

Representations of Home, Dislocation, and Nostalgia in Select Contemporary South African Novels

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyses the literary representation of home in Michiel Heyns's *Lost Ground* (2011) and Zoë Wicomb's *October* (2014), by investigating the fictional reflection of the (e)migrant's 'home visit'. I am interested in the trope of the return-home visit as representing a turning point in the migrant's trajectory, an event which initiates a crisis of identity and challenges conventional understandings of home and belonging. While most critical studies have addressed the migrant's experience in the 'host' country to investigate issues of 'home', 'belonging', and 'identity', I argue that focusing on the migrant's visit to the original 'home' country can offer equally valuable insights into such postcolonial concerns.

By drawing on relevant critical studies and theoretical perspectives — for example, Marshall's seminal research on the issue of the migrant's home visit (2017, 2018) — this dissertation examines the literary representation of the migrant's 'return-home visit' in two contemporary South African novels. Each novel presents a migrant protagonist who has spent a significant amount of time in another country, and whose return visit to the original home is problematic and depicted through a nostalgically reflective and self-critical gaze. Based on a postcolonial theoretical framework, I analyse the representation of the migrant's home visit as a liminal experience marked by conditions of alienation, dislocation, and nostalgia.

This dissertation, therefore, emphasises the return-home visit as a significant life event during which migrants reflect deeply on their personal histories and their individual understanding of 'home'. The literary trope of the return-home visit, which in turn reveals the psychological intricacies of the migrant condition, further emphasises the instability of 'home' and the inevitable psychological disruption and dislocation associated with the journey across borders.

DECLARATION

I, Lavasha Naidoo, declare that

- (i) The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
- (ii) This dissertation has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.

Signed:  _____

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1. INTRODUCTION, THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, AND LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this dissertation is to analyse the literary representation of home in Michiel Heyns's *Lost Ground* (2011) and Zoë Wicomb's *October* (2014): more specifically, by investigating the fictional reflection of the migrant's 'home visit' as an existential event that initiates a crisis of identity and destabilises traditional definitions of home. I am interested in the trope of the return-home visit as representing a turning point within the migrant's trajectory, an event which challenges assumptions of belonging and emotional fulfilment associated with conventional understandings of home.

The selection of my primary texts was guided by my desire to explore literary representations of South African migratory experiences. Each novel presents a migrant protagonist who has spent a significant amount of time in another country, and whose return visit to the original homeland is problematic and depicted through a nostalgic gaze. The protagonists are paradoxically 'unhomed' in their own home (Bhabha 1994), and only appear to realise the extent of their emotional distance from their original home place during their return visit.

By means of a postcolonial theoretical framework, I wish to analyse the representation of migrants' return-home visits as liminal experiences marked by conditions of alienation, dislocation and nostalgia. Through focusing on the migrants' psychological fragmentation, I intend to emphasise their home visit as a profound turning point within their lives, while also subverting conventional definitions of home as a place of emotional stability and belonging.

By juxtaposing the two novels' representation of the migrant home visit, I intend to investigate the link between a migrant's sense of identity and their original homeland. Through my analysis, I hope to gain insight into the complex perspectives of 'home' in contemporary times of migration and globalisation.

In this chapter, I will provide an analysis of relevant theoretical perspectives and conduct a literature review with regard to my chosen primary texts and their respective

authors. The section that follows will explore the theoretical framework to be employed: postcolonial literary studies, as well as the various concepts that underpin my study, more specifically, home, dislocation, the migrant 'home visit', and nostalgia.

1.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: POSTCOLONIAL LITERARY STUDIES

Postcolonial literary studies is an interdisciplinary field that has always been concerned with globalisation, migration, and social inequalities, having always been engaged with texts and discourses through a political and global lens. A major contribution to the field is Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), which highlights the asymmetrical power relationship between the East and the West, and the West's misrepresentation of the East as the powerless 'other'. According to critic Suman Gupta, literary theorists derive from Said's text "both the delineation of a field of investigation and a rich vein of politically nuanced and globally relevant strategies for engaging with texts and discourses" (Gupta 2009:108).

Subsequent to Edward Said's pioneering work, postcolonial literary studies has concerned itself with the consequences of colonial exploitation and constructing a 'decolonised' narrative of colonialism. However, as critic Janet Wilson reveals, the field has in recent times transformed and shifted its focus to the "postcolonial present" (2010:1). In *Rerouting the Postcolonial* (2010), Wilson emphasises the field's renewed engagement with "neo-colonial imbalances" (1) and its return to the literary (2) — an engagement in which the relationship between the literary aesthetics and the political and ideological aspects of the postcolonial text is renewed and reiterated (2).

Similarly, in *Postcolonial Imaginings: Fictions of a New World Order* (2000), David Punter has emphasised how an affective and aesthetic engagement within postcolonial literary studies can reinvigorate the field (9). Initially, the field focused on the political effects of imperialism with its discourse being dominated by the theories of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha; however, Punter reveals that these theories are often conceived as strict, polemic, and complicit in prolonging "imperialist subjugation", consequently denying the complexities of alternative voices (2000:18). Punter therefore emphasises the need for a reflective stance within postcolonial literary studies, as a diverse "field in which everything is contested, everything is contestable, from one's reading of a text to one's personal, cultural, racial, national standpoint, perspective and history" (2000: 10).

In maintaining a reflective stance, postcolonial literary studies continues to be interested in the complexities of migration, which has become a common condition in this era of global, political, and technological advancement. In *Migrancy, Hybridity and Postcolonial Literary Studies* (2004), Andrew Smith attributes this interest to the connection between geographical movement and narrative (which always accompanied one another), and explains that this connection “takes on a new and qualitatively different significance in the context and aftermath of colonialism” (242). According to Smith, the study of migration within postcolonial studies is illuminating, as it reveals “new sight, new knowledge, a new understanding of the relativity of things” (2004: 257).

In recent years, postcolonial literary studies has intensified its interest in issues of migration, and mainly through an increasingly affective lens, which underlines the ambivalent and often traumatic nature of the migrant position. Wilson (2010) explains that the interrelatedness of globalisation studies and cultural studies has led to the “rise of ‘affect’”, which places an emphasis on subjectivity and the individual’s relationship to the public sphere (6). This “emotional softening” has led to the breakdown of binary thinking that dominated the early discourse of the field (Wilson 2010: 17). Maria Olausson explains that the “independence of the oppositions” is recognised as a destabilising force (2009: xi), and that binaries (‘home and away’, ‘citizen and foreigner’, and ‘local and global’) need to be deconstructed. Hence, the current trajectory of postcolonial literary studies — through its deconstruction of fixed binaries and affective lens — has begun to represent the precarious positionality of migrants.

In order to offer a complex interpretation of the migrant’s positionality, postcolonial literary studies explores macro-theoretical perspectives of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism. In addition, and in keeping with the ‘affective shift’, it also examines the micro-aspects of the migrant’s position, such as psychological dislocation and disorientation, alienation and cultural hybridity. Hence, a number of theorists within the field focus on the psychological, emotional, and cultural reverberations of migration and its effect on the migrant identity.

Current research emphasises concepts of dislocation, nostalgia, and the manner in which notions of home and belonging are influenced by the increased mobility of migrants globally. In the next section, I will discuss the concepts that are of particular relevance to my thesis: contemporary perspectives on 'home', as well as the manner in which the concept has evolved in this era of mass mobility. Moreover, the link between concepts of home and migration will be explored with more depth through the phenomenon of the return-home visit, which provides insight into migrants' experience of dislocation and nostalgia in connection to their original home.

Contemporary Perspectives of Home

Home has conventional connotations as a country of birth and a primary site of safety, security, belonging, and emotional fulfilment. Critic Sara Ahmed lists these assumptions of home in three registers, stating that for many people "home is where one usually lives, home is where one's family lives, or home is one's 'native country'" (2000:89). These conventions of home are actively destabilised by migrants, who leave their homeland and enter adoptive 'host' countries, building lives and connections beyond the borders of the home country. "Home" loses its underlying assumptions, and becomes a complicated concept when migrants find alternative homes in foreign 'host' countries, or return to their homeland — only to confront the estranging fact that their home is not the haven it once was. In what follows, I will discuss critical perspectives that attempt to address the contemporary problematic of home.

Conventional definitions of home are constantly challenged by theoretical perspectives and rearticulated in postcolonial narratives. For example, Rosemary Marangoly George reveals the manner in which 'home' is a fraught conceptual field, not simply a comforting haven:

Homes are manifest on geographical, psychological and material levels. They are places that are recognised as such by those within and those without. They are places of violence and nurturing. A place that is flexible, that manifests itself in various forms and yet whose every reinvention seems to follow the basic pattern of inclusions/exclusions. Home is a place to escape to and a place to escape from. Its importance lies in the fact that it is not equally available for all. Home is the desired

place that is fought for and established as the exclusive domain of a few. It is not a neutral place. (1996: 9)

A similar view is provided by critic Jopi Nyman, who states that home is “not necessarily a stable issue or a merely positive and empowering site” (24). This is discernible in postcolonial literature, which subverts assumptions of home as a primary site of belonging and fulfilment by representing home as place of dislocation and estrangement.

