as relics of the former British Empire. However, the narrator’s derision does not entirely apply to Richard/the Lahnee. Although there is no doubt that Richard/the Lahnee belongs to that community, he is set slightly apart from the over-confident collective and portrayed – sometimes deridingly, sometimes empathetically – as flawed

¹⁵⁶ From this point on, when mentioning the ‘British’ community, I refer to a community whose cultural identity is British.

and vulnerable. According to the narrator, Richard/the Lahnee “was not anything like your average Wit Ou” (13) [tr. white man]. Even so, the character’s own words and actions illustrate that he is not a man of depth or honour, either: he is exploitative (84-85) while also prone to tantrums when he does not get his way (86), and is over-concerned by what people might think of him (90). So, there are both positive and negative memories about Richard/the Lahnee: nostalgic memories of him as a somewhat benign presence, as well, contrastingly, as unpleasant memories of an obnoxious person who is condescending towards ‘non-whites’.

The narrator’s memories of ‘the lahnee’ are conflicted. In spite of his strong (negative) feelings about the British community, the narrator is unable to see the Englishman only as part of that collective. As he reflects in more depth, the narrator reconsiders Richard/the Lahnee as an individual, albeit a conflicted individual. The reader is, therefore, presented with a conflicted view of a conflicted individual.

Richard/the Lahnee is presented as uncertain about his sense of identity. He is a South African-born Englishman, a second-generation immigrant, who is an “Englishman born and brainwashed” (15). His family is part of a community that is fiercely protective of its ‘Britishness’, a community that has a restoratively nostalgic attachment to all things English, an attitude that masks a fear of losing not only its sense of identity but also its sense of control. As explained by the narrator in the Prologue:

In this neck of the woods, nostalgia for Empire lingered on in the minds and hearts of that sector of its melanin-challenged denizens who had wanted God to Save the Queen’s dominion even after the Boers had changed the Union of South Africa into a Republic. [...] Durban and its environs remained the Last Outpost of the British Empire. (1, 2)

British culture is, therefore, the dominant influence in Richard/the Lahnee’s life, the culture with which his sense of identity is aligned. His family and community are more ‘English’ than the natives of England themselves, as they cling doggedly to the culture of their origins. The novel presents Richard/the Lahnee as a caricature of the ‘Englishman in Natal’, his appearance and speech as an example of a nostalgic attachment that has become an affectation bordering on the obsessive: “He not only wore a tweed coat and scarf and sported a handlebar moustache, he rounded his vowels and pointed his consonants with gusto” (15). Why does he cling so stubbornly to his British identity?

I argue that because Richard/the Lahnee has grown up in the multi-cultural environment of Durban (among British, Indian, and African people), he does not have a clearly established or definitive sense of self. Therefore, as compensation, he adheres to the ‘restoratively’ nostalgic brand of Englishness that serves a protective function for him, the type of nostalgia that sees itself as “truth and tradition” (Boym, 2001:xviii) rather than as nostalgia. Through this adherence to tradition, he strives “almost to the point of hysteria” (29) to keep up appearances, to convince himself and others of his identity. Often, for an individual who has a background with multiple cultural influences, defining a sense of identity involves a decisive choice to adhere to only one of those cultural identities, while ignoring (or

denying) other influences.¹⁵⁷ By assuming a traditional (but exaggerated) British identity, Richard/the Lahnee protects himself from the socially unacceptable alternative of having no identity at all; in other words, he protects himself from having an identity that is not clearly defined, because such ambiguity would suggest that he does not belong anywhere.

In addition to serving a compensatory and protective function, Richard/the Lahnee's traditionally British identity – his public persona – embodies a contrived role; it has been pushed onto him just as Chin (in *Song of the Atman*) and Harman (in *The Slave Book*) had rigid identities imposed on them, identities with which they are not entirely comfortable. However, unlike Chin and Harman, Richard/the Lahnee does not explore the possibility of alternative roles, but instead insists on maintaining his façade. That Richard/the Lahnee's image as a stereotypical upper-class Englishman is a façade is evident for the following reasons: firstly, he does not have upper-class origins. His wife, for one, sees through his mask, understanding that he is a “ruffian beneath the gentlemanly veneer” (29). She observes how he “could never completely hide his low-class parentage, much as he tried to feign an upper-class upbringing well above his father's humble origins as a Covent Garden barrow boy” (29). Secondly, and more importantly, a homogeneous British identity is an impossibility for Richard/the Lahnee, because he has spent his formative years in a multi-cultural environment. He suffers a conflict regarding his sense of self, similar to Chin's discomfort about his identity (in *Song of the Atman*). Just as Chin was conflicted about the Indian and South African aspects of his identity, Richard/the Lahnee is conflicted by the seeming incompatibility of his inherited British culture and his South African upbringing. In spite of being raised in an English community in Natal, he has forged close bonds with people of diverse cultures (for example, African/Zulu and Indian). As a young child he even believed for a while that his nanny, an African woman, was his mother. Only as a young adult does he learn that he is expected to adopt one particular culture and heritage, that his sense of identity is meant to be delimited by his social and legal status, and that he should ‘know his place’. Because he is unable to feel at ease within the British heritage which he perceives as a confined space, Richard/the Lahnee remains perpetually conflicted. He projects himself as an Englishman, but he is never completely comfortable in this social role.

It seems that in his rigidly adopted Englishness he denies his own longing for an alternative South African/‘Natal’ identity, a heterogeneous multi-cultural mix of English, Indian, and Zulu. His affinity for Indian culture (in particular) is constantly evoked, manifested in his enjoyment of Indian food and music and in the company he keeps. Because of his love of Indian food, for example, he “always has a quart bottle full of [russum] in the fridge” (84) and will often request samples of certain dishes.¹⁵⁸ “Don't forget to bring me some curry” (165), he will remind his employees/customers. He also enjoys

¹⁵⁷ According to Pumla Gqola, “Most people with a known varied ancestry prioritise one with whose name to identify themselves” (2010:51).

¹⁵⁸ Russum is a “[s]trong and tangy soup, made with hot medicinal spices, usually served to people suffering from colds” (Mesthrie 2011:195). Can be spelt ‘russum’, ‘rasso’, or ‘rassam’.

Indian music and can even “play a reasonable rendition of ‘Khabi-Khabi’ ” on his accordion (174). Furthermore, he constantly follows the thread of the conversation on the ‘Indian side’ of the bar and – whether he is shouting across to them (108) or sidling silently over to their gathering (140) – he often attempts to insinuate himself into the group as they drink and chat, indicating that he does not want to remain confined to the European/white side of the bar and has a “need to belong” (Baumeister and Leary 1995:497) to the broader range of local society.¹⁵⁹ He wants to be part of a “chemistry of unforced, spontaneous human communion” (108) but, because he is conditioned to believe that it is only within the British community that he will be permitted to feel a sense of belonging, his “belongingness deficits” (Seehusen et al. 2013:908) will over time fortify his defensive retreat into the British role/persona he has assumed. He entrenches himself in the mindset of the collectively nostalgic British community and consolidates his British identity further, by impersonally referring to anyone who is not of British origin as ‘they’ or ‘them’, and even by referring to his would-be friends Mothie and Sunny as “you Indians” (140), thereby reinforcing his ‘apart-ness’.

The novel’s portrayal of Richard/the Lahnee illustrates that a collective nostalgia in a ‘restorative’ form can overwhelm an individual’s natural inclinations and consequently have a profoundly negative effect on the individual, who becomes perpetually preoccupied with an inner struggle for meaning. The novel shows that the circumstances of Richard/the Lahnee’s life have conditioned him for an ambiguous role in society and in life; a case of nurture, rather than nature. In fact, “[t]hose who knew him in his youth [...] vouch that he was indeed a very pleasant young man” (14) until he became the hotel manager. It was at this point that he rigidly assumed the role of a ‘lahnee’. He does more than simply take on the responsibilities of a manager in a hotel; he has also assumed the patronising habits and demeanour of a privileged white man in Natal. In this way, the “young man [has] changed into a real lahnee” (14).

To conclude my remarks about the characters, I venture to say that it is from the vantage point of the narrative present that the writer has reassigned the positionings of the two groups of characters. While the focus on Mothie and Sunny has shifted them to centre-stage, Richard/the Lahnee has been relegated to a more marginal space, symbolically speaking. Furthermore, the perception of Richard/the Lahnee’s marginality is strongest when he appears to be tormented by his yearning for inclusion in the convivial company of those from whom he has set himself apart (from those previously relegated to the margins, such as Mothie and Sunny). Thus, seen in hindsight, the Englishman’s power is exposed as a mere social and economic construct and, accordingly, any perception of superiority is quashed. The illusion of Richard/the Lahnee’s social power is irrevocably shattered when his subsequent demise is summed up in the Epilogue: “Mr So-So [Richard/the Lahnee] was dumped and, after

¹⁵⁹ The ‘need to belong’ has been defined as a “need for frequent, non-aversive interactions within ongoing relational bonds” (Baumeister & Leary 1995:497). Furthermore, Seehusen et al. suggest that “‘belongingness deficits’ trigger nostalgia” and that “nostalgia, with its rich social content, functions as a compensatory strategy in response to belongingness deficits” (2013:908).

drinking away his lump-sum severance pay and most of his early pension package, ended up becoming an inmate of the Salvation Army Relief Hostel” (174). Richard/the Lahnee’s ‘restorative’ nostalgia, therefore, has only impeded his emotional and social development, while the narrator’s ‘reflective’ nostalgia has allowed the reader an empathetic perspective of this flawed man.

*

This close examination of the novel’s characterisation has revealed that Sunny, Mothie, and Richard/the Lahnee are initially framed by nostalgic memories. But the characters do not remain confined to those roles, because with the passage of time the narrator’s retrospective view also allows for critical reflection on their actions and reactions, thus revealing the protective function that nostalgia has played in shielding them from traumatic memories. Ultimately, such reflection elicits the reader’s empathy and understanding. I turn now to an exploration of the novel’s nostalgia for the unique environment in which these characters co-exist.

Nostalgia in the Novel: Places

In my earlier discussion regarding the nostalgic depiction of places in *Song of the Atman*, I mentioned that the ‘essence’ of India permeates all levels of the narrative, even though India is outside of that novel’s spatial parameters. The earlier novel, *Song of the Atman*, focusses on Cato Manor as home, a place that was founded and (predominantly) populated by Indian immigrants and their offspring. Although an Indian influence is similarly apparent in *The Lahnee’s Pleasure*, British culture is also prominently represented. The setting for the novel is the Mount Edgecombe sugar estate, with India and Britain perceived as ‘absent presences’ in the novel. Although the setting is neither Britain nor India (all of the action takes place in South Africa), the influence of both is profound.¹⁶⁰

The Mt Edgecombe Sugar Estate in the late 1960s as spatial and temporal setting represents a microcosm of apartheid-era South Africa with its strict delineations between races/ethnicities, cultures, genders, classes, and nationalities. In the apartheid era, such social and cultural divisions were enforced by legal constraints and often reinforced by rigid physical and social boundaries.

The novel’s main plot (involving the disappearance of a young girl) is set almost exclusively in the Indian men’s bar on one particular day, while a sub-plot (involving the hotel manager’s wife and her illicit lover) covers a period some weeks prior to the events of the main plot. The characters do

¹⁶⁰ According to Desai and Vahed, in KwaZulu-Natal, there are still lingering “[v]estiges of British imperialism”, even in the 21st century. The authors point out that “[t]he landscape of KwaZulu-Natal, in this the first decade of the twenty-first century, still bears the signs of indenture” as seen in the “acres of land bristling with sugar cane and carrying the names of enclaves that signal the sway of British colonisers” (2007:7).

sometimes reminisce about earlier times, but always about people they knew on the estate: friends and family members who lived and worked under the same conditions. This reminiscing gives them a sense of continuity and therefore also a sense of meaning.

By confining the spatial setting to the inner world of a sugar estate, and then narrowing the focus further still to a hotel and bar-room, the narrator creates an enclosed, almost claustrophobic atmosphere. Unlike the earlier *Song of the Atman*, with its focus on the experiences of travelling and migration along the length of South Africa's Indian Ocean coastline, in *The Lahnee's Pleasure* attention is focussed inwards, on occurrences on the estate.

Temporally, the Prologue and Epilogue, both set in the 2000s, frame the main narrative, which is set in the 1960s. These contrasting time periods highlight the radical change in circumstances between 'then' and 'now' – between the 'old' and the 'new' South Africa – so that, although this is not a story of migration from one place to another, it is nonetheless a story of displacement/dislocation. Moving between these two time periods, the narrator in effect moves between two differing places; although the setting is the same geographically, the place has so vastly changed over time (due to political and social shifts) that it seems as if it has become another place. The narrator returns, imaginatively, to the earlier version of the estate and hotel, because there he feels a sense of belonging.