One of the earliest postcolonial texts to question traditional definitions of home as a stable point of reference is Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1994), which famously states that “[t]o be unhomed is not be homeless” (13). Bhabha reflects on the ‘unhomeliness’ that stems from migrants’ experience of displacement as “the unhomely moment” in which “borders between home and world become confused; and uncannily the private and public become part of each other” (13). Bhabha’s text, which focuses on the Freudian ‘uncanny’ and the emotionally destabilising nature of home, remains an essential text from which further ideas of the complex nature of home have developed.

More recent critics who also focus on the uncanny nature of home are Jo Collins and John Jervis, who describe the uncanny as an “experience of disorientation” and “the simultaneous homelessness of the present and haunting by the past” (2008:2). Migrants, who return to their homeland from their elected ‘host’ country, often find their old home disturbingly unfamiliar. They are unable to reconcile their old expectations of belonging with the alienating state of their earlier home, which is perceived as uncanny a result of their migration.

Home and the Mobility of Migrants

Postcolonial literary studies celebrates “the idea that the migrant is in a position of peculiar insight” (246), experiencing liberating “ideological shifts” as a result of the journey across borders (247). While from a macro perspective, migrants’ movements result in “a growing uncertainty over nationalism” (247), on a more personal level, migration shifts migrants’ perspectives on identity, belonging, and home.

Critics such as Nyman (2009) have discussed the link between home, mobility (migration, exile and return), and identity, with a focus on the “ambiguous character of home in modernity” (25). For Nyman, “concepts such as home, homeland, and belonging have become highly problematic” in this era of globalisation and mass migration (24). As a result, the concept of home is ‘rearticulated’ in postcolonial narratives, with texts “actively redefining the migrant’s sense of self and home, showing their subjects re-entering spaces and sites once important to their families, but not without reflection and critical distance” (Nyman 2009: 26).

In view of the increased mobility and globalisation of the current era, Nyman asserts that home is a “construct” (56), that it is “not a fixed geographical space but something that can be recreated in other spaces” (229). It follows, therefore, that mobility impacts the migrants’ perception of home: the migrants’ journey across borders can be an “inherently radical gesture” by which they escape the control of nation states and “limited, linear ways of understanding themselves” (Smith 2004: 245).

A renowned critic who has explored the mobility of migrants is Zygmunt Bauman. In response to the postmodern world “over-saturated with information” (1996: 10), Bauman distinguishes between two types of migrants: “tourists” and “vagabonds”. Whereas the mobility of a tourist depends solely on their “heart’s desire”, the mobility of a vagabond is determined by the inhospitality of their local surroundings (12). In Bauman’s words, “tourists travel because they want to; the vagabonds – because they have *no other choice*” (14; emphasis original).

Tourists — for whom “[m]obility is the name of the game” (Bauman 1996: 12) — are generally elite migrants who are financially and politically independent. Whereas tourists have the choice of a home, vagabonds do not: they are generally associated with refugees and illegal immigrants, whose own politically unstable country forces them to seek refuge on the margins of a foreign country. The migrant trajectory of vagabonds is often unpredictable, and subject to radical change when they are no longer welcome in a place. Despite the difference between these two types of migrants (tourists and vagabonds), their perception of home is heavily affected by their experience of migration and they can be seen to live by the following principle: “do not commit yourself too strongly to people, places, causes – you cannot know how long

they will last or how long you will count them worthy of your commitment” (Bauman 1996: 10).

Another more recent critic, Aleksandra Bida, in her book *Mapping Home in Contemporary Narratives*, has discussed the consequences of modern mobility and its effect on the concept of home. She asserts that the “hypermobility of the contemporary world has also created very different sets of experiences for which the notion of home as a single location with static roots cannot account” (2018:5). Bida has shown that the hypermobility or “homelessness” has been romanticised in a problematic manner (14) and that, in this age of increased technology and globalisation, home tends to be perceived as a commodity, in “calculative”, “quantitative” terms (17). As a result, she advocates for a more introspective view of home as concept “connected to identity, agency, and belonging” (8), and also reflects on the “significance of imagining home as a means of inclusion and renewal in personal as well as globally situated contexts” (6).

Furthermore, in discussing the problematic of home, Bida alludes to a more subjective, and even existential view of home. Inspired by Martin Heidegger’s theories of ‘dwelling’, Bida discusses how home has become an “emotionally empty living space” created by a “utilitarian”, “calculative” perception of home (28). According to Bida, a “home-maker’s agency [lies] in engaging with the idea of home by constructing and preserving, rethinking and reframing it” (2018: 18).

In postcolonial literature, migrant writers gain agency through their narratives of migration. These postcolonial texts (often quasi-autobiographical) provide a space in which migrants can represent and reflect on the complexities of migration, often rearticulating home and redefining the migrant’s sense of self. Postcolonial literature and its focus on ‘home’, as Bida states, can provide “a unique position to assess these imagined home spaces and maps against conventions in order to uncover deviations and adapt the idea to new experiences, parameters, and expectations” (2018:6).

Home and ‘the Return of the Affect’

The ‘return of affect’ within postcolonial literary studies has also influenced the conceptualisation of home, privileging the complex positionality of individual migrants and their emotional attachments. A meditative, self-reflective view of home encourages an affectively involved perception of home. Home can therefore be seen as a “sentimentalised” space that is perceived affectively. As Ahmed states “[t]he question of home and being-at home can only be addressed by considering the question of affect: being-at home is a matter of *how one feels or how one might fail to feel*” (Ahmed 2000: 89; original emphasis).

Similarly, John S. Allen emphasises the “transformative emotional and cognitive power” of home which provides “an arena for forging and maintaining social relationships” (2015: 8). In *Home: How Habitat Made Us Human*, Allen underlines the importance of home as a “place that is different from all others” (2015:1); the feeling for home, Allen asserts, “is built from sensory inputs (smell and vision), memory, and emotions that create in the mind a holistic sense of the self in a specific place” (2015:8).

In addition to its formative influence on relationships and the creation of a sense of self, home is a safe space from which an individual can learn to navigate the private and public sphere. Allen has explained that

[h]ome provides a place for human beings to *prepare to face the outside world*. Part of this preparation involves forging critical relationships with others who will help us succeed outside the home. Being prepared also means being rested in body and mind, and home is, of course, the preeminent place where we recover from our worldly pursuits. Feeling at home therefore emerges from the *intertwined feelings* we experience around rest, restoration, and relationships (with people and places). (2015: 27; my emphasis)

Home can, therefore, be seen as a base from which one contemplates the outside world and negotiates the difference between self and other. One’s subjectivity is linked to one’s sense of home, with home being characterised as a pillar of the “conscious being”, and a site around which the “autobiographical self” is organised (Allen 2015:

246). Home can be conceptualised as a sentimental space for social relationships and, more importantly, for one's sense of self.

The above perspectives, on 'Home and the Mobility of Migrants' and 'Home and the Return of the Affect' emphasise 'home' as an ambiguous concept, which can also be uncanny and inhospitable. The subversion of conventional notions of home is most visible during the migrant's home visit. In the next section, I will discuss the return-home visit and the manner in which it emphasises the dynamic nature of home and the precarious position of the migrant.

The Migrant's Home Visit

While 'home' and the migrant identity have been well researched within postcolonial studies, the trope of 'migrant home visit' is a fairly recent area of investigation. The migrant's 'home visit' (also referred to as 'return-home visit' and 'return visit') is an event that refers to migrants who return to their original homeland after spending a significant amount of time in an adoptive 'host' country. Migrants return home for a variety of reasons, ranging from dissatisfaction with the foreign 'host' country, the need for reconnection with friends and family, or for other pragmatic reasons. Regardless of the reason for the visit, returnees often approach their original home with conventional expectations of home as a place of safety, belonging, and emotional fulfilment. In contrast, however, during their home visit, they are frequently confronted by the fact that these assumptions are no longer relevant.

While back in their old home, migrants realise that they have undergone an emotional transformation and that their relationships with the people of their homeland have changed. Migrants discover that their childhood home and relationships in the original country have changed, and moreover, they become aware of how much they have changed as a result of their time abroad. The awareness of such changes cause migrants to experience alienation during their visit.¹ The migrant's peculiar position as the "other" in their own home is of great interest to me: it speaks to the consequential

¹ It should be mentioned that while for many migrants the home visit is a reminder that they "no longer truly belong" to their original home, in contrast, the home visit can also affirm the migrant's national identity and belonging to their homeland, causing many migrants to consider a permanent return to their home country (Marschall 2017: 146).

nature of migration and the complexity of the migrant positionality. According to Sabine Marschall — whose pioneering sociological research on home visits underlines the triangular relationship between home, memory, and tourism — the return-home visit can “unexpectedly lead to self-transforming experiences and profound personal insights that can deeply affect the migrant’s sense of identity and personhood” (2017: 141).

Due to the time spent abroad, migrants often return home “accustomed to new values and life styles during their time away from home” (Marschall 2017: 145). In many cases, migrants return with an improved educational and social status (Marschall 2017: 220), with their new lifestyle influencing their view of their homeland. As Marschall has explained, migrants are “acutely aware of their superior social status, educational level and ‘worldliness’. Much of what they used to take for granted when growing up, is now strange to them” (2017: 220).

Migrants’ ‘worldliness’ often emphasises the effect of exile on one’s social standing and consciousness. Most migrants are altered by their experience of their adopted country, and these changes become apparent during their return visit. For this reason, critics Helen Muggeridge and Giorgia Dona (2004), describe the home visit as a memorable event that provides a “measure of one’s progress in life” (415).

As a result of their experience of life across borders, migrants return home with a different worldview that is foreign to the people of their homeland. Most migrants assume that home will be as they left it, and associate it with the sense of belonging they had prior to their emigration. However, upon return, they are confronted with an uncanny “sense of otherness and difference” during their home visit (Marschall 2017: 145).

Most migrants return home to reconnect with friends and family, and to feel comforted by a sense of belonging. According to David Timothy Duval (2004), the home visit can be viewed as a social function that allows migrants “to renew, reiterate and solidify familial and social networks” (51). However, many migrants are unable to carry out this social function successfully as they find that the relationships with the people of their homeland, much like their sense of self, has changed.

Transformed by their experience of an alternative way of life, migrants struggle to find common ground with their family and friends, who they “perceive as largely stagnant and no longer able to relate to their experience” (Marschall 2017: 144). Migrants who were once at ease in their childhood home find themselves in the position of the outsider, unable to regain the intimacy that once existed in their relationships with friends and family. The relationships which, in exile, were “magnified in imaginations [are now] unmatched by the experience of the visit” (Muggeridge & Dona 2006: 421).

Muggeridge and Dona remark on the strained relationships between migrants and the people of their old home as “[t]he parody of being close to someone, having imagined them for years and built up a picture and then being worried about holding an everyday conversation with them” (2006: 421). Migrants’ inability to regain the intimacy they once had with their friends and family reveals the painful effect of exile on relationships, with many migrants finding that home is not necessarily a place of belonging anymore.

The Migrant’s Home Visit and Dislocation

The home visit destabilises the idea of home as a place of idealised belonging, as many migrants struggle to reconnect with the people of their homeland. Migrants usually experience dislocation, disorientation, and psychological fragmentation as a result of emigration. However, recent criticism into the trope of the home visit alerts us to the fact that the return to the home country can also lead to the experience of dislocation. For, during the home visit, migrants’ assumptions of home as a place of belonging, emotional fulfilment, and safety are destabilised by various “‘reality checks’ against the tendency to idealize the homeland and to think that society has remained unchanged and static” (Barnes 2001, cited in Muggeridge & Dona 2006: 429). Migrants come to the painful realisation that not only have they changed, but their childhood home has changed too. For many returnees, home is a place of discomfort: ironically, it is a place in which they must now rearticulate their position, the same way they once did upon arriving in their adopted country.

According to Marschall, migrants who return home often seek “ordinary familiarity, commonness, affinity and identification with others and with places” (Marschall 2017: 147). Unable to find this common ground, migrants feel a profound sense of alienation. Marschall emphasises the migrants’ sense of ‘otherness’ during their visit:

although they were still emotionally attached to their place of origin, the visit home made them acutely aware of how different they had become. Below the surface of the warm welcome, chasms began to appear when interacting with social relations. (2017: 219)

As a consequence of their inner transformations of consciousness, migrants begin to draw comparisons between the ‘home’ country and the adoptive ‘host’ country, as well as between their childhood home of the past (the way they experienced it prior to their emigration) and the way they experience it during the home visit. These comparisons are largely due to what Smith (2004) calls the “double perspective” of migrants: a position that enables the comparative perception of two places, two countries (248).

In *Imaginary Homelands* (1991), Salman Rushdie captures the peculiarity of the migrant’s double perspective through the metaphor of broken mirrors, stating that the vision of migrants is fragmentary as they are “obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost” (11). Migrants’ double vision is ambiguous: while it is an estranging force that detaches them from their homeland, it also grants migrants a new perspective of their homeland and their ideals of home. The ‘stereoscopic’ vision of migrants, as Rushdie explains, often results in migrants being both insiders and outsiders of their society at same time (1991: 19), in other words, they inhabit a liminal space.

Liminality refers to being on a threshold, a transit space, “situated in between other, usually more clearly defined, spaces, periods or identities” (Cuddon 2013: 398). Migration as liminal space often offers its occupant an undefined, ambiguous experience: while experiencing displacement, migrants also gain a new perspective by being on the threshold between two spaces, cultures, or countries. Liminality is also analysed by Bhabha (1994), who brands the in-between space as the “Third Space of enunciation” (54), a space which “carries the burden of meaning” (56). Bhabha asserts that there is “no primordial unity or fixity” of culture within liminal spaces (55); hence,

migrants who occupy such in-between positions can construct meaning that is free from a dominant discourse. The concept of liminality usually describes the position of migrants who enter an adoptive country; conversely, in this study, I am looking at the representation of liminality specifically as occurring during the return-home visit after an extended exile.

For the migrant who has spent a significant amount of time in another country, the home visit is a liminal experience, as their original home is neither totally familiar nor exactly foreign. During the visit, migrants are in an in-between position, as Marschall explains:

[t]he home trip offers a temporary escape from loathed group identities (e.g. 'foreigner') ascribed to them and discursively constructed in the host country. However, the prolonged time away from home renders previously familiar roles and identity positions more complex and requires their renegotiation. (Marschall 2017: 217)

Therefore, during their return visit, migrants are free from the confines of fixed identity and, as Duval suggests, are "deterritorialized" (2004: 53). Moreover, migrants "see their home with new eyes, from a different vantage point" (Marschall 2017: 220). Migrants within a liminal space are, as I mentioned, in an ambivalent position as despite being 'deterritorialized', migrants long for the connection they once had with their former home. These feelings of longing can be better understood through the concept of nostalgia.

The Migrant's Home Visit and Nostalgia

In addition to their psychological dislocation, migrants are confronted with intense moments of nostalgic reminiscences during the home visit. The return home, according to Muggeridge and Dona, is a "meeting of past and present, of imaginations about the home country built up over years of exile and the reality of the present" (2006: 422). While visiting home, migrants uncover memories of the past as a result of their "search for the most ordinary, familiar traces of their remembered past" (Marschall 2017: 220), and are often overwhelmed by memories and feelings of nostalgia.

In order to illustrate the significance of nostalgia during the return-home visit, I am going to include critical references to research on postcolonial nostalgia in general, and apply certain aspects to the home visit. In *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001), Svetlana Boym emphasises nostalgia as a “sentiment of loss and displacement” (2001: xiii). She underlines the root of the word “nostalgia” — from *nostos* which means to return home, and *algia* which means longing — in order to characterise nostalgia as “a longing for a home that no longer exists” (2001: xiii). Nostalgia is often associated with a longing for a place, but is more adequately described as a longing for a place within a certain time frame (2001: xv), it is therefore an “ache of temporal distance” (2001: 43).

Migrants’ re-encounter with their former home causes them to evoke old memories of home. There is a gap between their memories of the past — when home was associated with comfort and ease in relationships — and their painful feelings of alienation during the home visit. Emotionally dislocated in their own home, migrants long for a sense of belonging, and are immensely nostalgic for the ease of the past.

Similar to Rushdie’s metaphor of broken mirrors, Boym explains that nostalgia is “a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images — of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface” (2001: xiv). Triggered by nostalgia, migrants confront these two images (home and abroad, past and present) and the incongruence between them. Hence, migrants’ view of their old home, already fragmented by the experience of migration, is further alienated as filtered through the prism of nostalgia.

The temporal aspect of nostalgia is also highlighted by Roberta Rubenstein, who states that while “homesickness refers to a spatial/geographical separation, nostalgia more accurately refers to a temporal one” (2001: 4). Nostalgia can, therefore, be interpreted to refer to migrants’ yearning for their home of the past. Rubenstein further describes nostalgia as “painful awareness, the expression of grief for something lost, the absence of which continues to produce significant emotional distress” (2001: 5).

The absence of what the migrant is nostalgic for — what Boym is referring to when she says that the “object of nostalgia is notoriously illusive” (2001: xiv) — continues to cause the migrant a significant amount of emotional distress. Migrants want to reconnect with their old home in the way they had prior to their emigration; however, as this is not possible, they feel a deep sense of loss. The impossibility of emotionally returning to their erstwhile home causes migrants psychological pain, but also reveals the truth about how much home has changed and how much they have changed. As Dennis Walder (2011) has stated, nostalgia “begins in desire, and may well end in truth” (3). This is especially relevant for migrants who return home hoping to reconnect with a sense of belonging, but are confronted with the experience of alienation, dislocation, and the impossibility of return.