Between 'then' and 'now', two important events in particular influence the narrator's story. The first event is South Africa's first democratic election in 1994. The second event, also occurring in 1994, has a more local significance: it was the year that the Mt Edgecombe sugar mill closed down and the sugar estate sold the land to private developers. Thus, between 'then' and 'now', the erstwhile environment of the sugar estate has disappeared and the community made up of sugar estate and mill workers has dispersed. The novel is thus a literary memorial to that unique world as something worth remembering. A memorial, of course, is a nostalgic attempt to record aspects of the past that can be both an "official guard of memory and a messenger from the underworld of the forgotten" (Boym 2001:88). In this novel, Govender recreates and memorialises a self-contained world by focusing on a few (inward-looking) characters who are situated within the exclusive confines of a farming estate.

In this regard, the novel bears a resemblance to Van Heerden's 'plaasroman', *Ancestral Voices*. The 'plaasroman', as we have seen, addresses the yearnings of a people for a place, a time, a lifestyle, an identity. It is a nostalgic genre concerned with the relationship between people and places and the trauma brought about by the change of that relationship. Although *The Lahnee's Pleasure* is set on a very different type of 'farm' to that in Van Heerden's novel, it similarly harks back to an earlier time of supposed simplicity and purity.

The novel also signals features of "plantation literature" (Stiebel, 2016:8), another literary genre that deals with life in an agricultural and closed-off environment, set as it is on a sugar farm or plantation. However, *The Lahnee's Pleasure* differs from typical plantation literature in its temporal and spatial

contexts. Firstly, it differs because it does not deal directly with indenture, but is set in a time after the abolition of the indenture system. Secondly, its spatial focus is unusual for plantation literature, because most of the action occurs in a shabby working-man's bar rather than in natural surroundings. According to Stiebel, South African plantation literature is rarely nostalgic, except when "nostalgia is attached to the natural beauty of the countryside, separated from the racial tensions that play upon its surface" (2016:8). In this novel, on the other hand, there are only glimpses of the natural surroundings, as in the opening scene where two women gossip across their vine-covered garden fence while observing the hotel from a distance and commenting on the men coming and going through its doors.¹⁶¹ This juxtapositioning of 'inside' and 'outside' serves to remind the reader that, while events unfold inside the bar, day-to-day life continues outside of the hotel and, by extension, beyond the perimeter of the sugar estate.

Why does the novel retreat to the confined setting of a sugar estate? What is the allure of this space? I suggest that a deep discontent with the present circumstances of South African life in the 2000s – as expressed in the Prologue – triggers the return to the sugar estate in the 1960s. The emphatically distinguished 'NEW SOUTH AFRICA' and 'OLD SOUTH AFRICA' in the Prologue express reproach for the current state of affairs. As we know, nostalgia for the past is normally prompted by the circumstances of the present; as Dlamini puts it, "for all its fixation with the past, [nostalgia] is essentially about the present" (2010:16). Prompted by current discontent, then, this novel returns to the past space – to a particular place in the past – in an attempt to find a sense of meaning in and for the present. The novel retreats to the specific setting of a sugar estate in the 1960s searching for a sense of familiarity and predictability while also memorialising people and places long gone.

What made this 'world' unique was the meeting of two (immigrant) cultures in an environment of dislocation and displacement. In examining the cultural influences at the sugar estate, it becomes apparent that, although each culture has manifested itself differently (because each has experienced the environment under different circumstances), the two cultures are ultimately inextricably blended together. Looking more particularly at the spatial setting, I consider next how British cultural influences are represented (in Govender's depiction of Mt Edgecombe) in solidly tangible manifestations (e.g. houses, buildings), whereas Indian culture infuses estate life through more gentle manifestations, such as traditional food and music. I also explore how the divisive barriers in the novel's spatial setting are covertly set aside in one way or another: characters of different backgrounds

¹⁶¹ Stiebel differentiates between South African plantation literature "which has as its spatial focus sugar farms or plantations", and plantation literature "as applied to the American South [which is] a nostalgic genre". She continues: "[p]lantation literature linked to sugar farms in South Africa rarely carries the same uncomplicated nostalgia [as plantation literature of the American South] even when written by descendants of white sugar farm owners who were privileged in their ownership" (2016:8).

Govender's novel could perhaps be better described as a "sugar-coated story" (2016:7) or a "sugar story" (2016:10), to use another of Stiebel's terms for "works written by South African Indian writers" with links to the history of indenture and to sugar estates.

share love and friendship, they enjoy food, music, and dancing together; they also reminisce and help each other solve life problems. At these various intersections, and in the contact zones where discrete cultures meet, the social, legal, and political barriers that are meant to keep them separated are refuted. It is to the hopefulness and sense of possibility of this time and place that the novel returns.

British and Indian Culture: Influence and Convergence

The setting on a sugar estate in Natal introduces British and Indian cultural influences in that the sugar industry in South Africa, historically, was predominantly a British enterprise with a work force comprised of Indian immigrant (indentured) labourers.¹⁶² Although, by the 1960s, Natal had become part of the Afrikaner Republic, it still hankered after its old status as a British colony, especially in its emotional affiliation. On the sugar-farming estates, the legacies of imperialism and the indenture system, together with the inequalities of the subsequent apartheid system, had ensured that the economic, social, and political power dynamics still favoured the welfare of British immigrants over the welfare of Indian immigrants. Indeed – to express it in postcolonial terminology – the “binary logic of imperialism [which establishes a] relation of dominance” (Ashcroft et al. 2007:19) was maintained. In this novel, the ‘relation of dominance’ on a sugar estate is revisited from the perspective of the postcolonial, post-apartheid present, so that the binaries of ‘centre’ (British/coloniser) and ‘margin’ (Indian/colonised) can be exposed and duly dismantled. Indian culture is shown, at this site, eventually to be as influential and effective as British culture.

The influence of British culture is apparent in examples of architecture and decorating styles, speech, dress, and the general demeanour of English characters. British culture is shown to be powerfully influential in Africa: sometimes ridiculed, often emulated, but generally and complacently, accepted as the norm. British influences are evident, for example, in the architectural styles seen on the estate village, the “somnolent little village” (1). The houses the company provides for its workers are quaint replicas of English village cottages with white stucco, “green doors and green window frames, and gardens of roses, snapdragons, [and] dahlias” (63). Overlooking the village is the focal point of the novel, the White House Hotel, which, as an intimidating edifice, is a primary example of overbearing British influence. In copying an English (Tudor) style of building in Africa, the architect indicates nostalgia for a British homeland; the building is also a symbolic statement of power, an example of the “vestiges of British imperialism” (Desai and Vahed 2007:7).

¹⁶² “The British annexed Natal as a British colony in 1843, bringing with them a capitalist system that demanded capital and labour” (Betty Govinden 2008:70). In South Africa, as in other British colonies, a labour force was required, a labour problem that the colonisers solved by moving subjects from one colony to another. As Betty Govinden points out, “Wherever white British migrants settled they required labour, and colonised subjects in colonies such as India [...] became the logical transportable ‘commodity’” (2008:69). Thus, indentured labourers “were imported by the Natal colonial government between 1860 and 1922 to work on sugar plantations” (Jacobs 2016:100).

Even the hotel's interior has a pronounced English character, which makes an impression on the Stranger when he arrives for the first time. His reaction to the kitsch décor is: “[n]ice little place you have here, reminds me of an English country pub, er, except for the enamel tables – somehow same kind of atmosphere’ ” (98). He seems compelled to let the barman know that he has been to England himself – he seeks to impress Sunny – implying that he is familiar with ‘Englishness’, that this familiarity, furthermore, has some elevating merit. Although, later on, the Stranger is disdainful of Sunny and Mothie deferring to Richard/the Lahnee (an Englishman), this incident shows that he himself is not unaffected by the ‘allure’ of Britishness, the “bewildering diplomacy” to which the narrator alludes in his Prologue (97).¹⁶³ The Stranger's behaviour is evidence of how the ambivalent nature of social belonging is “manifest[ed] in mimicry, cultural schizophrenia, or various kinds of obsession with identity” (Ashcroft et al. 2007:19).

The novel's representation of British culture is not restricted to architecture; it also extends to the dress, speech, and demeanour of a certain ‘type’ of British expatriate, who is depicted explicitly and one-dimensionally as a caricature. For example, when Sunny (the barman) buys a used car (coincidentally, a British car model, a Morris Minor), the seller he encounters is a stereotypical Englishman, a “stern old man with the same bearing as [Richard/the Lahnee]” (52), who speaks with the same “polished hater” (52) as Sunny's boss. Richard/the Lahnee speaks in an “upper-class English accent” that matches his appearance: he wears a tweed coat and scarf and “sports a handlebar moustache” (15).

These external markers are worn/adopted as an attempt to restore a brand of ‘Britishness’ that has become unmoored from its origins; Richard/the Lahnee, living in Natal, is part of an immigrant community that clings to its British culture, ‘more English than the English’. Characters like Richard/the Lahnee resort to styles of language, dress, and behaviour that are nostalgic in a regressive rather than progressive way, because they are afraid of losing their sense of identity and also their sense of superiority. The narrator, on the other hand, recalls such ‘types’ as caricatures because in that guise they are controllable and predictable.

In spite of overbearing displays of British cultural power, certain incidents also reveal a clumsy insecurity and a sense of unbelonging. This discordance is most acute in Richard/the Lahnee's affected speech and the inappropriateness of his tweed jackets for an African climate. It is also apparent in the insistent but discordant style of architecture of the White House Hotel, where the “only concession to the harassed victims of the heat and humidity [is] a wide shady verandah” (15). The Tudor-style hotel

¹⁶³ Muthal Naidoo observes how British culture sometimes has a major (negative) effect on the South African Indian community: “Many ‘Indians’ have tried to find identities which reach beyond the ‘Indian’ community. Because Western culture has historically dominated education and leisure in South African cities, [...] ‘Indians’ have sought to emulate white norms, values, and customs at the expense of their inherited culture. Others have acknowledged the strong influence of the West on their socialization but do not deny their origins” (1997:30).

is described as “plonked on the highest of Mount Edgecombe’s rolling hills of sugar cane” (1, 15): “plonked” emphasising its incongruity with its surroundings. Although it “stand[s] majestically” on its hilltop site, it also has to vie for attention with “huge trees [and] banana and sisal shrubs in a break in the cane fields that dominate either side of the road” (124).¹⁶⁴ Although the ostentatious display of British culture is visibly apparent, British culture is shown to be somewhat precarious as it strives to insinuate itself in the African surrounds. British cultural practices coexist, however, with vibrant Indian cultural influences on the sugar estate. As I have said, many of the markers of British cultural influence are edifices and tangible material items (clothing, cars, and household fittings), while the Indian influences are manifested in less tangible, but equally potent forms such as food, dress, language, and tradition.

Accordingly, two Indian housewives are shown gossiping across a garden fence at the beginning of Chapter One. The scene provides an example of Indian culture asserting itself in an African setting despite a looming British imperial presence. The two women each live in a “council house provided by the [...] Sugar Company at a ‘nominal rent’ ” (10). These modest houses are neat constructions painted white and trimmed in green, with “gardens of roses, snapdragons, and dahlias” (63). Each kitchen sports a ‘welcome Dover’ cast-iron stove – a feature the narrator sarcastically describes as “another signal of British imperialism’s civilizing influence” (10). Although the environment is reminiscent of a picturesque English village, however, a closer look belies that impression because (as in *Song of the Atman*) Indian culture, too, is shown to permeate all levels of this novel, manifesting itself in various forms.

The opening scene provides evidence of the various manifestations of Indian culture. As the two women chat at their fence, pots of traditional aromatic Indian food are simmering on their English ‘Dover’ stoves. One woman prepares “hot vegetable curries and steaming manja rice touched with a stick of cinnamon, not forgetting the dhal sprinkled with fresh, fresh dhanya plucked from [her] lush vegetable garden” (10), while the other woman prepares “chicken and aloo” (11). Their food choices and preparations, moreover, are closely aligned with their spiritual practices, taking Indian Hindu traditions into consideration. Each woman has a chosen “day of abstinence” (10) for her family, when only vegetarian meals are prepared. While one of the women observes the “day of Lord Shiva” (10) on a Monday, the other observes “the day of Vishnu” (11) on a Tuesday. Because food is such a powerfully evocative aspect of cultural tradition, a nostalgic atmosphere is created – by the frequent mention throughout the novel – of specific Indian foods.¹⁶⁵ In addition to observing certain dietary restrictions on religious holidays, the characters in the book routinely practise other Indian traditions

¹⁶⁴ Ironically, many of the plants mentioned are not indigenous to Africa, either, but foreign or ‘exotic’ plants introduced to the landscape by various newcomers.