Besides being a “sentiment of loss”, nostalgia can be seen as a “strategy of survival, a way of making sense of the impossibility of homecoming” (Boym 2001: xvii). It is also, according to Walder (2011), a “source of creativity and understanding” (3) as well as a negotiation between the past and present that leads to a fuller understanding of the past and its effect on the present (9). Similarly, Rubenstein (2001), explains how literary representations of nostalgia allow things that are lost to be “recoverable in narrative terms” (6),

move beyond nostalgia’s initially regressive pull to override, neutralize, or transmute loss and achieve a new level of awareness. [...] Through their characters, authors may (figuratively) reconstruct and thus restore or repair the emotional architecture of that multivalent space. (Rubenstein 2001: 6)

A similar view is held by critic David Medalie, who has explained — with references to South African literature — that the representation of nostalgia in literature can be seen as a persistent and complex force and “a critical tool” that allows for a “unique form of engagement with the past” (2010: 36). Medalie identifies two types of nostalgia, the first being described as the longing for a lost childhood. The critic defines this type of nostalgia as static, simplistic, and unreflecting, as its representation often “becomes its own justification and results in morbid grief from which there is no escape” (39). In contrast, the second type of nostalgia is more “evolved” in its representation and is what Medalie calls “a canny or cognizant kind of nostalgia” (2011: 40). This type of

nostalgia is described by Medalie as being embedded in the text, and presented with technical complexity (often with “neo-modernist techniques”) to elicit a reader’s active participation in the text (40). Overall, Medalie shows that texts can engage with nostalgia in more than one way, and that nostalgia is indeed a complex and powerful way of addressing a longing for the past. When applied to works focused on a migrant’s home visit, nostalgia can be regarded as a profound and transformative force: through reminiscences about the past, migrants can make sense of their emotional dislocation and the ‘unhomeliness’ of the present, thus processing the loss of their earlier home.

To sum up, I would like to suggest that the trope of the migrant’s home visit adds a significant dimension to postcolonial literature. As explained by Nyman, “the idea of return to the original home is a recurring trope through which fictions deal with such issues as home, nostalgia, and roots, and the conflicts between the values of the old and new worlds” (2009: 37). Therefore, the literary representation of a return-home visit reveals the intricacies of the migrant positionality, and is ultimately a vehicle through which ‘home’ can be further conceptualised in the contemporary era. During their home visit, migrants experience both dislocation and nostalgia, causing them to occupy a liminal space on three levels. Firstly, with regard to physical space, they are geographically displaced. Secondly, with regard to identity, migrants experience the home visit as destabilising their sense of self and triggering an existential crisis of identity. Thirdly, with regard to temporality, they are afflicted by nostalgia, thus they constantly compare the home of the past and of the present. The return-home visit as a liminal state of mind empowers migrants to gain insight into their complex positionality and construct notions of home that are liberated from conventional discourse.

1.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The selection of my primary texts — Michiel Heyns's *Lost Ground* and Zoë Wicomb's *October* — was guided by my desire to explore contemporary South African novels that represent issues of home, dislocation, and nostalgia. Each novel mirrors the 'migrant's home visit': by focusing on a protagonist who has spent a significant amount of time in another country, and whose return to the original homeland is represented as a profound, life-changing event. There are significant parallels between both texts, and therefore, a fertile ground for comparison. In what follows, I will provide an analysis of the bio-literary background of each author and the literary criticism directed at their *oeuvre*, focusing on the critical debates surrounding my selected primary texts.

Michiel Heyns's *Oeuvre* and the Critical Reception of *Lost Ground*

Michiel Heyns is a South African novelist and acclaimed literary translator. *Lost Ground* (2011) is Heyns's fifth novel, for which he was awarded the Herman Charles Bosman Award for English Fiction and the *Sunday Times* Fiction Prize for 2012.² To date, Heyns has published nine novels and translated seven novels, by South African writers including Marlene van Niekerk's *Agaat*, for which his translation received numerous awards.³ In order to offer an overview of Heyns's *oeuvre*, this section will provide a brief summary of each of his novels and its critical reception, with an emphasis on the critical debates surrounding *Lost Ground*.

Heyns's first two novels are set in South Africa, and represent various social facets of recent history, both apartheid and post-apartheid. *The Children's Day* (2002) explores apartheid South Africa during the 1960s through the perspective of an adolescent protagonist. According to Andries Wessels (2012), this novel explores the tension between the private and public sphere, as it reveals that "salvation for the individual is not to be found in the proclamations of a public morality" but in private faith and fidelity

² *Lost Ground* was also shortlisted for the 2012 University of Johannesburg Prize for English Fiction and the M-Net Prize for English Fiction.

³ Heyns's translation of *Agaat* won the 2007 Sunday Times Fiction Award, the 2008 Sol Plaatje Award for Translation, the 2009 South African Translators' Institute Award for Literary Translation, and was shortlisted for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize 2008. With regard to Heyns's other literary translations, these include Marlene van Niekerk's *Memorandum: A Story with Pictures* (2006), Tom Dreyer's *Equatoria* (2008), Etienne van Heerden's *30 Nights in Amsterdam* (2011), Chris Barnard's *Bundu* (2011), Eben Venter's *Wolf, Wolf* (2013), Ingrid Winterbach's *It Might Get Loud* (2015) and Willem Anker's *Red Dog* (2018).

(70). Heyns's second novel, *The Reluctant Passenger* (2003), is set against the background of South Africa's first democratic election and, as stated by David Medalie, "explores aspects of the struggle for power during the period of political transition", as well as, "problems of selfhood (especially the tension between 'nature' and 'culture' in the making of identity), and questions relating to ecology and conservation" (Medalie n.d.: n.p.).

In contrast, Heyns's next two novels focus on characters beyond the borders of South Africa and its recent history, and have been analysed for their postmodern stylistic elements and representations of historical events. *The Typewriter's Tale* (2005) is a historical novel that explores the life of famous writer Henry James through the perspective of his typist. Heyns's next novel, *Bodies Politic* (2008), explores the lives of three women during the suffragette movement. The novel is viewed by critic Anthony Egan as a "meditation on perspective in history [and] a study of the relationship between activism and family" (2008: n.p.), being also praised by Jane Rosenthal for its representation of "foreign voices (that is, not South African) with consummate ease" (2012: n.p.).

Inspired by Henry James's *The Ambassadors*, Heyns's sixth novel, *Invisible Furies* (2012) deals with Christopher Turner — a marginal figure — who travels from Franschhoek (South Africa) to Paris, on a mission for a friend. In his discussion of *Invisible Furies*, J.U. Jacobs analyses the practice of intertextuality, and concludes that Heyns "combines an impressive intertextual feat with an ironic interrogation of intertextuality itself" (2018: 148). The use of intertextuality is also evident in Heyns's seventh novel, *A Sportful Malice: A Comedy of Revenge* (2014), which draws on a 17th century painting by Italian artist Caravaggio as central symbol within the novel. The epistolary narrative focuses on protagonist Michael Marcucci and his encounters with caricatured characters as he travels from Cambridge to Italy for research. Comical and 'camp' in nature, the novel, according to Jacobs (2015), "parodically updates debates about artistic representation from traditional figurative art to present-day conceptual and performance art" (2).

One of Heyns's most recent novels⁴, *I am Pandarus* (2017) is a contemporary interpretation of the classical Trojan characters Troilus, Cressida, and Pandarus. In the novel, an editor is approached by Pandarus, who wants to publish his interpretation of ancient history. Through this adaptation of a classical tale that is set in present-day London, and which offers flashbacks of the old city of Troy, Heyns "explore[s] the depths of his subject with wit and self-reflexive irony" (Anon 2018: n.p.). The novel also explores the theme of marginality, as Jacobs explains that Pandarus defines himself as an "archetypal marginal figure" always on the "periphery of passion" shared by others (2018:138).

As can be gleaned from the above comments, the novels of Michiel Heyns reflect a variety of themes, settings, and characterisations. In an interview with Naomi Meyer, Heyns explains his diverse *oeuvre*, stating that he bears no ideal reader of his work in mind as his "books are too different from each other to be aimed at a particular target market" (Meyer 2012: n.p.). This is perhaps also the reason why Heyns has been the recipient of numerous prizes, with his *oeuvre* gathering significant critical attention.

The novel under analysis, *Lost Ground*, is centred on protagonist Peter Jacobs, who returns to his home-town in Alfredville, South Africa, after spending two decades abroad. Peter visits his childhood home in order to investigate his cousin's murder, but unexpectedly exposes his own shattered sense of belonging. The novel has been praised by critics for its nuanced representation of contemporary South African society, as well as its standing as a detective novel. Since its publication in 2011, *Lost Ground* has received significant critical appraisal as an outstanding embodiment of contemporary South African literature.

With reference to the novel's reflection of social dynamics, Matthew Blackman states that the "[d]escription of South Africa's social and spatial peculiarities will be familiar to readers of South African literature. And issues of identity and belonging are never

⁴To date, *A Poor Season for Whales* (2020) is Heyns's most recent novel. Set in contemporary South Africa, with allusions to Jane Austen's *Emma*, the novel focuses on middle-aged divorcée Mary Crowley and her exchanges with a diverse set of characters in the small-town of Hermanus.

far from the writer's thoughts" (2013: n.p.). The novel's set of characters, particularly protagonist Peter Jacobs, offer commentaries on contemporary issues. As Blackman has explained:

South Africa's identity, Heyns seems to suggest, is one that defies any single rational explanation and defies a normative understanding. Jacobs, on his road to discovery, finds to his confusion that he, like South Africa, is an entity with lost and confused ideals. (2013: n.p.)