¹⁶⁵ A few examples of the Indian foods mentioned are the aromatic broth “russum” (45), kudle, chunnu, masala-fried fish, and chilli-bites (46) and, as served for celebrations, chicken biryani followed by “[p]ayasau – an ambrosiac sweet made of sago and diced almonds and coconut” (48).

and rituals such as “break[ing] a coconut or rub[bing] ash on one’s forehead” (55). The women, furthermore, “strictly adhere” to dress codes, wearing head coverings (10) and/or the “koongum, the red dot that [married] Hindu women wear” (9).

The various evocative sights, smells, and flavours I have mentioned are accompanied by a chorus of Indian voices, the sounds of Indian languages, and a unique form of English that is influenced by Indian phrases and syntax. Language use in the novel is reminiscent of the various characters’ origins, so that it is sometimes inflected by Tamil traditions, sometimes by Hindi (9), while at other times “old Urdu saying[s]” are used to emphasise a point (119). All of these Indian languages influence the unique form of English spoken by the Indian characters in the book: a South African Indian patois. Betty Govinden refers to a “working-class South African Indian accent [which is] an English influenced by Tamil syntactical structure” (2009:289, 292).¹⁶⁶ And of course there is also the Indian music and dancing that the men in the bar enjoy (as mentioned in the previous section).

‘Indianness’, the atmosphere of traditional Indian life, is therefore represented as a profound and pervasive cultural force throughout the novel – as an indomitable spirit that cannot be extinguished. Although British imperial culture looms large, it is quietly suffused by Indian culture.

*

My exploration in this sub-section of the novel’s physical setting shows how each of the two supposedly discrete cultural influences has made its mark at this site. The novel features two immigrant communities who nostalgically adhered to the cultural practices of their home countries, thereby embedding their cultures in the space (the time and place) that is the novel’s setting. Here, each of the immigrant communities expressed a ‘restoratively’ nostalgic desire to memorialise their original homes. It becomes increasingly apparent, though, that the two cultures cannot remain totally separate entities, neither can they remain detached from, or unaffected by, the African setting. Although I have not discussed African cultural influences at this site (the focus being primarily on British and Indian cultural interaction), the effects of the site itself – an African place – are highlighted through comments on the plant life and the climate.

It is clear, therefore, that people affect this space and that it, in turn, has an effect on its human inhabitants. As Wegner contends, space is shaped by “social processes and human interventions, and

¹⁶⁶ I suggest that Betty Govinden’s comments on language use in *Song of the Atman* also apply to *The Lahnee’s Pleasure*: “Himself a second-generation descendent of indentured Indians, Ronnie Govender – in an English influenced by Tamil syntactical structure – evokes the atmosphere of the ‘coolie’ era, and shows how indentured life in South Africa signalled a continuing struggle for ‘Indian’ recognition and identity” (2009:292). She refers also to the “working-class South African Indian accent” (2009:289) that Ronnie Govender captured in his play, *The Lahnee’s Pleasure*, and which – as I note here – has been transferred to the novel.

[is also] a force that, in turn, influences, directs, and delimits” (2002:181) human action. The African setting is thus layered with multiple cultural influences that continue, over time, to affect its inhabitants and evoke strong emotional attachments. As per Viljoen, Lewis, and van der Merwe, “the relationship between space and identity [is] a symbiotic relationship, a mutual dependency creating meaningfulness” (2004:12).

The next issue to consider is how the cultural influences intersect in nostalgic memory. But, before looking at the synergy of cultures in the novel, I examine how the sugar estate of the 1960s is imagined as a retreat from current discontent, and how previously ignored aspects of that environment are reconsidered, viewed afresh, and foregrounded with hindsight.

Nostalgia for the Sugar Estate: A Bitter-Sweet Retreat

The narrator frequently uses the phrase “everyone knew their place” (2, 6, 8, 12, 16) to stress the point that in ‘the old South Africa’, the population was segregated. The notion of ‘knowing one’s place’ refers to one’s given position in society, but it also extends, quite literally, to physical places: knowing where one is allowed or denied access. In the context of the novel (apartheid-era South Africa), an individual’s ‘place’ is determined and enforced by legal and political systems, and perpetuated by class considerations modelled informally on hierarchical European social systems.¹⁶⁷ Space is mapped, allocated, and controlled by various tangible and intangible forces/powers.

Various instances of control over places/spaces become apparent as the story unfolds, yet the narrator’s attitude towards the various constraints is ambivalent: his sardonic tone indicates his disdain for the restrictions and injustices of that time and place but, paradoxically, the narrator also hints at a discordant longing for the order and familiarity he remembers or imagines they afforded. The novel tracks the narrator’s conflicted emotional development regarding belonging and the ownership of certain places. The charting of his psychological journey begins in the Prologue (which is set in the narrative present) with his expressions of disappointment. It then moves through his account of events in the past (the 1960s in the main narrative), eventually to return to the present in the Epilogue, after having undergone a change in perspective and mood. As the reader follows these narrative steps, the ambiguous sense of longing for this divided place becomes evident as a form of nostalgia with multiple functions. I suggest that nostalgia serves three important functions:

- i. as a retreat, an escape from the disappointments of the present;
- ii. as a reconsideration of places that were previously ignored;
- iii. as a “contact zone” (Ashcroft et al. 2007:48) between cultures, which hints at the unfulfilled potential of cultural integration, of ‘what might have been’.

¹⁶⁷ With regard to class and the post/colony, Ashcroft et al. contend that “it is clear that in many ways the idea of a binarism between a proletarian and an owning class was a model for the centre’s perception and treatment of the margin, and a model for the way in which imperial authority exercised its power within the colonies” (2007:34).

I examine each of these functions more closely below, beginning with the notion of the sugar estate as a nostalgic retreat.

i. Nostalgia as retreat: I mentioned earlier that there are similarities between this novel and Van Heerden's novel, *Ancestral Voices*. Both *Ancestral Voices* and *The Lahnee's Pleasure* focus on closed-off spaces in which people are inward-looking. Spaces (of the past) that are remembered or imagined as 'cocoon' can seem appealingly safe and comforting, because they are familiar and unchanging when compared with the unpredictable conditions in the novel's present (2000's South Africa). As John Su comments, "the longing to return to a lost place frequently conceals feelings of fear and anxiety" (2005:3) in/about the present.

In *Ancestral Voices*, the confined space is a farm in the Karoo which is controlled by the patriarch of the Moolman family. The various families on the Moolman farm are familiar with one another and suspicious of outsiders. The situation in *The Lahnee's Pleasure* is similar, because its setting is delimited to a sugar estate where all the characters live and work together and are familiar with each other's life histories. As Mothie says, "Everybody knows me in Mount Edgecombe. I got [a] lot [of] respect" (11). In addition, like the Moolman family on their Karoo farm, the inhabitants of the sugar estate are wary of outsiders.

The 'outsider' in this novel is a character who is treated with such suspicion that he is not even named – referred to simply as 'the Stranger' throughout the novel – including the Epilogue (167), thereby confirming that even though friendship with the narrator has endured for many years, he is never completely accepted. The Stranger's exclusion in the narrator's account illustrates the regressive (rather than progressive) nature of some instances of nostalgia, since, as the narrator remembers it, there is initially no room for this outsider in the community.

A community's tendency to remember places and people in sealed-off or idealised forms may be seen as an indulgence, a static form of nostalgia that leaves no room for development. It is the type of restoratively nostalgic "fantasy" (Hook 2012:232) on which nationalistic visions are founded: a frame of mind that extends the notion that 'knowing one's place' also means protecting 'one's place' against outsiders or newcomers.¹⁶⁸ Such attitudes exemplify one of the "central critiques of nostalgia: its tendency to encourage passivity and xenophobia" (Su 2005:18). In this novel, the narrator does, at times, idealise the sugar estate's exclusive community, especially when reporting on the perspectives of characters whose views are distorted by their narrow subjectivity. In general, utopian versions of past events tend to feature selected images that are frozen in place – framed like mental photographs and used as screen memories or "static snapshots" (Hook 2012:234). That is why, in these nostalgic

¹⁶⁸ In Hook's view, "[r]eference to nostalgia's role as fetish against change throws into perspective the fantasmatic nature of much of nostalgic reminiscence [and adds that this] quality is openly admitted by Boym (2001) in her description of nostalgia as 'a romance with one's own fantasy' " (2012:232).

accounts, there is a certain resistance to the newcomer in the hotel bar. In not naming this outsider, instead consistently referring to him as ‘the Stranger’, the narrator’s image of him does not intrude on the vision of cohesive solidarity imagined as existing amongst the locals in the bar.

Furthermore, so that the narrator can maintain his restoratively nostalgic image, the Stranger is not ‘permitted’ to bring about change; if any change is to occur, it must occur in the Stranger rather than in the other characters. The onus seems to be on the Stranger to conform to local norms, because restorative nostalgia, as Boym would say, only “protects the absolute truth” (2001:xviii) in which there is no room for change or deviation. According to such a mindset, nostalgically remembered spaces can only be desirable to ‘outsiders’. The narrator attempts to endorse the idealised vision of the community when he reports on the Stranger’s curiosity about the sugar estate community and his desire to be included in the group. To give some examples, the Stranger listens to the locals “with great curiosity” (123) and feels “compelled to enquire” about their situation (125). He finds it “hard not to laugh out loud” (127) at Mothie’s jokes and takes “pity on the troubled old man” (127) whom he begins to call “Uncle” (136), which is a term of endearment and respect, and he “sympathise[s]” (160) with Sunny. Later, there is evidence that, instead of influencing the community’s mindset as he had wished to do, the Stranger’s own perspective is altered; he comes to understand that social and political change “would take some time [and that] indeed it was a Long Walk” (168).

There are other contrasting perspectives of the Stranger in which his questions and exasperations challenge the intimacy of the bar, but it is clear that those perspectives must be ignored if this particular nostalgic snapshot is to be maintained. Even so, these are still valuable memories for the reader/critic because – as per Hook’s observation about screen memories being like “snapshots” – their “formal exaggerations and triviality [do] alert us to the fact that something has been excised” (2012:234).

ii. Nostalgia as reconsideration of places previously ignored: Having established that restoratively nostalgic memories of the sugar estate as a closed-off space sometimes provide an imagined retreat from the dissatisfaction of the present, I suggest also that nostalgic memories in the novel foreground spaces that have formerly been ignored. Certain spaces are highlighted that might otherwise have disappeared into oblivion. One example is the White House Hotel, which is memorialised via the unusual perspective of the Indian working-men’s bar.

The bar-room at the hotel is divided into two sections – the European/white section and the Indian section – with the farcical arrangement of one expanse of wooden bar-counter stretched between the two bars being serviced by just one barman. Sunny must dash between the two sections of the bar, serving customers on both sides of the partition, and Richard/the Lahnee, the manager, also moves between the two sides of the bar. The narrator explains it as follows:

In the days when there was Law and Order [...] the law had it that the drinking area for the melanin-undercut be separated from the area for the melanin-improved. The size of the clientele at the [White House Hotel] was such that, while it was quite sufficient for a neat enough return, it did not make financial sense to have to employ two full-time barmen in two separate bars. [...] So a dry-wall partition was erected separating one bar from another. A door was strategically placed in the partition to enable the barman on duty to serve Both Sides during his shift. (96)

Because the narrator (a third person who does not identify himself) focalises from the perspective of an Indian person, the reader glimpses only one side of the bar. There is no description or curiosity about the other side, because the novel's focus is entirely on the Indian men's bar, where Sunny, Mothie, the Stranger, and Richard/the Lahnee congregate. In this scene, the traditional centre-margin binary has been reversed: the Indian side of the bar, which in a colonial hierarchy would be at the margin, is now, from a postcolonial perspective of the 2000s, reconsidered as the centre. Thus, the other side of the bar becomes a site of the (postcolonial) 'other'.¹⁶⁹

The focus is on the Indian working-men's bar as a place of cosy camaraderie, a place where these men can relax and 'be themselves'. It is their own space, where they speak a locally-inflected language, sing popular songs, talk about the issues of the day, and reminisce about a shared past. It is a place where they experience empathy and understanding. Although, in reality, these men have been relegated to a segregated space, this space is remembered as a place of belonging.¹⁷⁰ It is an intimate space that even attracts outsiders like the Stranger because here, he feels, paradoxically at home. The Stranger's admiration and his unwillingness to leave reinforce the notion that this is a desirable place: "he had spent more time than he had intended at the [hotel]" (123), so that having to deliver a parcel, "he hurried through his delivery" and returned to the bar (143). Although Richard/the Lahnee hovers in the bar ostensibly in his capacity as manager, his lingering presence suggests his desire also to experience the warm, convivial atmosphere that entices him to the Indian group.

Why is it important – to the author and/or the narrator – that this particular space be remembered? It is important because characters who would previously have been ignored in fiction-writing, now occupy centre position and become visible in a familiar setting.¹⁷¹ The past is thus retold, or "redescribed" (Su 2005:148), in a meaningful way, which is a process that nostalgic literature can fulfil. As Su suggests:

¹⁶⁹ The traditional centre-margin binary would have it that, "[t]he colonised subject is characterised as 'other' [...] as a means of establishing the binary separation of the coloniser and colonised and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view" (Ashcroft et al. 2007:155).

¹⁷⁰ This bar as a meeting place is reminiscent of the atmosphere of places where the enslaved characters in Rayda Jacobs's *The Slave Book* would meet (e.g. under the apricot tree, where they would eat together, and under the mulberry tree, where they would wash at the water barrel). These are spaces where a sense of belonging and acceptance is felt.

¹⁷¹ "Nostalgic narratives typically feature the self as central character and revolve around interactions with important others" (Wildschut 2006:988).

[i]f literary narratives can undo traumatic history to some degree by redescribing the past in ways that enable individuals to learn from it and not repeat past mistakes, nostalgia may contribute to this process. (2005:149)

In imaginatively revisiting the working-men's bar at the White House Hotel, Govender has used nostalgia to 'fix' the past.¹⁷² The remembered hotel has been secured in his novel as a memory worth preserving, and the hotel's image has been renewed and reframed so that it is no longer viewed from only one (British) perspective.

iii. Nostalgia as a contact zone between cultures: I also suggest that nostalgic musings about the sugar estate (particularly its hotel and bar as a gathering place) are a mournful reminder that certain possible visions/hopes for the future that were imagined in the 1960s did not materialise, as seen from the perspective of the novel's present in the 2000s.

The novel begins with a Prologue (from a post-apartheid perspective), in which the narrator sardonically exclaims that "you might be forgiven if you thought you were anywhere else but in darkest Africa" (3). This, I suggest, is the crux of the matter in this novel: a pervasive sense of despair at the lack of national and cultural coherence in contemporary South Africa.

As I suggested earlier, the novel returns to this earlier time and place (the 1960s), because of a nostalgic longing for a desire once again to experience a sense of possibility, a feeling of hopefulness for a better future. A return to the sugar estate and hotel – which represent a South African "contact zone" (Ashcroft et al. 2007:48) – is thus a return to a place that hints at the possible co/existence of many cultural traditions, practices, and beliefs.¹⁷³ The estate's hotel/bar is a space that features characters of differing cultural backgrounds and, as they clash and compromise, there is a glimpse of optimism that these differing cultures may come to "contribut[e] to a new and complex cultural formation" (Ashcroft et al. 2007:210).¹⁷⁴ Thus, nostalgia for a period of life that coincided with the apartheid era seems paradoxical, but as Dlamini puts it, "[t]here is a way to be nostalgic about the past without forgetting that the struggle against apartheid was just" (2010:16-17).

To conclude, I suggest that Govender's nostalgic novel – though it tells a seemingly simple tale – has responded to deep discontent in the present and, by reflecting on events in times and places that are now accesible only via the imagination, has gone some way to providing a sense of meaning to paradoxical longings for the past.

¹⁷² Roberta Rubenstein's term here means that "[t]o 'fix' something is to *secure* it more firmly in the imagination and also to correct – as in *revise* or *repair* – it" (2001:6).

¹⁷³ The term 'contact zone' is "an extremely useful and flexible term for the many complex engagements which characterise the postcolonial space and its encounters. [Some] seek to make the contact zone a space of engagement where the inequalities of the relations between parties engaged can be confronted if not resolved" (Ashcroft et al. 2007:49).

¹⁷⁴ 'Syncretism' describes "the synthetic cultural productions that result from the coming together of diasporic cultures" (Buchanan 2010:463), while the term 'synergy', in postcolonial theory, "emphasises the positive and energetic aspects of the process of transculturation" (Ashcroft et al. 2007:210).

Chapter 7 – Comparative Perspectives & Concluding Remarks

I set out to explore the concept and application of nostalgia in a selection of contemporary South African novels. States of nostalgia are usually associated with pleasant forms of escapism. In the novels that I have selected, however, nostalgia has ‘reflective’ value and can be utilised to find meaning in life, in the past, the present, and in considerations for the future. My research shows that nostalgia may involve a resurrection of trauma and a profound longing for something lost; that nostalgia may be understood in the way that Hook describes the original Greek notion of ‘nostalgia’, where emphasis is placed on the pain and persistence of longing (2012:238).

In the selected novels by Van Heerden, Jacobs, Serote, and Govender, nostalgia takes the form of a complex and evocative engagement with the past while serving to challenge present dissatisfactions and emotional wounds. I show that, in its imaginative relationship with the past, nostalgic memory can be a gentle aid to grieving, providing reassurance that all has not been obliterated, that some fragments of past lives always remain and can, in part, be reclaimed. Sometimes, all that remains is the longing, but as Walder puts it, “that in itself has a value” (2012:81).

Moreover, nostalgia is not a matter of binary oppositions. It is not the case that nostalgia is entirely good in some forms while in others wholly bad. Nor should ‘restorative’ and ‘reflective’ nostalgia – as categorised by Boym – be regarded as mutually exclusive states of mind or emotion. More often than not, nostalgia involves an entangled relationship between images of what is, what was, and what could be – a dynamic and highly changeable state of experience.

Accordingly, my aim has been to consider whether nostalgia in literature (at least in the novels that I have explored) could be a source of remembrances that are valid for conveying, and comparing, culturally specific images of past experiences. More specifically, my focus has been on whether nostalgic memory can encourage a heterogeneous array of people to assert their ‘South African’ senses of identity, and on how nostalgia might variously manifest itself in different racial and cultural circumstances. Hence, the selection of novels by African, Afrikaner, Indian, and so-called Coloured writers, both male and female, whose writings present Christian, Muslim, and Hindu perspectives, as well as perspectives that incorporate traditional African spiritualities.

Comparative Perspectives

Each of these writers has a publication history that extends over several decades, including the last ten years (in my focus, the 2000s and 2010s). Each has distinctive knowledge, understanding, and experience of South Africa’s recent history and socio-political upheavals, and an awareness of present-day discontents. Each has witnessed profound change, and is acutely aware that South Africa

is now a 'different' place to what it was in the past. As authors, they remember – and make imaginary comparisons with – an earlier time.

This heterogeneous group of authors offered me eight diversified novels across which – taken as a group – the temporal reach of narrative plot stretches from contemporary times all the way back to an African antiquity. Although none of the novels predicts an imaginary or imagined future, each has an ending that is ready to face the future. Additionally, the novels have a geographical range covering the country from Johannesburg in the North, to Cape Town in the South, and beyond (the novelists take their characters to locations in Europe, South America, and North America, and mention many other global locations).

The characters in these novels hail from various ancestral origins (reflecting also the cultural origins of the authors themselves): there are forebears who came to the country from across the oceans – as colonising immigrants, as breakaway 'pioneers' (in the case of Van Heerden and Jacobs), as enslaved or indentured labourers (in the case of Jacobs and Govender) – while other historical lines lead back to indigenous peoples, to nomadic clans, to early pastoral or agrarian populations (as in Jacobs and Serote).

Despite the various backgrounds and perspectives of the four authors and the multitude of characters they have created, the common and constant elements of these books are the search for a lost or elusive sense of identity and belonging. No matter the cultural heritage of the subjects, no matter whether the gaze is inwards or outwards, whether to the distant or the recent past, all of these writers and these novels are concerned with the postcolonial issues of identity and belonging; they reflect a perennial sense of displacement and dislocation.

Through their various fictional characters, the novelists examine the ambivalence and ambiguity of identity: I am South African/am I South African? In response – and to validate the claim or answer the question – nostalgia is a pivotal element.

I offer here six points of focus according to which my observations in regard to these novels can be summarised:

Observation 1: Nostalgic narratives in South African literature look to various periods of the past.

That nostalgic writers look to the past is obvious, since nostalgia is a form of memory and remembering. But with my more immediate concern being nostalgia in South African literature, I set out to ascertain which historical periods are the principal foci for nostalgic South African writers, and whether there are time periods that stand out as being of particular interest. I investigated whether temporal focus differs from writer to writer and whether it shifts from book to book in the oeuvres of individual writers.

I noted that each wrote, at some stage, about the apartheid era. Van Heerden's *30 Nights*, Jacobs's *Joonie*, Serote's *Revelations* and *Rumours*, Govender's *The Lahnee's Pleasure* and parts of *Song of the Atman* are all set in apartheid times. Some of these novels deal overtly with apartheid: for example, Serote's novels feature characters who are fighters/soldiers in the armed struggle. Others deal more obliquely with the conditions/legacies of the apartheid regime: for example, in *Joonie*, a family struggles to forge a life in a socially and geographically segregated city.

Although there is a preoccupation with the apartheid past, each author's search for 'home' has a wider compass; earlier periods are also explored. Van Heerden, for example, traces the fortunes of an Afrikaner farming family in the early 1900s in *Ancestral Voices*, while in *30 Nights in Amsterdam* he alludes to the Afrikaners' earliest links with European ancestry, as well as to contemporary South Africa. Jacobs, in *The Slave Book*, investigates slavery on a wine farm in the Cape in the late 1800s; while in *Joonie* she narrates – from the vantage point of the 2000s – a story set in the 1970s, in which a young woman grapples with her sense of identity and attempts to make a home in a segregated apartheid society. The two Serote novels were written and published only two years apart and both are narrated in the 2000s, by characters who remember their apartheid struggle years. Additionally, *Revelations* hints at the lives of much earlier ancestors through a scene featuring cave-rock paintings, while in *Rumours* very early beginnings are closely inspected through a re-enactment of ancient healing rituals – heedful of a very distant past connected to a pre-modern African society.

The exploration of a variety of time periods indicates that the search for home and belonging is ongoing and requires considerable scope. The diversity of time periods does not, however, explain the 'nostalgic' allure of each specific time period. I will discuss my observations in that regard after I have discussed how/why present circumstances may initially trigger nostalgia.

Observation 2: Nostalgic narratives are 'triggered' by discontent in the present.

From what vantage point do these narratives nostalgically survey the past, and why?

Most of the selected novels have a narrative present in the 2000s, or within the author's own lifetime, or at least within the realms of living memory/recent history. The common denominator is that the 'present' is a time of discontent. Each novel highlights discontented feelings about (the narrator's) current circumstances. Furthermore, these commonly felt negative emotions spur the narrator's subsequent nostalgic musings, bearing out the observation by Wildschut and colleagues that "nostalgia occurs in response to [a] negative mood" (2006:975).

It is their discontent that prompts narrators to 'return' to the past where they hope to retrieve happiness or to experience again an earlier sense of hope. Of course, we can speculate that, as many of the

narrators' vantage points are 21st century South Africa, this discontent-as-spur may correlate with the authors' own real-time discontents.¹⁷⁵

How is discontent represented in the eight novels? Why are the characters dissatisfied? In Van Heerden's novels, the characters navigate a diminished Afrikaner patriarchy, as is evident in *Ancestral Voices* in the dwindling powers and non-cohesion of the Moolman family in the early 1900s. It is a problem that is even more acute for the De Melker family (*30 Nights in Amsterdam*) who, in the 2000s, are no longer able comfortably to inhabit their Afrikaner identity within the changed socio-political circumstances of a new democratic era.

A similar situation ensues in Serote's novels: in both *Revelations* and *Rumours*, the protagonists must deal with changed roles and circumstances that challenge their conceptions of African identity. They must adjust to life after the Struggle; they must discard their entrenched roles as soldiers/freedom fighters now that they are living in a democracy. To compound their difficulties, these changes in their circumstance are ones that they did not anticipate.

In both of Govender's novels, the protagonists struggle with degradation in their poverty and with a lack of agency. The narrator in *The Lahnee's Pleasure* expresses his acute displeasure in the Prologue: under the new socio-political order, the fact that circumstances have not improved sufficiently is cause for virulent complaint. The tendency for discontent to spur nostalgic memory is apparent also in Jacobs's novels. In *Joonie*, three generations of female characters struggle against/under the patriarchal social conditions that discriminate against women.

While the specific triggers that provoke nostalgia in each novel are unique – the differences hinge on the particular circumstances of each protagonist – there are overall similarities. The triggers for nostalgia in these novels are in each case symptoms of a 'postcolonial malady': an ambivalence about identity and belonging and a yearning for times (however imagined) that could have offered a clearer sense of self and place. (We are reminded of Rushdie's memorable phrase, 'imaginary homelands'.)

My next point considers the particular times and places in which that clearer sense of self and belonging is sought. Once triggered, nostalgia often causes the imagination to contemplate troubled/troubling times.

¹⁷⁵ This may be the case with Van Heerden's *30 Nights in Amsterdam*, Jacobs's *Joonie*, Govender's *The Lahnee's Pleasure*, and Serote's *Revelations* and *Rumours*, which are all narrated from, or framed by, contemporary settings.

Observation 3: Nostalgic narratives paradoxically point to turbulent times.

Nostalgic narratives do not necessarily focus on time periods that were peaceful; very often – and paradoxically so – the focus is on times that were just as turbulent and problematic as the (narrative) present, if not more so.