Similarly, the novel's concern with South African identity is also emphasised by Renate Lenz, who views *Lost Ground* as a reflection of the "original white male colonisers' or settlers' sense of identity and perception of their standing in the 'new' South Africa" (2017: 1). Discussing the theme of identity and space in the novel, Lenz explains that

Peter's displacement has obscured the boundary between home and world. Being neither here nor there, his postmodern subjectivity comprises a condition of existential isolation and ostracism. Because the character has not succeeded in deconstructing and reconfiguring his identity in terms of the spaces in which he dwells, his perception of self fragments and he suffers an intrapersonal schism of subjectivity. (9)

According to Lenz, the alienated position of Peter Jacobs and his search for identity prompts a mode of self-confrontation which is foregrounded by the intertextual references within the novel (4). The use of intertextuality is also prevalent in the novels that follow *Lost Ground*⁵, and is a common characteristic of Heyns's *oeuvre*.

In her review of *Lost Ground*, Finuala Dowling comments on the novel's position in Heyns's *oeuvre*, stating that it is "the best of *The Children's Day* combined with the best of *The Reluctant Passenger*, *The Typewriter's Tale* and *Bodies Politic*" (2012: n.p.). Dowling characterises the novel as both a literary representation of contemporary South African circumstances and a prime example of the detective novel, concluding that "[w]hether you read it as a whodunit or as a portrait of the nation, *Lost Ground* is utterly compelling – exquisitely written, profound, hilarious and hauntingly familiar" (2012: n.p.).

⁵As stated previously, critics have also analysed aspects of intertextuality in Heyns's other novels *Invisible Furies* (2012) and *A Sportful Malice: A Comedy of Revenge* (2014).

For Sam Naidu, *Lost Ground* is, primarily, an example of South African crime fiction: “a literary, self-conscious crime novel which abounds with devices such as intertext, allusion, allegory, or satire, and which probes universal, existential themes within a distinctly South African setting” (2013: 729). In addition to classifying the novel as a crime novel, with “intrinsic elements of the whodunnit” (736), Naidu discusses the manner in which *Lost Ground* subverts elements of traditional detective fiction by also engaging with existential issues of home and migration. Thus, Naidu asserts that *Lost Ground* encourages the reader to empathise with the protagonist, specifically “to identify with his suffering – the loss and sense of annihilation he feels at having so profoundly bungled the investigation” (735). Naidu also comments on Heyns’s use of irony to explore the protagonist’s psychological anguish:

irony and narration are what enable Peter’s survival in a moment of extreme distress and dissolution, then Heyns’s ultimate aim in this literary detective novel is to show that although the detective may fail to solve the crime, the narrating of the detective’s attempt to solve the crime is what holds value (2013: 737).

Similarly, for J.U. Jacobs, the protagonist of *Lost Ground* is a marginal character who uses irony for his self-preservation (2018: 139). By comparing this novel with *Invisible Furies*, Jacobs illustrates how the protagonists of Heyns’s novels are often alienated characters⁶, leading him to conclude that “[m]arginality is probably the most recognisable theme in Michiel Heyns’s fiction; a number of his novels conclude with the protagonists having to come to terms with their marginalised state” (138).

Furthermore, in exploring the theme of marginality in *Lost Ground*, Jacobs also explores Peter’s alienated position as a result of his exile from his home country (2016: 257), an interpretation more aligned with a postcolonial literary approach. Analysing the novel in conjunction with Ivan Vladislavić’s *Double Negative*, Jacobs explores the concept of diasporic homecoming and the manner in which home is represented as a place where “exile is doubly relocated, doubly dislocated” (239) in these two novels.

⁶ In a recent article, Jacobs compares the marginal protagonists of Heyns’s novels *Lost Ground*, *A Sportful Malice*, *I Am Pandarus*, and *Invisible Furies* (2018:138).

In conclusion, *Lost Ground* has been received by critics as an outstanding literary work that accurately depicts contemporary South African society in the form of a detective novel. With regards to characterisation, Peter Jacobs is viewed as a detective-like figure, affected by issues of alienation and identity. Critics have also discussed the text's subversion of the detective novel genre and the author's use of irony and intertextual references. While the genre and social contexts of the novel have been thoroughly analysed, there has been no distinct exploration of the novel's representation of the migrant's home visit as a catalytic event. It is, therefore, my intention to explore the representation of the return-home visit in *Lost Ground* as an important fictional trope that reflects the migrant protagonist's crisis of identity and destabilised understandings of home.

Zoë Wicomb's *Oeuvre* and the Critical Reception of *October*

In contrast to Michiel Heyns, who lives and works in South Africa, Zoë Wicomb is a South African author and academic who has lived in Scotland since 1994. While Heyns's debut novel was published in 2002, Wicomb has been publishing literary work since 1987. Furthermore, whereas Heyns's work reflects various themes and settings, Wicomb's *oeuvre* exhibits a continual interest in issues of transnationalism and migration, and is set typically in South Africa and Scotland — reflecting the author's own rich experience of migration. Wicomb's sustained focus on postcolonial concerns and her position as an international writer has garnered significant critical commentary and a large international audience.

October (2014) is Wicomb's third novel, which was shortlisted for the 2015 *Sunday Times Barry Ronge Fiction Prize*. Wicomb's *oeuvre*, for which she received the 2013 Windham–Campbell Literature Prize, includes the novels *David's Story* (2000) and *Playing in the Light* (2006), as well as the collections of short stories *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) and *The One That Got Away* (2008). A distinguished academic, Wicomb's *oeuvre* also includes non-fiction essays and literary criticism. In order to encapsulate the main themes of Wicomb's literary works, this section will provide a brief overview of each of her novels and short-story collections, the critical discussions surrounding *October* will be analysed more extensively.

Wicomb's first fictional work, *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987) received international critical acclaim. It is a collection of interlinked short stories that centre on protagonist Frieda Shenton and the people of her home-town. Published during apartheid, the stories reflect how the system of racial oppression affected individual lives, particularly the members of the coloured community. Critic Bharati Mukherjee viewed the stories as a search “for identity in a harshly hierarchical society” (1987: n.p.). For Derek Attridge, the story collection focuses on racial issues through protagonist Frieda, as she “registers the injustices of apartheid and the complexities of racial stratification not as the explicit impositions of political ideology but as daily, practical impediments to [the protagonist's] ambitions and relationships” (2017: 1). The stories, therefore, represent individuals in overdetermined times — marginal characters who, according to critic Dorothy Driver, are often “considered unimportant

and unempowered in any grander scheme of things” (2017: 9). Wicomb’s fictional work, Driver explains,

gives ethical focus to figures from large communities, remote villages or non-affluent suburbs who reveal the capacity to retain their ‘ordinariness’ by stepping out of the bizarre version of reality put in place through distorting effects of power relations and normalised as the real. (2017: 9)

Hence, the term ‘translocal’ is applied frequently to Wicomb’s work, as it aptly describes the manner in which Wicomb’s fiction challenges the politics of location by creating “deterritorialised spaces for other kinds of subjectivities and social practices” (2017: 9).

In his discussion of *You Can’t Get Lost in Cape Town*, Andrew Van der Vlies reflects on Wicomb’s impatience with readers’ tendency to view the postcolonial writings of black women through an autobiographical lens (2018: 15); he asserts that Wicomb’s use of unreliable narration, metafiction, and fragmentation is a way in which she addresses this difficulty of representation (16). The use of these literary techniques, according to Van der Vlies, also addresses the ethical implications of telling the stories of others.

David’s Story (2000) is Wicomb’s first novel which, according to critics Hugh William Macmillan and Lucy Valerie Graham, has “received more academic attention than any other post-apartheid novel with the single exception of Coetzee’s *Disgrace*” (2011: 332). The novel is set during a time of transition in South Africa, and focuses on protagonist, David Dirkse, who analyses his position in relation to the history of his coloured community and within South Africa’s changing landscape. For Macmillan and Graham, *David’s Story* is a post-apartheid and postmodern novel concerned with “the impossibility of discovering or telling the truth about the past” (2011: 331). The novel explores the protagonist’s struggle to investigate his personal history, as well as the broader efforts of the TRC⁷ to establish the truth of past atrocities. As Macmillan and Graham conclude, the “novel’s narrative complexity and multi-layered portrayal of ethical dilemmas should compel readers to confront the impossibility of discerning a single, simple truth about the history and future of South Africa” (2011: 346). Hence,

⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

David's Story calls attention to the difficulty of representation and the ethical consequences of story-telling, echoing the sentiments of Wicomb's earlier literary works.

J.U. Jacobs, for his part, explores David's struggle with identity politics, asserting that the novel's "metadiscourse" subverts any linear attempt of identity construction and renders Griqua ethnic nationalism a "mythical construct" (2016: 86). Jacobs also states that the "conundrum of a coloured South African identity, its ambiguities and dilemmas, in the context of apartheid with its essentialised racial categories, as well as in the aftermath of apartheid, has remained a dominant theme in all Wicomb's works of fiction" (78).