And even though nostalgia is considered, broadly speaking, to be a “happiness-related emotion” (Sedikides; qtd in Wildschut et al. 2006:989), the periods the authors focus on are inevitably historical periods that are not synonymous with peace or tranquillity.

Most often writers focus on the recent past by recalling apartheid times. Even though seven of these eight novels were published after 1994 – the year of South Africa’s first democratic elections – all eight revert to times before 1994, and all feature at least something of the apartheid years.¹⁷⁶ In addition, the settings include times of slavery (Jacobs) and colonialism (Van Heerden, Govender). So, at this broad historical level, we see that stories are being told (from the vantage point of a democratic era) in a nostalgic tone, even though the narratives are set in repellent and troubling times. This pattern (of telling nostalgic stories set in troubling times) attaches itself, furthermore, to the more intimate level of the individual characters.

Examples from the novels spring to mind: there are warm memories of childhood, even though depictions of cosy family homes belie the actuality of grinding poverty, separation anxiety, and debilitating societal expectations and restrictions (Govender, Jacobs, and Van Heerden); memories of happy, multigenerational family homes cloud the facts of forced cohabitation due to poverty, discriminatory land laws, and forced removals from former homes (Govender, Jacobs, Van Heerden); beautiful memories of friendship and camaraderie obscure the deprivations of living rough and on-the-move as freedom fighters, or even the degradations of slavery (Serote, Van Heerden).

Thus, based on this sample of South African literature, we see that tough times of the present often invoke pleasant memories of earlier times. Triggered by current discontent, any kind of earlier times can be believed to have been better than the present situation. Observing that warm memories often recall problematic, even horrifying times, how is it that pleasant, benign memories arise from such harried times, and why are the memories so persistent and acute? How is this connection to be explained?

Observation 4: Nostalgic memory is inevitably linked to traumatic memory.

South Africa’s historical trauma affects all aspects of contemporary social and political life and is reflected in South African literature. When a trauma occurs (we are talking here of psychic wounding),

¹⁷⁶ In the one exception to this observation, the difference is slight: Van Heerden’s *Ancestral Voices* focusses on the years shortly before apartheid’s institutionalisation.

one of the ways that the psyche can protect itself is by submerging or obscuring the traumatic memory. But although traumatic memory can be ignored or hidden, it cannot be obliterated; it will remain as a lurking presence and it will always attempt to (re)present itself in one way or another until it is acknowledged and dealt with. One of the ways in which trauma will persistently assert itself is through evocative nostalgic memory.

Nostalgia can effect a total 'block-out' or serve as a buffer against overwhelming emotional pain. There is often a double perspective of positive and negative memory. Nostalgic memory can be experienced as a duality: pleasant memory being superimposed on traumatic recollection. The one aspect may, at times, obscure the other, but a close inspection of an instance of nostalgia, or the close reading of a nostalgic text, will expose both aspects (bitter and sweet).

Such a double perspective – as I have suggested in my analysis – is applicable in relation to the term 'South African', insofar as there is no 'single story' of belonging. Rather, as reflected in my selection of novels, there are multiple strands and perspectives, a multiplicity of affective perceptions.

Van Heerden, for example, explores the Afrikaner founding myth, the subsequent decline of Afrikaner power, and the ensuing anguish and bewilderment; Jacobs's nostalgic texts point to the horrors of slavery at the Cape and the unique diaspora that has emerged; Serote's novels highlight African struggles for freedom and agency, together with the traumatic ruptures in the continuity of African culture and spirituality; Govender's writings give readers insight to the traumas and legacies of Indian migration attached to indenture.

These authors have been able to depict their characters' intimate personal experiences within broad historical, political, and cultural contexts. In each novel, individual characters resurrect their own personal nostalgic memories in a context of problematic social relations. In this way, the traumas and atrocities of slavery, indenture, or apartheid subservience are experienced at a very personal level in what (initially) appear to be just benign everyday remembrances.

For Zan and Henk de Melker (in *30 Nights in Amsterdam*), for example, nostalgic longings provoke yearnings for a childhood home: for the soft touch of their grand/mother's hand, the taste of the breakfast porridge, or the creak of a farm gate. However, the small pleasures they remember occurred amidst the chaos of a disintegrating family, when there was at that time a fearful loneliness (the disintegration of the family mirroring, in turn, the wider decline of Afrikaner power). Thus, the vivid images created by the acutely personal memories of Zan and Henk are associated not only with the trauma of losing their family but also, poignantly, with a collective Afrikaner nostalgia for a lost past.

In similar fashion, Sangora Salamah (in Jacobs's *The Slave Book*) fondly remembers the meals and snatches of conversation that he shared with friends under an apricot tree on the farm. Pleasant and sensual memories – as when he remembers the sun and breeze on his skin as he sat under the tree –

underpin his repressed traumatic memories (lack of freedom and choice, the loss of his original family, then later separation from his wife). In this novel, too, the reader encounters personal memories – both bitter and sweet – that speak of a broader, collective memory, thus suggesting the ability to survive the degradation of slavery.

In both of Serote's novels, the struggle veterans' collective traumas are distilled and made tolerable through the nostalgic experiences of individual men: memories of deeply satisfying private moments are evoked by the characters' sensory experiences. Examples include snatches of music, glimpses of rural landscapes on road trips, or the flavours and aromas of favourite meals, even though those memories were linked to the trauma of fighting abhorrent apartheid conditions.

Govender's fictional Chin (in *Song of the Atman*) remembers the tone of his mother's voice in prayer, the flavours of her wonderful meals, the pleasurable physical ache earned from a day's work in their own vegetable garden. Chin's remembered pleasures are as simple as those of Sunny and Mothie (in *The Lahnee's Pleasure*), who sing and tell stories in the bar, prompting each other with 'remember when?' But their beautiful images cannot obliterate the grinding poverty that they knew – worries about keeping a roof over the family's head, putting food on the table – and, in turn, these personal traumas mirror a collective/individual inability to aspire to much else because of that grinding poverty, perpetuated first by the indenture system and later by the apartheid regime.

All of these examples show that the individual characters' nostalgias (their happy memories) are linked to their personal traumas and, importantly, that their wounds mirror those of greater social and political traumas. And, because the traumas are recalled through individual sensory and sensual nostalgic evocations – through universally recognised pleasures and pains – the reader is able to link societal pain to the ache of individual lives.

However, the knowledge that nostalgia is linked to trauma does not simplify the relationship between these two emotions. Nostalgia may flag the presence of traumatic memory but – depending on the forms it takes – it grants more, or less, access to the associated traumatic memory. This leads to my next observation regarding the forms of nostalgia in South African literature.

Observation 5: Nostalgia manifests itself in various complex forms (idealising versus critical).

Nostalgia in South African literature is complex: in my selection of novels, it manifests itself in both 'restorative' and 'reflective' forms. Sometimes nostalgia is conducive to deep and fresh critical understanding (reflective nostalgia); sometimes, it obscures truth and reality (restorative nostalgia).

Because nostalgia is a complicated concept, and because it manifests itself in such various forms it can be – at times – a confusing/contentious form of memory. As a consequence, its utilisation and value

can be under-appreciated. It is perhaps for this reason that Lewis Nkosi, for one, said that there is no evidence of nostalgia in South African literature, and that it is seldom useful.¹⁷⁷

I show, on the contrary, that in various forms nostalgia does indeed manifest itself in South African literature. Boym's typologies of 'restorative' and 'reflective' nostalgia play a crucial role in my analysis. What I find is that there is no 'either/or' binary opposition between restorative and reflective forms of nostalgia, and that the boundaries between the two concepts are often blurred. Nostalgia is thus a malleable and adaptable literary concept and tool, apt for articulating vast emotional spaces and expressing entangled emotions such as those of the 'South African condition'.

My finding is that the novels I have analysed utilise a reflective form of nostalgia: a return to the past while taking into critical account the knowledge of hindsight. None of the examples is static or purely restorative in its approach to the past. This does not mean, however, that the authors and/or their characters are immune from – occasionally – reverting to a restoratively nostalgic view that seems to present an idealistic past. In Van Heerden's novels, for example, some of the characters still dream of 'the farm' as a utopia (as it would be presented in the traditional *plaasroman* genre). Idealistically harmonious communities and neighbourhoods are also fondly remembered in both Jacobs's and Govender's novels, while in Serote's novels we encounter an all-encompassing camaraderie as an idealised condition.

Juxtaposition of the 'utopian' and the 'realistic' is evident in each author's work, with many instances of restorative and reflective nostalgias overlapping. Admittedly, examples of characters whose nostalgia is purely restorative can be cited.¹⁷⁸ But even static/regressive memories can be 'placed' in conjunction with other characters' perspectives. In most cases, if there is an initially idealised perception of the past, it generally develops into a more complex and critical/reflective image along the way, which usually occurs after a catalytic moment or turning point.

It is through such understandings of nostalgia's various forms and mutations that its literary function in a narrative becomes clearer, a point to be elaborated upon.

Observation 6: Nostalgia is a helpful literary tool.

Boym's 'typologies' of nostalgia offer a useful distinction, provided the distinction is not oversimplified. Although her two classifications of 'restorative' and 'reflective' nostalgia enable

¹⁷⁷ Lewis Nkosi commented that "[w]hat is so striking, then, about modern writing in South Africa is the relative, at times astonishing, absence of nostalgia" (2005:320) and that, "the past in South Africa is remembered mainly as a bad nightmare" (2005:322).

¹⁷⁸ Laverne in *Joonie* holds a static view of her youth, of her family, and of her former community, and it is a vision she refuses to relinquish (purely because she cannot cope without that reassuring fantasy); similarly, the hereditary line of the 'Abel Moolmans' (*Ancestral Voices*), who never let go of their fixed ideas, share the same dogged view that is reflected in Granny/MaOliver's characterisation (*30 Nights in Amsterdam*); Serote's Mandla and Govender's Guru also function by holding to a static version of how things should be.

differentiation, neither – as I have noted – should be considered as wholly negative or positive. Understanding that all forms of nostalgia are complex and nuanced allows nostalgia’s potential to be unlocked.

Using nostalgia as a critical tool requires that it first be ‘diagnosed’: is the nostalgic memory ‘restorative’ (Boym), ‘static’ (Medalie), ‘regressive’ (Hook)? or is it ‘reflective’ (Boym), ‘evolved/contemplative’ (Medalie), ‘progressive’ (Hook)?

Restorative nostalgia in its focus on an idealised past can be a negative force – dangerous even, as Su (2005) and Boym (2001)¹⁷⁹ both caution – but it can also have positive aspects when it offers valuable insight into the subject’s state of mind. For example, understanding a character’s need for a static or regressive perspective means accepting (or gaining greater insight into) the fact that there may be a repressed trauma attached to the form of nostalgia. This is the case with Laverne in *Joonie*; the reader understands that she has managed to function in society largely because nostalgia has psychologically protected her from emotional pain. There are other cases, though, where restoratively nostalgic memory leads to a character becoming ‘unstuck’. This happens when nostalgic memories persistently, but gently, usher the memory towards the associated repressed traumatic memory that needs to be acknowledged. With nostalgic memory, pleasant recollections lure the mind towards revelations of an underlying trauma, but at the same time also guide the psyche towards a more holistic ‘truth’ – towards validation, acceptance, and healing. This is the case with characters such as Otsile (*Revelations*), Keke (*Rumours*), and Sangora (*The Slave Book*). As traumatic memories are gradually readmitted into full consciousness, the characters’ nostalgia becomes more reflective, less restorative.

Whether restorative or reflective, though, nostalgia is helpful for the observer or critic because witnessing another’s nostalgic reminiscences or practices gives insight into, and understanding of, their suffering or need of protection and opens possibilities for empathy and patience. In relation to the diagnostic value of nostalgia, Hook’s contention bears repetition: that “[i]t is what we do with [an] instance of nostalgia that counts” (2012:233).

An understanding of nostalgia – whether it manifests in its ‘restorative’ form or in its ‘reflective’ variety – deepens our understanding of human experience, and is valuable, I suggest, in bridging divides between people, particularly in a divisive society like South Africa. We begin to appreciate commonalities in the human desire for a sense of belonging: a step forward that applies beyond the novels I have examined here, and should be a focus of interest in critical surveys of South African literature.

¹⁷⁹ Boym goes so far as to say that, “[un]reflected nostalgia breeds monsters” (2001:xvi).

Concluding Remarks

My findings and concluding remarks are based on a broad cross-section of South African novels: remarks which – I am confident – will extend to a wider array of literature in South Africa. I offer a few suggestions, therefore, drawn from my initial research investigations that have not been included here and where further consideration could be fruitful. Andre Brink and Michiel Heyns, for example (much like Etienne van Heerden), both write about the descendants of early Dutch/Afrikaner settlers. Brink, furthermore, lends an additional voice to the early, almost-forgotten slave community that Rayda Jacobs also foregrounds. Zoë Wicomb also shares commonalities with Rayda Jacobs in her writings from abroad about the so-called ‘Coloured’ experience. Anne Landsman writes about the pain of diasporic Jewish-South Africans who harbour persistent nostalgic memories about childhood in South Africa. Praba Moodley’s plantation narratives (her ‘sugar narratives’) detail life on Natal estates in the early 1900s. Craig Higginson’s novels, also set in KwaZulu-Natal, project nostalgic images from the perspective of British-South African and African characters. There are also recently published books by two Black South African writers, Niq Mhlongo and Mohale Mashigo, that nostalgically and skilfully deal with contemporary (and earlier) township life.¹⁸⁰

Engaging with a broad reach and range of nostalgic literature in South Africa is important because it is in the mosaic of splintered images and multiple perspectives that a common desire for belonging can be understood. The mosaic effect will grow increasingly richer – more profound and more unifying – as more and more fragments coalesce.

*

My research indicates that nostalgia has literary and social value. Not only is nostalgia an endemic element in South African literature, but its literary manifestation extends across a broad spectrum of cultures, sharing more similarities than differences and opening pathways for deeper cross-cultural and inter-cultural understanding.

Comparing nostalgia in my selection of South African novels, I detect more similarities than differences. Across cultures, people experience similar nostalgic longings: a yearning to return to places of previous belonging, to enjoy the sensuous pleasures of shared meals and familiar music, to take part in ritualistic and traditional behaviour. The differences in nostalgic longings inhere chiefly in their cultural specificities, in the finer details, becoming apparent in the cultural specifics of each

¹⁸⁰ I list here just some of the novels, by the authors I have mentioned, that are of interest for future research and analysis: *Way Back Home* (2013) by Niq Mhlongo, *The Yearning* (2016) by Mohale Mashigo, *The Dream House* (2015) and *The Landscape Painter* (2011) by Craig Higginson, *Philida* (2012) by Andre Brink, *The Heart Knows No Colour* (2003) and *Follow Your Heart* (2009) by Praba Moodley, *Playing in the Light* (2006) Zoë Wicomb, *The Rowing Lesson* (2007) by Anne Landsman, *Lost Ground* (2011) and *Invisible Furies* (2012) by Michiel Heyns.

social group. While the details of the longings may vary, the feeling is similar, and familiar, as are the emotions that initially trigger nostalgias.

Therefore, within the cross-cultural, multi-cultural arena that these representative novels illuminate, one can identify a common ‘language of nostalgia’ that underpins the cultural specificity of its manifestations: a type of language that expresses the pain caused by longing itself (which is a familiar, shared experience across all races).¹⁸¹ In reflecting the common element of nostalgia, these four writers (in the eight novels), implicitly address the resultant traumas of apartheid, slavery, and colonialism, and – read in juxtaposition with one another, as I have presented them here – provide an intersection, a meeting point, of understanding. Although there are many perspectives, the common element is nostalgia, and this common element serves to promote empathy and understanding across social and racial boundaries.

Thus, Van Heerden’s Afrikaner characters, Jacobs’s enslaved characters, Serote’s displaced political struggle soldiers, and Govender’s sugar-estate labourers all express the same desire: they long for a sense of meaning in their lives in the present, for a sense of identity as South Africans, and they yearn to be at home in a place of belonging.

This dissertation has argued for nostalgia’s value in assisting meaningful, affective communication about the various pasts that influence South Africa’s present. Nostalgic memory is not a complete history, but it is a valuable part of history. It is from the ‘twilight zone’ of nostalgic memory that shards of the past can be retrieved and pieced together. My research has illustrated that because nostalgia is a concept that encourages representations of rapid social change, contemporary writers can harness it as a positive force in the individual and collective search for identity, belonging, and meaning, while readers are exposed to previously subverted elements of the past that have the capacity to qualify the challenges of the present and provide fresh points of entry for a new imagining of the future. As somewhat of a would-be nation, then, it is important that South Africans continue to write and read their own literature and, in particular, to value a literature of nostalgia.

Nostalgia in South African literature is a resource of cultural memory; it amounts almost to a narrative style (a sub-genre, even). It provides a powerful aid to the communication of important differences and similarities, which become apparent through the writers’ expressions of experience, and through the critics’ comparative readings.

END

¹⁸¹ Pondering the universality of nostalgia, Walder says: “It is clear that nostalgia is a widespread, if not universal, phenomenon, although the term itself is profoundly European in origin” (2011:3).

Reference List

- Alberts, Maria Elizabeth. 2006. “‘n Eiesoortige Afrikaanse magiese realisme na aanleiding van die werk van André Brink en Etienne van Heerden – tr. A Unique Afrikaans Magical Realism with Reference to the Work of André Brink and Etienne van Heerden.” Unpublished MA dissertation: University of Johannesburg.
- Anker, Johan. 2009. “30 Nagte in Amsterdam”, *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 46(2):241-243.
- Annamalai, Sathasivan. 1998. “The History of South African Indian Theatre in Natal from the Mid-1900s to the Present Day, with Special Reference to its Transformation Within the Changing Socio-Political Climate.” Unpublished DPhil dissertation: University of Durban-Westville.
- Ashcroft, Bill. 2001. *Post-Colonial Transformation*. London: Routledge.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth, Tiffin, Helen. 1989. *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*. London: Routledge.
- _____. 2007. *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (second edition). New York: Routledge.
- Attridge, Derek, Jolly, Rosemary. 1998. *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Baderon, Gabeba. 2014a. *Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-Apartheid*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- _____. 2014b. “Remembering Slavery in South Africa”, <http://africasacountry.com/2014/12/remembering-slavery-in-south-africa/> [accessed 09/12/2014].
- Baines, Gary. 2008. “Coming to Terms with the ‘Border War’ in Post-Apartheid South Africa”, Available at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/29807044_Coming_to_terms_with_the_Border_War_in_post-apartheid_South_Africa [Accessed 06/07/2018].
- _____. 2009. “Site of Struggle: The Freedom Park Fracas and the Divisive Legacy of South Africa’s Border War/Liberation Struggle”, *Social Dynamics* 35(2):330-344.
- Baldick, Chris. 2008. *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Baumeister, Roy F, Leary, Mark R. 1995. “The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachments as a Fundamental Human Motivation”, *Psychological Bulletin* 117(3):497-529.
- Boehmer, Elleke. 1995. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____. 2012. “Permanent Risk: When Crisis Defines a Nation’s Writing”. In: Mengel, Ewald, Borzaga, Michela (eds). *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel*. Amsterdam: Rodopi: 29-46.
- Bhabha, Homi. 1994. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Boym, Svetlana. 2001. *The Future of Nostalgia*. New York: Basic Books.
- Borzaga, Michela. 2012. “Trauma in the Postcolony: Towards a New Theoretical Approach”. In: Mengel, Ewald, Borzaga, Michela (eds). *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel*. Amsterdam: Rodopi: 65-91.
- Borzaga, Michela. 2015. “The Present in Pain: ‘Temporal Poiesis’ in Mongane Wally Serote’s ‘To Every Birth Its Blood’ (1981)”, *Journal of Literary Studies* 31(1):64-81.

- Bose, Neilish. 2015. "Performing History and Constructing 'Culture': Ronnie Govender's 1949 and the Romanticism of Historical Memory", *African Studies* 74(2):235-246.
- Bradbury, Jill. 2012. "Narrative Possibilities of the Past for the Future: Nostalgia and Hope", *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 18(3):341-350.
- Brown, Duncan. 2005. "Narrative, Memory, and Mapping: Ronnie Govender's 'At the Edge and Other Cato Manor Stories'", *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 17(1):108-128.
- Buchanan, Ian. 2010. *Oxford Dictionary of Critical Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chapman, Michael (ed). 2002. *The New Century of South African Poetry*. Johannesburg: AD Donker Publishers (Pty) Ltd.
- _____. 2003. *Southern African Literatures*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press.
- _____. 2011. "'Sequestered from the winds of history' Poetry and Politics". In: Chapman, Michael, Lenta, Margaret (eds). *S A Lit Beyond 2000*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press: 177-202.
- Chaudhari, Shamiaga. 2013. "'From today onwards, your name is February!' Naming and Name Stripping in Texts of Diana Ferrus, I D du Plessis, and Rayda Jacobs", *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 50(2):30-46.
- Chetty, Rajendra. 2016. "Transactional Memory in Ronnie Govender's 'At the Edge and Other Cato Manor Stories'", *English Academy Review* 33(1):57-71.
- Chetty, Rajendra. 2017. *At the Edge: The Writing of Ronnie Govender*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Chevalier, J, Gheerbrant, A. 1996. *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*. London: Penguin Books.
- Clare, John. (ed). 2010. *Captured in Time: Five Centuries of South African Writing*. Johannesburg & Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers.
- Coetzee, Ampie. 2000. *'n Hele os vir 'n ou broodmes – Grond en die plaasnarratief sedert 1595*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Uitgewers.
- Coetzee, J M. 1988. *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. Sandton: Radix.
- Cooppan, Vilashini. 2012. "Affecting Politics: Post-Apartheid Fiction and the Limits of Trauma". In: Mengel, Ewald, Borzaga, Michela (eds). *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel*. Amsterdam: Rodopi: 47-63.
- Cornelius, Beverley Jane. 2013. "Pasts Remembered, Future Identities Pursued: Postcolonial Nostalgia in Etienne van Heerden's Novels, 'Ancestral Voices' and '30 Nights in Amsterdam'." Unpublished MA dissertation: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Cozzolino, Philip J, Blackie, Laura E R. 2013. "I Die, Therefore I Am: The Pursuit of Meaning in the Light of Death". In: Hicks, Joshua A, Routledge, Clay (eds). *The Experience of Meaning in Life: Classical Perspectives, Emerging Themes, and Controversies*. London: Springer: 31-45.
- Cresswell, Tim. 2004. *Place: A Short Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Davidson, Joyce, Milligan, Christine. 2004. "Embodying Emotion Sensing Space: Introducing Emotional Geographies", *Social and Cultural Geography* 5(4):523-532.
- Davis, Fred. 1979. *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia*. New York: Free Press.
- Davis, William E, Hicks, Joshua A. 2013. "Judgements of Meaning in Life Following an Existential Crisis". In: Hicks, Joshua A, Routledge, Clay (eds). *The Experience of Meaning in Life: Classical Perspectives, Emerging Themes, and Controversies*. London: Springer: 163-174.

- Daymond, Margaret J. 2011. "Shadow Stories and Shadow Selves: Techniques of Selfhood in Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* and the Autobiographical Writing of Agnes Lottering and Rayda Jacobs", *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 23(2):157-167.
- Deacon, Harriet. 2004. "Intangible Heritage in Conservation Management Planning: The Case of Robben Island", *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 10(3):309-319.
- De Beer, Ronel. 1991. "'Toorberg' (Etienne van Heerden) en sy intertekste – tr. 'Toorberg' (Etienne van Heerden) and its Intertexts." Unpublished MA dissertation: University of Pretoria.
- De Kock, Leon. 2012. "Interview at Woordfees Literary Festival". Stellenbosch University. <https://soundcloud.com/slipnet-1/wally-serote-at-woordfees> [Accessed 5/10/2016].
- Desai, Ashwin, Vahed, Goolam. 2007. *Inside Indenture: A South African Story, 1860-1914*. Durban: Madiba Publishers.
- Dick, Archie L. 2012. *The Hidden History of South Africa's Book and Reading Culture*. Scottsville: UKZN Press.
- Dlamini, Jacob. 2010 (2009). *Native Nostalgia*. Cape Town: Jacana.
- _____. 2015 (2014). *Askari*. Cape Town: Jacana.
- Dlamini, Moses. 1984. *Hell-Hole Robben Island: Reminiscences of a Political Prisoner in South Africa*. Nottingham: Spokesman.
- Edwards, Justin D. 2008. *Postcolonial Literature: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Eliot, T S. 1932. "Tradition and the Individual Talent". In: *Selected Essays by T S Eliot*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company:3-11.
- Erasmus, Zimitri. 2000. "Recognition through Pleasure, Recognition through Violence: Gendered Coloured Subjectivities in South Africa", *Current Sociology* 48(3):71-85.
- Frankish, Tarryn, Bradbury, Jill. 2012. "Telling Stories for the Next Generation: Trauma and Nostalgia", *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 18(3):294-306.
- Freed, Lynn. 1992. "Review: 'Ancestral Voices' by Etienne van Heerden" *New York Times Book Review* (16 August). Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/1992/08/16/books/the-moolmans-and-the-stepmoolmans.html> [Accessed 9/2/2012].
- Gagiano, Annie. 2012. "Re-Examining Apartheid Brokenness – 'To Every Birth Its Blood' as Literary Testament". In: Mengel, E, Borzaga, M (eds). *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel*. Amsterdam: Rodopi: 217-241.
- García Márquez, Gabriel. 1970 (1967). *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. London: Penguin.
- Gaylard, Gerald. 2005. *After Colonialism: African Postmodernism and Magical Realism*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Genette, Gerard. 1980 (1972). *Narrative Discourse*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Govender, Ronnie. 1976. *The Lahnee's Pleasure*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- _____. 2006. *Song of the Atman*. Johannesburg: Jacana.
- _____. 2008(a). *The Lahnee's Pleasure*. Cape Town: Jacana.
- _____. 2008(b). *In the Manure: Memories and Reflections*. Claremont: David Philip Publishers.