Similar issues of identity are also relevant regarding Wicomb's next novel, *Playing in the Light* (2006). Set in post-apartheid South Africa, the novel centres on protagonist Marion Campbell, who experiences a crisis of identity shortly after discovering that her parents have been racially 'passing' for white. *Playing in the Light* focuses on Marion's investigation of her coloured ancestry and her place in post-apartheid South Africa. Critics have mainly focused on the novel's treatment of identity and its representation of racial ambiguity. David Hoegberg (2018) reflects on the novel's use of intertextuality in exploring the multi-faceted nature of identity. He states that

[t]he novel's sheer range and number of intertextual allusions testify to the fertile and creative process by which texts, like identities, are constructed from multiple elements. Far from trying to conceal its origins, the novel celebrates them, and Wicomb emerges as the expert orchestrator of this process. (2018: 500)

Another interesting view of *Playing in the Light* is taken by critic Emmanuel Ngwira (2016), who suggests that the trope of gardening in the novel is a metaphor for the misrepresentation of one's race: "the planting and meticulous tending of the family garden speaks to the Campbells' efforts to cultivate and nurture their whiteness" (2016: 184). Ngwira, therefore, concludes that the novel represents racial identity as "a form of 'play', a form of performance, whose authenticity depends not just on outward appearance but on how convincing one's performance turns out to be" (2016: 191).

Yet another perspective on *Playing in the Light* is offered by Dirk Kloppe (2011), who views the novel in terms of nostalgia akin to the uncanny. According to Kloppe, Marion's discovery of true racial identity places her in "an uncanny place, where things are different but the same" (2011: 153). Therefore, her dreams, and her recollection of the past after finding out the truth about her ancestry is considered a form of nostalgia. As he explains, in

[e]nquiring into the value of restorative nostalgia, the novel has in fact deployed a mode of reflective nostalgia, a nostalgia that knows there can be no return to the past even as it describes the return of this past, and one that also knows there can be no return to the whiteness this past had sought to fix in place. (2011: 155)

Wicomb's next literary work, *The One That Got Away* (2008) is set in Cape Town and Glasgow, and focuses on a range of characters from both countries. It has mostly been explored through a postcolonial lens. Aaron Eastley (2017), for example, analyses the short stories' reflection of diasporic transnationalism, commending Wicomb's versatility in depicting cross-cultural and transnational relationships (2017: 160). Eastley also praises Wicomb for privileging the private sphere, as he states that "the stories show how, out of the generic circumstance of global movement or displacement (which might also be categorized as exile or diaspora), the specifics of individual circumstances and fraught human relationships come to the fore" (160).

In her exploration of the stories, Virginia Richter (2011) reflects on the relationship between South Africa and Scotland as uncanny. Richter asserts that "Europe is Africa's ghost, and vice versa, while Glasgow is an uncanny reduplication of Cape Town", with this long-standing connection between the two locales "lead[ing] to the various protagonists' sense of disorientation, a disorientation that is equally experienced by the reader" (2011: 376). In addition, Richter also considers Wicomb's position as a cosmopolitan author, explaining that "[w]hile Wicomb has deservedly been acclaimed as one of the proponents of cosmopolitan literature, she also shows the limitations of the concept by insisting on the irreducible misery of displacement and cultural alienation" (2016: 386).

The One That Got Away has also been explored in terms of gender by Emmanuel Ngwira (2017). Analysing the collection of stories in conjunction with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), Ngwira commends both literary works for representing transnational migration from the perspective of women. Ngwira also explores each protagonist's engagement with cultural and historical artefacts as an interrogation of exoticism (2011: 295).

Similarly, and by drawing on Judith Butler's theories on gender, Laue (2017) explores *The One That Got Away* along with Wicomb's earlier work *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. Laue concludes that the female characters, of selected stories within the two collections, redefine the potential of coloured women in South Africa (2017: 30). By "redefining their bodies as sites worthy of respect, and by actively taking part in the public sphere of politics", Wicomb's characters "reclaim their place in the world as beautiful, politically conscious agents" (Laue 2017: 30).

Overall, as can be gleaned from the above-mentioned critical opinions, Wicomb's *oeuvre* represents different phases of South Africa's recent history, with her early works focusing on apartheid and the transition era, and her later works focusing on post-apartheid and broader postcolonial concerns. Critics have commended Wicomb's depiction of personal circumstances in spaces overdetermined by adverse socio-political condition and have emphasised the "tensions between public and private" in her writing which, according to Van der Vlies, "is at the heart of the Wicomb project" (2018:7). Wicomb is mainly viewed as a writer of the "translocal" because of her "avowed lack of interest in nationalism" and "her astute attention to spatial juxtapositions and interactions" (Driver 2017: 7).

October is one of Zoë Wicomb's most recent⁸ fictional works, which is more aligned with 'translocal' postcolonial concerns. The novel foregrounds migrant protagonist Mercia Murray and focuses on her ambivalent relationship to her old home in South

⁸ Wicomb's latest novel is *Still Life* (2020). It is an historical novel that focuses on famous Scottish poet Thomas Pringle, and is concerned with themes of identity, time, and space.

Africa and her new home in Scotland. The novel juxtaposes Cape Town and Glasgow, so that “[e]ach of these places is now imbued with a tinge of that other time or place, and are thus no longer either exclusively ‘Scottish’ or ‘African’” (Driver 2017: 7). Of a similar view, critic Meg Samuelson (2017) has stated that Wicomb’s writing provides “a provincial-cosmopolitan point of view that articulates a translocal voice” (178). Samuelson reveals the manner in which the novel illustrates “the unhomeliness of home and simultaneously dethrones the privileged perspective assigned to the exile” through the “use of free indirect discourse” (178). Furthermore, in her analysis of *October*, Samuelson refers to the novel as “a tale of two women”: of Mercia who is the “restless ‘citizen of the world’” and Sylvie (Mercia’s sister-in-law), who is “comfortably inhabiting the position of ‘countrywoman’” (186).

The difference between the characters of Mercia and Sylvie has also been discussed by Attridge (2017), who contrasts these two characters in order to explore the novel’s theme of belonging. For Attridge, belonging is a key theme in the novel that is expressed through Mercia “for whom belonging is a problematic concept”, and Sylvie, who “without questioning it, belong[s] to [her] place” (5). Furthermore, in discussing setting in Wicomb’s fiction, Attridge differentiates *October* from Wicomb’s earlier works. While the characters in Wicomb’s previous works are represented as undergoing a complex transition from one country to another, Mercia, the protagonist of *October*, has spent a significant amount of time in both countries; therefore, Attridge asserts that Mercia is “in a different situation”: instead of a shift from one country to another, Mercia’s connection to “Scotland and the Cape are unsettling in both directions” (2017: 4).

The novel’s theme of belonging is also emphasised by Jacobs, as he states that the “Cape Town-Glasgow axis” of Wicomb’s writing reflects her “emigrant journey” and her “knowledge about the expatriate’s experience of unbelonging” (2016: 95). In his reading of *October*, Jacobs considers the novel’s use of intertextuality in exploring themes of home and belonging, and points out that Wicomb explicitly refers to Robinson’s novel *Home* (2009) throughout *October*. Intertextuality, according to Jacobs, is a technique that “precipitates and helps to structure the discourse of home and unbelonging in Wicomb’s narrative” (2016: 102).

An interesting perspective on the novel is provided by Antoinette Pretorius (2015), who also charts the theme of belonging in *October* but through the novel's representation of food. Pretorius analyses food as defining "one's sense of individual identity, as well as a collective sense of cultural belonging" (646). She reveals the representation of food in the novel as "inherently informed by a sense of the uncanny: food is represented as being both familiar and strange, and both empowering and dangerous" (655). Pretorius highlights the representation of food in the novel as a "marker of [class] difference" (656).

For Aaron Eastley, *October* — similar to *The One That Got Away* — explores the challenges of the "intimate, familial sphere" (2017: 168). In his view, Mercia has chosen a life abroad to get away from her family; however, upon her return to South Africa, she is forced to confront her conflicted feelings about her family and traumatic childhood (169). According to Eastley, *October* shows that although Mercia is internally conflicted, she is "drawn back to her first home and the family that she chooses never to abandon" and is able to carry "her home in herself" (172).

Critic Liani Lochner (2018) analyses *October* in conjunction with J.M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron* (1990). Both novels represent female characters who conduct autobiographical projects which "interrogate the idea of the writer being in control of her narrative: the idea of authorship itself" (Lochner 2018: 3). According to Lochner, Mercia's autobiographical project in which she explores her personal history, is deliberately staged to highlight Wicomb's "objection to purely historical readings of black women's writing" (3). In fact, elsewhere, "Wicomb made a point of mentioning her own grandchildren before introducing *October* as a novel about 'childlessness'" (4). Lochner also explores Wicomb's (and Coetzee's) "acute awareness of the writer's dispossession in and through language" (10), which is illustrated in their respective novels through "an aesthetic engagement with the figure of alterity" (8). For example, referring to Mercia's reading of Robinson's novel *Home* in *October*, Lochner explains that:

[h]er literary and affectively unsettled reading of this novel [...] enables a certain dislocation from the narratives that dominate her family relations and initiates a reconsideration of herself in relation to the places and the people [...] who represent home. (10)

Therefore, in her interrogation of the idea of authorship, Lochner concludes that “Wicomb’s novels thus make a claim for literary reading, a different encounter with the aesthetic, as an event” that is subject to the reader’s interpretation (13).