- _____. 2013 (1996). *At the Edge and Other Cato Manor Stories*. Pretoria: Manx.
- Govinden, Devarakshanam Betty. 2008. *Sister Outsiders: The Representation of Identity and Difference in Selected Writings by South African Indian Women*. Pretoria: University of South Africa Press.
- _____. 2009. "Healing the Wounds of History", *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 21(1-2):286-302.
- _____. 2011. "Healing the Wounds of History". In: Chapman, M, Lenta, M (eds). *S A Lit Beyond 2000*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press:283-298.
- Green, Kathleen Eileen. 2004. "A Comparative Examination of the Novels of Farida Karodia, Rayda Jacobs, Pamela Jooste." Unpublished MA dissertation: Rand Afrikaans University.
- Gqola, Pumla Dineo. 2001. "'Slaves don't have opinions': Inscriptions of Slave Bodies and the Denial of Agency in Rayda Jacobs's *The Slave Book*". In: Erasmus, Z (ed). *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town*. Cape Town: Kwela Books: 45-63.
- _____. 2010. *What is Slavery to Me?: Postcolonial/Slave Memory in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Guestyn, Maria Elizabeth. 2013. "Representations of Slave Subjectivity in Post-Apartheid Fiction: the 'Sideways Gance'." Unpublished MA dissertation: Stellenbosch University.
- Gupta, Suman. 2001. *Globalization and Literature*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hale, Thomas A. 1976. "Review of 'No Baby Must Weep' by Mongane Wally Serote", *World Literature Today* 51(1):148.
- Hansen, Thomas Blom. 2000. "Plays, Politics and Cultural Identity Among Indians in Durban", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 26(2):255-269.
- Heyns, Michiel. 1994. "Overtaken by History? Obsolescence-anxiety in Andre Brink's *An Act of Terror* and Etienne van Heerden's *Casspirs en Campari's*", *E A R* 11:62-72.
- _____. 2000. "The Whole Country's Truth: Confession and Narrative in Recent White South African Writing", *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 46(1):42-66.
- Hlabane, David Mokgatle. 1998. "The Poetry of Mongane Wally Serote: A Critique of Colonial Society and its Aftermath." Unpublished MA dissertation: Vista University.
- Hoelscher, Steven, Alderman, Derek H. 2004. "Memory and Place: Geographies of a Critical Relationship", *Social and Cultural Geography*, 5(3):347-355.
- Hook, Derek. 2012. "Screened History: Nostalgia as Defensive Formation", *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 18(3):225-239.
- Human, Thys. 2008. "30 Nagte in Amsterdam: Vernuftig en Verbeeldingsryk". Available at: <http://www.litnet.co.za/Article/30-nagte-in-amsterdam-vernunftig-en-verbeeldingryk> [accessed 23/2/2012].
- Irlam, Shaun. 2004. "Unravelling the Rainbow: The Remission of Nation in Post-apartheid Literature", *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 103(4):695-718.
- Jacobs, Johan U. 2016. *Diaspora and Identity in South African Fiction*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Jacobs, Rayda. 1994. *The Middle Children*. Toronto: Second Story Press.

- _____. 1996. *Eyes of the Sky*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- _____. 2001. *Sachs Street*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- _____. 2003. *Confessions of a Gambler*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- _____. 2004. *Postcards from South Africa*. Cape Town: Double Storey Books.
- _____. 2005. *The Mecca Diaries*. Cape Town: Double Storey Books.
- _____. 2006. *My Father's Orchid*. Roggebaai: Umuzi.
- _____. 2008. *Masquerade: The Story of my Life*. Roggebaai: Umuzi.
- _____. 2011. *Joonie*. Johannesburg: Jacana.
- _____. 2012 (1998). *The Slave Book*. Cape Town: Kwela.
- Jethro, Duane. 2013. "An African Story of Creation: Heritage Formation at Freedom Park, South Africa", *Material Religion The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* 9(3):370-393.
- John, Philip. 2010. "Die 'Terapeutiese perspektief' en die 'Agtstekleurgekekkel' van 30 Nagte in Amsterdam deur Etienne van Heerden (2009)", *Stilet* 21(1):187-203.
- Johnson, David. 2012. "Representations of Cape Slavery in South African Literature", *History Compass* 10(8):549-561.
- Juhl, Jacob, Routledge, Clay. 2013. "Nostalgia Bolsters Perceptions of a Meaningful Self in a Meaningful World". In: Hicks, J A, Routledge, C (eds). *The Experience of Meaning in Life: Classical Perspectives, Emerging Themes, and Controversies*. London: Springer.
- Kannemeyer, J C. 1993. *The History of Afrikaans Literature*. Pietermaritzburg: Shuter & Shooter.
- Kearney, Jack. 2006. "Representations of Islamic Belief and Practice in a South African Context: Reflections on the Fictional Work of Ahmed Essop, Aziz Hassim, Achmat Dangor and Rayda Jacobs", *Journal of Literary Studies* 22(1-2):138-157.
- Kona, Bongani. 2011. "Review: 'Revelations' by Mongane Wally Serote. Serote's Novel Raises Questions". Tonight Books (24 January). Available at: <http://beta.iol.co.za/tonight/books/serotes-novel-raises-questions-1016177> [Accessed 9/11/2015].
- Kozain, Rustum. 2014. "Foreword". In: Baderoon, G. *Regarding Muslims: From Slavery to Post-Apartheid*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press: xv-xix.
- Kral, Francoise. 2009. *Critical Identities in Contemporary Anglophone Diasporic Literature*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Kriel, S E. 1990. "Narrative Manipulation in Afrikaans Border Literature." Unpublished Dissertation: University of South Africa.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Krog, Antjie, Mpolweni, Nosisi Lynette, Ratele, Kopano. 2009. *There Was This Goat: Investigating the Truth Commission Testimony of Notrose Nobomvu Konile*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Kruger, Loren. 2003. "In a Minor Key: Narrative Desire and Minority Discourses in Some Recent South African Fiction", *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 8(1):70-74.

- Kolodziejczyk, Dorota. 2010. "Cosmopolitan Provincialism in a Comparative Perspective". In: Wilson, J (ed). *Rerouting the Postcolonial*. London: Routledge: 151-161.
- Laubscher, Leswin. 2012. "Of Odysseus and Abraham: Nostalgia, Heimwee, and the Ways (of) Home", *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 18(3):214-224.
- Lefebvre, Henri. Nicholson-Smith, Donald (translator). 2012 (1991, 1974). *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Lehman, Daniel W. 2010. "'Born from Restlessness': A Conversation with Rayda Jacobs", *World Literature Today* 84(6):13-16.
- Leys, Ruth. 2012. "Trauma and the Turn to Affect". In: Mengel, E, Borzaga, M (eds). *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel*. Amsterdam: Rodopi: 3-27.
- Magona, Sindiwe. 2012. "It is in the Blood: Trauma and Memory in the South African Novel". In: Mengel, E, Borzaga, M (eds). 2012. *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel*. Amsterdam: Rodopi: 93-105.
- Malpas, Jeff E. 1999. *Place and Experience: A Philosophical Topography*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mamet, Claudia. 2007. "Fictional Constructions of Grey Street by Selected South African Indian Writers." Unpublished MA dissertation: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Mashigane, Mncedai Siseko. 2000. "Art as Craft and Politics: The Literature of Mongane Wally Serote." Unpublished MA dissertation: University of Cape Town.
- Mda, Zakes. 2009. *Black Diamond*. Johannesburg: Penguin Books.
- Medalie, David. 2010. "The Uses of Nostalgia", *English Studies in Africa* 53(1):35-44.
- Mengel, Ewald, Borzaga, Michela. 2012. "Introduction". In: Mengel, Ewald, Borzaga, Michela (eds). *Trauma, Memory, and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel*. Amsterdam: Rodopi: vii-xxxii.
- Mesthrie, Rajend. 2011a. "Public Lecture Series on 150 Years of Indian History in South Africa", *Social Dynamics: A Journal of African Studies* 37(3):436-438.
- _____. 2011b. *Dictionary of South African Indian English*. Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Meyring, Sharon. 2004. "A Glancing Rebound: Interview with Rayda Jacobs". Available at: <https://oulitnet.co.za/ricochet/rjacobs.asp> [Accessed 12 March 2015].
- Mohamed, Kharnita, Ratele, Kopano. 2012. "'Where My Dad Was From He Was Quite a Respected Man", *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 18(3):282-293.
- Moslund, Sten Pultz. 2003. *Making Use of History in New South African Fiction: An Analysis of the Purposes of Historical Perspectives in Three Post-Apartheid Novels*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, University of Copenhagen.
- Murray, Jessica. 2011. "'Binne 'n halfuur het ek wit geword (within half an hour I became white)': Intersections of Gender, Race, and Class in South African Fictional Representations of Appearance", *Litnet Akademies* 8(2):270-285.
- Mzamane, Mbulelo V. 1983. "Black Consciousness Poets in South Africa, 1967-1980: With Special Reference to Mongane Serote and Sipho Sepamla." Unpublished Doctoral dissertation: Sheffield University.

- Naidoo, Muthal. 1997. "The Search for a Cultural Identity: A Personal View of South African 'Indian' Theatre", *Theatre Journal* 49(1):29-39.
- Narismulu, Priya. 2015. "Serote's Poems of Healing, Leadership, and Transformation: 'There Will be a Better Time Made by Us'", *Journal of Literary Studies* 31(1):82-95.
- Ndlela, Philden. 2004. "Black South African Writing Against Apartheid, 1959-1983." Unpublished Doctoral dissertation: University of Massachusetts-Amherst.
- Nel, Adele. 2010. "'My lyf was my slagspreuk': verset en die politiek van die liggaam in *30 Nagte in Amsterdam* van Etienne van Heerden", *Stilet* 22(1):165-186.
- Newman, Judie. 1994. "Postcolonial Gothic: Ruth Praver Jhabvala and the Sobhraj Case", *MFS Modern Fiction Studies* 40(1):85-100.
- Nkosi, Lewis. 2005. "The Republic of Letters After the Mandela Republic". In: Stiebel, L, Gunner, L (eds). *Still Beating the Drum: Critical Perspectives on Lewis Nkosi*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi:310-330.
- Nuttall, Sarah. 2009. *Entanglement: Literary and Cultural Reflections of Post-Apartheid*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.
- Nyman, Jopi. 2009. *Home, Identity, and Mobility in Contemporary Fiction*. Amsterdam & New York: Rodopi.
- Oloaluwa, Senayon S. 2010. "In Anticipation of Tomorrow: Globalisation and 'Transnation' in Mongane Wally Serote's 'History is the Home Address'", *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 22(1):72-91.
- Park, Crystal L. 2013. "Trauma and Meaning Making: Converging Conceptualizations and Emerging Evidence". In: Hicks, J A, Routledge, C (eds). *The Experience of Meaning in Life: Classical Perspectives, Emerging Themes, and Controversies*. London: Springer:61-76.
- Patel, Essop. 1990. "Mongane Wally Serote: Poet of Revolution", *Third World Quarterly* 12(1):187-193.
- Paul, C. 1988. "Funksies van die fisiese ruimte in 'Toorberg' (Etienne van Heerden) – tr. Functions of the Physical Space in 'Toorberg' (Etienne van Heerden)." Unpublished MA dissertation: Rand Afrikaans University.
- Pheiffer, Fred (ed). 2007. *Afrikaans-Engels English-Afrikaans Kernwoordeboek Concise Dictionary*. Cape Town: Pharos/NB Publishers.
- Pickering, Michael, Keightley, Emily. 2006. "The Modalities of Nostalgia", *Current Sociology* 54(6):919-941.
- Pillay, S. 2014. "Fictional Reconstructions of Cato Manor In 'At the Edge and other Cato Manor Stories' and *Song of the Atman* by Ronnie Govender." Unpublished Dissertation: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Popescu, Monica. 2008. "Licence for Shooting: South African Literature, the Media, and the Cold War", *Scrutiny2: Issues in English Studies in Southern Africa* 13(1):92-104.
- _____. 2014. "On the Margins of the Black Atlantic: Angola, the Eastern Block, and the Cold War", In: *Research in African Literatures* 45(3):91-109.
- Prinsloo, Loraine. 2006. "Marlene van Niekerk se *Agaat* (2004) as 'n Postkoloniale Plaasroman – tr. Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat* (2004) as a Postcolonial Farm Novel." Unpublished MA dissertation: University KwaZulu-Natal.