To sum up, much like the other fictional works by Zoë Wicomb, *October* has received significant critical attention. Most of the critics mentioned have surveyed the novel using a postcolonial approach. The novel has been explored through diverse foci: autobiography, home, belonging, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism. While these explorations are particularly useful for my thesis, I have noted that the novel’s reflection of the migrant’s return visit has not been investigated by critics. Migrants who return to their original country after a substantial time spent abroad are in a liminal position: they experience dislocation and nostalgia resulting from the journey from one country to another. Hence, my close-text analysis will explore the representation of Mercia’s return-home visit in *October* as a turning point in the migrant’s trajectory, and as an event that destabilises conventional definitions of home and belonging.

1.3. STRUCTURE OF THIS DISSERTATION

The aim of my dissertation is to explore the literary representation of the migrant's return-home visit in Michiel Heyns's *Lost Ground* and Zoë Wicomb's *October*. I will analyse the visit as a significant event that emphasises the precarious position of the migrant, and the inadequacy of conventional ideas of home as a place of refuge, particularly in contemporary times of increased global mobility.

Chapter One (Introduction, Theoretical Framework, and Literature Review) introduces the topic of the migrant home visit, the primary texts, and the theory underpinning my study. The Theoretical Framework (1.1.) informed by postcolonial literary studies, explores concepts of home, return-home visits, dislocation, and nostalgia. In the Literature Review (1.2.), I have engaged with the critical debates surrounding Michiel Heyns and Zoë Wicomb. My survey of critical responses has included an analysis of their bio-literary backgrounds and the literary criticism of the *oeuvre* of each author. In the next two chapters, I conduct a close-text analysis of the representation of the home visit in each novel. As highlighted by critic Sabine Marschall, the return-home visit is an important event "in time and space that consists of both emotional and cognitive reactions [...] involving complex interactions between individual and place" (2017: 142). Taking my cue from Marschall's insight, I analyse the home visit in three registers: *place*, *self*, and *time*.

Chapter Two (The Representation of the Migrant Home Visit in Lost Ground) focuses on Peter Jacobs's return to his childhood home, and his alienation in both his home country (South Africa) and his host country (England). By drawing on the established theoretical framework and the critical debates indicated in the literature review, I investigate the novel's reflection of the home visit and its implications for the migrant's sense of identity and belonging, focusing on the protagonist's shifting sense of *place*, *self*, and *time*.

Chapter Three (The Representation of the Migrant Home Visit in October) focuses on the fictional representation of the home visit in Wicomb's *October*. While *Lost Ground* reflects a male perspective on the experience of the migrant home visit, *October* offers a female perspective through protagonist Mercia Murray. This chapter will therefore focus on the impact of her home visit on her ambivalent relationship to both South

Africa and Scotland. As with the previous chapter, I will focus on the migrant's shifting sense of place, self, and time.

In *Conclusionary Remarks*, I draw brief comparisons between the two primary texts based on the findings of my close-text analysis. This chapter sums up the aspects of the return-home visit and parallels the manner in which each text represents such an emblematic event. I am particularly interested in contrasting the differing literary techniques and character portrayals. I will also conclude my study and offer my overall findings regarding relevance of the migrant's home visit as a literary trope.

2. THE REPRESENTATION OF THE MIGRANT'S HOME VISIT IN *LOST GROUND*

INTRODUCTION

Lost Ground (2011) by Michiel Heyns is a novel about a migrant's return-home visit to his original home country. It is set in contemporary, post-apartheid South Africa with sporadic references to England. The protagonist's dramatic and cathartic home visit is presented through a first-person narrative that spans 10 days.

The narrative focuses on Peter Jacobs, who returns to South Africa after 22 years of self-imposed exile in England. Recently separated from his British partner James, Peter decides to visit his childhood home, the (fictional) village of Alfredville. During the visit, he reconnects with his childhood best friend, Bennie, and becomes friends with another visitor to the town, Nonyameko. He also has an array of unusual encounters with the local people of his village. Peter returns to Alfredville to write an article for *The New Yorker* about his cousin, Desirée — who had been allegedly murdered by her coloured husband. Peter's envisaged article is not primarily motivated by his personal sentiment of loss of a family member, but rather by the wish to investigate racial complexities of post-apartheid, democratic South Africa. However, as Peter investigates Desirée's murder, his repressed personal feelings towards his original home begin to surface and cloud his judgement. The climax of the novel takes place when Peter wrongfully accuses his best friend, Bennie, of Desirée's murder, subsequent to which Bennie commits suicide. After finding out that the murderer is in fact Bennie's wife, Peter is shattered emotionally and abandons his investigative article. The novel ends abruptly with Peter clutching the hand of Nonyameko in the midst of an emotional breakdown, as he is deeply disturbed by the events of his home visit.

In terms of genre, *Lost Ground* — as mentioned in 1.2. — may be considered an example of crime fiction. This form of novel has become prevalent in the South African literary scene because, as Christopher Warnes (2012) explains, writers are using fiction as a vehicle for reflecting on the persistent source of social anxiety concerning the excessive crime rate in South Africa. Crime fiction is popular with South African readers because it investigates and expresses their social fears in a safe, orderly

manner. In a typical detective novel, which is a sub-genre of the crime novel, the detective restores order: by the end of the novel, the detective's investigation results in the vindication of the innocent characters and the punishment of criminals. Warnes explains that through the figure of the detective,

the fictional projection of fantasies of legibility and control serves an extenuating function for middle-class readerships, facilitating the negotiation of threat, and managing anxieties consequent on the dissolution of the apartheid-era's (false) certainties. (2012: 984)

The 'negotiation of the threat' is often embodied through the persona of the detective whose journey, Warnes (2012) asserts, is mirrored by the reader (991), and who is seen as an "antidote to disorder, violence, and uncertainty" (986). Crime fiction, Warnes concludes, permits writers to have both "readerly and socially-responsible reflexes": to reach a large readership and to maintain the "commitment to political and social conscientising that has long been a feature of South African literature" (991).

Lost Ground can be understood as a detective novel in which Heyns displays his 'readerly and socially-responsible reflexes', by way of his representation of Peter's investigation (which is made to drive the action), and his detailed depiction of the country's socio-political conditions. The novel can also be described as a "whodunnit", a sub-genre of detective novel in which, Warnes explains, "past events are unravelled in a static present" (2012: 982); this is evident in the manner that Peter uses his investigative skills to reconstruct the events surrounding Desirée's murder. The narrative strategy utilised by Heyns is also indicative of detective fiction. The novel uses chronological first-person narration in the form of a diary. The narrative oscillates between Peter's cynical interior monologue, which resembles that of an unsentimental investigator, and the periodic email exchange with his ex-partner James, an exchange mostly superficial and ironic in nature.

While reading *Lost Ground* within the crime fiction genre is insightful, I bring another possible reading to the table. Seen from another perspective, Peter's position during his return-home visit can also be perceived as an illustration of the migrant's complex positionality. Having lived as a migrant in another country, Peter's emotionless and mocking interior monologue is indicative of his distant and judgemental attitude

towards his home country. His ironic email exchanges with his ex-partner, Londoner James, represent his repressed and ambiguous feelings regarding both home country and host country. Through this email exchange, Peter attempts to distance himself from the transformative insights gleaned during the visit to his former home.

Peter's visit to his erstwhile home place, Alfredville, is an important event that results in "self-transforming experiences and profound personal insights" (Marschall 2017: 141). His struggle to re-integrate into Alfredville, I argue, underlines the inadequacy of conventional definitions of 'home' as a place of certain belonging and emotional fulfilment. It is also during this return-home visit that his fractured identity is revealed; Peter's feelings of dislocation and nostalgia, as experienced during his visit, lead to a crisis of identity.

In this chapter, I will explore the novel's fictional reflection of the return-home visit. Through the concepts of home, dislocation, and nostalgia, I will discuss the different aspects of the return visit in order to underline its importance as a concentrated event that affects the identity of migrants and their perception of 'home'. Marschall encapsulates the home visit as a complex subjective interaction between individual and place (2017: 142). Taking my cue from the above observation, I will reflect on the migrant's home visit in relation to *place*, *self*, and *time*. I begin the next section by exploring Peter's sense of place, in order to reflect on traditional understandings of home.

2.1. A SHIFTING SENSE OF PLACE

Having left South Africa in 1989 (to avoid conscription during apartheid), Peter returns in 2010, to a new social situation with a different set of societal problems. Upon his arrival in Alfredville, the first thing that Peter Jacobs notices about his old home-town is the physical changes to Queen's Hotel, which (besides its name), has completely "abandoned its former identity" (Heyns 2011: 5). A "respectably gloomy establishment" (5), the Queen's Hotel used to cater for the odd commercial traveller and the Alfredville locals. Most of its business came from its bar and lounge (which were frequented by white villagers), as well as its 'non-European' bar located in the back of the hotel. At present, the hotel's interior has been modernised from its "half-hearted fifties look" (9); the bar is now a meeting place for a diverse crowd of tourists, businessmen, and farmers. Much like Queen's Hotel, Peter's Alfredville home has abandoned its former identity and has changed both physically and socially.