- Punter, David. 2000. *Postcolonial Imaginings – Fictions of a New World Order*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- _____. 2002. "Spectral Criticism". In: Wolfreys, Julian (ed). *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 259-278.
- Raditlhalo, Tlhalo Sam. 2013. "'Senses of Silence': Historical Trauma in 'To Every Birth Its Blood'", *Journal of Literary Studies* 29(3):99-118.
- Roos, Henriette. 2005. "Torn between Islam and the Other: South African Novelists on Cross-Cultural Relationships", *Journal of Literary Studies* 21(1-2):48-67.
- Ross, Robert. 1999. *Status and Respectability in the Cape Colony 1750–1870: A Tragedy in Manners*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rubenstein, Roberta. 2001. *Home Matters: Longing and Belonging, Nostalgia and Mourning in Women's Fiction*. New York: Palgrave.
- Rushdie, Salman. 1991. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta.
- Said, Edward. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- _____. 2001. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. London: Granta.
- Samuelson, Meg. 2010. "(Un)settled States: Indian Ocean Passages, Performative Belongings and Restless Mobility in Post-Apartheid South African Fiction", *Social Dynamics* 36(2):272-287.
- Schneider, Stefanie. 2012. "The Soft Side of Mongane Wally Serote". Summary of discussion between Mongane Wally Serote and Leon de Kock, 7 March 2012, Stellenbosch: US Woordfees. (Recording of discussion available at: <https://soundcloud.com/slipnet-1/wally-serote-at-woordfees>) [Accessed 5/6/2016].
- Schoeman, Karel. 2012. *Portrait of Slave Society: The Cape of Good Hope, 1717-1795*. Pretoria: Protea Book House.
- Schoene, Berthold. 2010. *The Cosmopolitan Novel*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Schreiner, Olive. 1995 (1883). *The Story of an African Farm*. London: Penguin Books.
- Searle, Berni. 1999. *Colour Me: Conceptual Art and Photographic Installation*. Cape Town: Mark Coetzee Fine Art Cabinet.
- Seehusen, Johannes, Cordaro, Filippo, Wildschut, Tim, Sedikides, Constantine, Routledge, Clay, Blackhart, Ginette C, Epstude, Kai, Vingerhoets, JJM. 2013. "Individual Differences in Nostalgia Proneness: The Integrating Role of the Need to Belong", *Personality and Individual Differences* 55:904-908.
- Serote, Mongane Wally. 1978 (1972). *Yakhal'Inkomo*. Johannesburg: Raven Press.
- _____. 1974. *Tsetlo*. Johannesburg: A D Donker.
- _____. 1975. *No Baby Must Weep*. Johannesburg: A D Donker.
- _____. 1978. *Behold Mama, Flowers*. Johannesburg: A D Donker.
- _____. 1981. *To Every Birth Its Blood*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press.
- _____. 1982. *The Night Keeps Winking*. Gaborone: Medu Art Ensemble.
- _____. 1987. *A Tough Tale*. Banbury Oxfordshire: Kliptown Books.

- _____. 1990. *On the Horizon*. Fordsburg: Congress of South African Writers.
- _____. 1992. *Third World Express*. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers (Pty) Ltd.
- _____. 1994. *Come and Hope with Me*. Claremont: David Philip Publishers (Pty) Ltd.
- _____. 1996 (1981). *To Every Birth Its Blood*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- _____. 1997. *Freedom Lament and Song*. Claremont: David Philip Publishers (Pty) Ltd.
- _____. 1999. *Gods of our Time*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- _____. 2002. *Scatter the Ashes and Go*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press.
- _____. 2004. *History is the Home Address*. Roggebaai: Kwela Books.
- _____. 2010. *Revelations*. Johannesburg: Jacana.
- _____. 2011. "Public Dialogue on the book Revelations by Mongane Wally Serote" (4 October), Centre for Conflict Resolution, Public Dialogues. Audio available at <http://www.ccr.org.za/index.php/events/book-launches/item/560-no-166> [Accessed 2016].
- _____. 2013a. *Rumours*. Johannesburg: Jacana.
- _____. 2013b. "Literary News, Views, and Interview by Nancy Richards: Dr Mongane Wally Serote, *Rumours*" (11 August). SAfm Radio. Audio available at: <https://www.iono.fm/e/53994> [Accessed 2016].
- _____. 2016. "An Absurd Literary History: with Sindiwe Magona and Wally Serote" (16 March), Time of the Writer Festival 2016 – Decolonising the Book, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Mazisi Kunene Museum, [Dissertation author's own notes and recording].
- Sibisi, Zwelinthini Leo. 2013. "Conscientisation: A Motive Behind the Selected Poems Sepamla, Serote, Gwala, and Mtshali." Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Sime, Jonathan D. 1986. "Creating Places or Designing Spaces", *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 6(1):49-63.
- Singh, Thavashini V. 2009. "Changing Form and Political Purpose in Selected Works of Ronnie Govender." Unpublished MA dissertation: University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Sole, Kelwyn. 1991. "'This Time Set Again': The Temporal and Political Conceptions of Serote's *To Every Birth its Blood*", *English in Africa* 18(1):51-80.
- Steiner, Tina. 2009. *Translated People, Translated Texts: Language and Migration in Contemporary African Literature*. Manchester: St Jerome.
- Stephanides, Stephanos (ed). 2007. *Cultures of Memory/Memories of Culture*. Nicosia: University of Nicosia Press.
- Stiebel, Lindy. 2011. "Crossing the Kala Pani: Cause for 'Celebration' or 'Commemoration' 150 Years On? Portrayals of Indenture in Recent South African Writing", *Journal of Literary Studies* 27(2):77-90.
- _____. 2016. "Sugar-Coated Stories? Plantation Literature by Selected South African Indian Writers", *English Academy Review: A Journal of English Studies* 33(1):7-23.
- Su, John J. 2005. *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Terblanche, Erika. 2010. "Etienne van Heerden: Gebore en Getoë". LitNet. Available at <https://www.litnet.co.za/etienne-van-heerden-1954/> [Accessed: 8 March 2012].
- Toerien, Barend J. 1987. "A Review of Etienne van Heerden's *Toorberg*", *World Literature Today* 61(3):484.
- Van Coller, H P. 1995. "Die Afrikaanse plaasroman as ideologiese refleksie van die politieke en sosiale werklikheid in Suid-Afrika", *Stilet* 7(2):22-31.
- _____. 2008. "The Peregrination of Afrikaans Prose Fiction from Farm to City", *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Modern Language Association* 109:27-140.
- Van der Merwe, Chris N. 2004. "When Outsiders Meet: Boerneef and A H M Scholtz". In: Viljoen, Hein, van der Merwe, Chris N (eds). *Storyscapes: South African Perspectives on Literature, Space and Identity*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing: 125-136.
- Van den Berg, Cilliers. 2011. "Collective Trauma in Modern Afrikaans Fiction". 1st Global Conference on Trauma: Theory and Practice, Prague, Czech Republic, 14-16 March. Available at <http://www.inter-disciplinary.net/wpcontent/uploads/2011/02/bergtpaper.pdf> [Accessed 15/02/2012].
- Van Heerden, Etienne. 1978. *Matoli*. Johannesburg: Perskor.
- _____. 1981. *Obiter dictum*. Johannesburg: Perskor.
- _____. 1983. *My Kubaan*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- _____. 1984. *Om te awol*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- _____. 1986. *Toorberg*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- _____. 1988. *Liegfabriek*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- _____. 1991. *Casspirs en Campari's: 'n historiese entertainment*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- _____. 1992. *Mad Dog and Other Stories*. Cape Town: New Africa Books.
- _____. 1993. *Casspirs and Camparis*. Johannesburg: Penguin.
- _____. 1993. *Die stoetmeester*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- _____. 1996. *Kikoejoe*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- _____. 1997. *Leap Year*. Johannesburg: Penguin.
- _____. 1998. *Kikuyu*. Cape Town: Kwela Books.
- _____. 1998. *Lied van die Boeings*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- _____. 2000. *Die swye van Mario Salviati*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- _____. 2002. *The Long Silence of Mario Salviati*. London: Sceptre.
- _____. 2005. *In stede van die liefde*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- _____. 2007. *Asbesmiddag*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- _____. 2008. *30 Nagte in Amsterdam*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- _____. 2011a (1989). *Ancestral Voices*. Johannesburg: Penguin.
- _____. 2011b. *30 Nights in Amsterdam*. Johannesburg: Penguin.

- _____. 2012. "Biography". Available at <http://www.etiennevanheerden.co.za> [Accessed 25/11/2012].
- _____. 2013. *In Love's Place*. Johannesburg: Penguin.
- _____. 2013b. *Klimtol*. Cape Town: Human & Rosseau.
- _____. 2017. *Die Wêreld van Charlie Oeng*. Cape Town: Tafelberg.
- Venter, D C G. 1993. "'Toorberg' van Etienne van Heerden binne die Afrikaanse plaasromantradisie – 'n pragmatiese studie / tr. Etienne van Heerden's 'Toorberg' in the Afrikaans Farm Novel Tradition – A Pragmatic Study." Unpublished MA dissertation: University of the Orange Free State.
- Vess, Matthew, Arndt, Jamie, Routledge, Clay, Sedikides, Constantine, Wildschut, Tim. 2012. "Nostalgia as a Resource for the Self", *Self and Identity*, 11(3):273-284.
- Viljoen, Hein. 2004. "Land, Space, Identity: The Literary Construction of Space in Three Afrikaans Farm Novels". In: Viljoen, Hein, van der Merwe, Chris N (eds). *Storyscapes: South African Perspectives on Literature, Space and Identity*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing: 107-123.
- Viljoen, Hein, Lewis, Minnie, van der Merwe, Chris N. 2004. "Introduction: Learning about Space – and about Ourselves". In: Viljoen, Hein, Van der Merwe, Chris N, (eds). *Storyscapes: South African Perspectives on Literature, Space and Identity*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing: 1-22.
- Viljoen, Louise. 1993. "Re-presenting History: Reflections on Two Recent Afrikaans Novels", *Current Writing: Text and Reception in Southern Africa* 5(1):1-24.
- Villa-Vicencio, Charles, Soko, Mills. 2012. *Conversations in Transitions: Leading South African Voices*. Cape Town: David Philip.
- Walder, Dennis. 2011. *Postcolonial Nostalgia: Writing, Representation, and Memory*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Warnes, Christopher. 2009. "The Afrikaans Novel". In: Abiola Irele, F (ed). *The Cambridge Companion to The African Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 69-83.
- _____. 2011. "'Everyone is Guilty': Complicitous Critique and the Plaasroman Tradition in Etienne van Heerden's *Toorberg (Ancestral Voices)*", *Research in African Literatures* 42(1):120-132.
- Washington, Salim 2015. "Silence, Music, Revolution: Jazz as Narrative Agent in Mongane Wally Serote's 'To Every Birth Its Blood'", *Journal of Literary Studies* 31(1):96-120.
- Wegner, Phillip E. 2002. "Spatial Criticism: Critical Geography, Space, Place and Textuality". In: Wolfreys, Julian (ed). *Introducing Criticism at the 21st Century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 179-201.
- Wenzel, Marita. 2004a. "Re-writing the 'Slave Narrative': Rayda Jacobs's *The Slave Book* and Andre Brink's *The Rights of Desire*", *English in Africa* 31(1):91-103.
- _____. 2004b. "The Latin American Connection: History, Memory and Stories in Novels by Isabel Allende and Andre Brink". In: Viljoen, H, van der Merwe, C N, (eds). *Storyscapes: South African Perspectives on Literature, Space and Identity*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing: 71-88.
- Wicomb, Zoë. 1998a. "Five Afrikaner Identities and the Rehabilitation of Whiteness", *Social Identities* 4(3):363-383.
- _____. 1998b. "Shame and Identity: the Case of the Coloured in South Africa". In: Attridge, D, Jolly, R (eds). *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy, 1970-1995*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 91-107.

Wiehahn, Rialette. 1995. “ ‘n Herbesoek aan die ontwykende wêreld van Etienne van Heerden se ‘Toorberg’ ”. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 33(2):5-21.

Wildschut, Tim, Sedikides, Constantine, Arndt, Jamie, Routledge, Clay. 2006. “Nostalgia: Content, Triggers, Functions”, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 91(5):975-993.

Wilkinson, Jane. 1992. *Talking with African Writers: Interviews*. London: Heinemann.

Willemse, Hein. 1985. “Review of *To Every Birth its Blood* by Mongane Serote”, *World Literature Today* 59(4):649-650.

Wolfreys, Julian. 2002. “Trauma, Testimony, Criticism: Writing, Memory and Responsibility”. In: Wolfreys, Julian (ed). *Introducing Criticism in the 21st Century*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 128-147.