Peter is represented as transformed by his prolonged self-imposed exile: having lived in London, a global metropolis, Peter has also become accustomed to a cosmopolitan mode of living. As a result, his perception of his home village is largely influenced by his London experience. Due to his altered lifestyle and his changed country of residence, Peter's home visit is marked by difference and can be seen as a "process of identity negotiation" (Duval 2004: 57). Indeed, as Marschall states,

[i]nteraction with family members, friends, neighbours, former work colleagues and other people in the home environment provides performative frames for different social identities, categories and roles that the person once occupied. The home trip offers a temporary escape from loathed group identities (e.g. 'foreigner') ascribed to them and discursively constructed in the host country. However, the prolonged time away from home renders previously familiar roles and identity positions more complex and requires their *renegotiation*; some are eagerly embraced and others rejected. (2017: 217; my emphasis)

Although Peter feels liberated from stereotypical "group identities" while visiting the old home, he has spent a prolonged time away from it, and must now re-negotiate his position. Peter's visit underlines the precariousness of the migrant's relationship with his old home, a place conventionally thought of as an identity anchor. As Cristóbal Mendoza and Ricard Morén-Alegret (2012) have said, a central element of identity construction is the individual's 'sense of place' — the individual's "subjective feelings"

directed towards a specific environment (763). Therefore, during their return visits, migrants can be described as having an altered sense of place, as they do not perceive their environment the same way that they did prior to their emigration. Peter's home visit is then characterised by a shifting sense of place, in which he must negotiate the difference between "the homeland as remembered to what is seen and experienced" (Duval 2004: 57).

The negotiation of this difference is measured by Peter's multi-sensory experience of home. "A sense of home", asserts Marschall, can be established through "subjective, multisensory and bodily sensations such as the feel of the climate, the smells, sounds, and especially the taste of local food, but first and foremost through social participation or interaction with local relations" (2017: 147). Similarly, Allen asserts that the feeling for home "is built from sensory inputs (smell and vision), memory, and emotions that create in the mind a holistic sense of the self in a specific place" (2015: 8). Bearing the insights of these critics in mind, Peter's response to the sensory environment is an indication of his relationship to his original home.

Therefore, through an exploration of his subjective multi-sensory responses to his birth place, I will now investigate the depiction of Peter's relationship to his external environment. The juxtaposition between 'host' country' and 'home' country highlights the manner in which Peter's sense of place is affected by his experience of a foreign country. As the next section will illustrate, Peter's experience in England becomes "a foil against which the home is experienced during the temporary return visit" (Marschall 2017: 218).

The Juxtaposition of 'Host' Country and 'Home' Country: From England, back to South Africa

I look out over the empty street, trying for an emotion, a sense of recovering a lost past, but nothing presents itself. Proust himself would have had a hard time with Alfredville. (Heyns 2011:13)

From the moment Peter Jacobs arrives in Alfredville, his natal place, he struggles against conventional conceptions of home that assume one's country of origin should be a primary site of belonging and emotional fulfilment. The above quotation is an

illustration of his inner tensions: although Peter would like to have a positive emotional response towards his homeland, it is with cold and critical eyes that he describes Alfredville. Return visits often function as “‘reality checks’ against the tendency to idealize the homeland and to think that society has remained unchanged and static” (Barnes 2001, cited in Muggeridge and Dona 2006: 429). So, from the onset, Peter recognises the changes to his homeland, but being influenced by his experience abroad, he appears critical of the socio-political changes that occurred in his home country during his absence:

South Africa — what does one say? It seems to be muddling along, the roads are in reasonable shape, those that aren’t being dug up for said World Cup, though the drivers are still terrible. Judging by the conversation of the chap next to me on the plane, a corporate type from Stellenbosch, an upmarket university town that rather fancies itself, any hitch in any arrangement confirms the whites in their none-too-covert convictions that blacks (or *they* as they are elliptically but pregnantly called) can’t run a country. Not, I seem to remember, that they (the other them!) did a much better job when they (we!) had the opportunity. Heavens, the very pronouns are confused in this place. (Heyns 2011: 19; original emphasis)

Peter’s frustration with the use of pronouns (‘they’) — which refers to black people as the ‘other’ — points to his criticism of the racism that still exists in South Africa. In fact, Peter’s home visit was initially driven by his scepticism regarding South Africa: he returns primarily to write a story on the negatively biased racial relationships that still exist in the country. As Desirée’s coloured husband is the chief suspect for her murder, Peter plans to write an article against the background of Shakespeare’s *Othello*.

Peter is also characterised as being particularly critical of the current socio-political contexts of South Africa, commenting on issues surrounding service delivery (“the country’s power crisis”: 10), and crime (9). A general dissatisfaction regarding current affairs in South Africa is displayed in Peter and James’s discussion of crime in South Africa (18). Peter’s view of his home country is mostly negative, as he is influenced by what he has read and heard about his country from abroad.

Later, in an email to James (his ex-partner), Peter states ironically that he has survived his “first day in Africa without getting mugged or raped” (19) but explains that his mobile

phone had been stolen on the Heathrow Express in England, thus qualifying the matter of crime as of global concern. Overall, Peter is depicted as being disillusioned by post-apartheid South Africa. This dissatisfaction with the socio-political aspect of his home country is a result of his constant juxtaposing of South Africa with England, the latter becoming a “foil” by which Peter observes South Africa (Marschall 2017: 218).

Many of Peter’s critical insights about his home country are presented as an echo of Alfredville gossip; but, as the narrative progresses, his more personal feelings towards South Africa are revealed. As a narrator, Peter often has a very cynical tone as he has repressed his emotions. Peter’s detached attitude matches that of a ‘detective’, somebody who must assess information impartially. Several critics have written about this novel as a detective novel⁹, and while I understand the value of such pursuit, my focus is on the representation of the protagonist’s experience as a migrant. As mentioned before, in my view, the novel primarily highlights the precarious position of migrants and their sense of alienation as experienced during a home visit.

As the narrative progresses, Peter’s criminal investigation embroils him more and more with the people and places of Alfredville, and he starts experiencing feelings of emotional dislocation. He feels psychologically fragmented as he simultaneously attempts to maintain his connection to London friends while re-establishing his connection to Alfredville. As the next section will demonstrate, Peter visits significant places from his youth in Alfredville in an attempt to find the familiarity and belonging traditionally associated with one’s childhood home.

Sites of Significance

Driven to return home in order to write an article on Desirée’s murder, Peter does not intend to stay in Alfredville for long, as he explains in an email to James that he “must just get this story written and then bugger off” (Heyns 2011: 19). However, Peter’s article is not the sole reason for his return, he has some very important, though well-hidden, reasons of another kind. As Marschall asserts, “overt pragmatic reasons [for returning home] may be underpinned by deeper psychological needs” (2017: 142).

⁹ Critics Sam Naidu (2013), Blackman (2013), and Dowling (2012) have analysed *Lost Ground* predominantly as a detective novel.

Although Peter is apparently driven by the search for Desirée's murderer, he is simultaneously doing some soul-searching, as he is seen pursuing places from his past. Peter's return to familiar places is what Duval (2004) would call an "exercise" through which migrants relate to their environment — the physical and social elements of their homeland (57). His interactions with these places are, therefore, significant as they reveal how he feels about his old home, subsequent to his migration and experience of a foreign country.

The Queen's Hotel

Naomi Meyer's suggestion that Alfredville is "a microcosm of the whole of South Africa" (2012: n.p.) is most evident in the range of characters encountered at the Queen's Hotel. Very much the outsider in his own home village — both as a detective figure and an emigrant — Peter stays at the hotel instead of seeking lodging with relatives. Thus, Peter is similar to many returning emigrants, who prefer "air-conditioned hotels over relatives' homes" in order to display their "modernity and 'otherness' from friends and family left behind" (Arnone 2011, cited in Marschall 2017: 142).

Peter fondly remembers the hotel bar from his teenage years. Now, as an adult he observes the different patrons, among whom he notices a group of men, with one making a racist joke. Peter reflects:

I groan inwardly — I'd forgotten that South African men celebrate their togetherness by ritual clowning for one another's benefit. And racist jokes, I'd hoped, would at least have gone underground under the new dispensation. (Heyns 2011: 21)

In the same bar, Peter is drawn to a black woman reading J.M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*, and comments that "whereas it's no great event on the London Tube to be reading the same book as the person opposite you [...], in Alfredville it is, in my experience, unprecedented" (Heyns 2011: 25). He is intrigued by the woman who sits in a bar among old-town folk cracking racist jokes, reading a novel predominantly associated with a white readership. It turns out that the woman reading the J.M. Coetzee novel is Nonyameko, a psychologist. Peter is drawn to her because, like him, she seems to be an outsider. He befriends Nonyameko, and is surprised to hear that

she too grew up in Alfredville. It is mainly through this budding friendship with Nonyameko that Peter gains insight into his migrant identity.

Nonyameko becomes Peter's confidante during his visit: through his conversations with her, Peter gains clarity around his criminal investigation and various aspects of his own identity. For instance, when Peter reveals to Nonyameko that he is back in Alfredville on a writing project, she brings to his attention the clichés of his situation:

'You are a novelist who is having trouble finding a subject in England, and now you have come out here to write a novel about an ex-South African coming back, [...] a man who is forced to revisit the past, or *confront* the past, more particularly his own tortured past, the torture usually figurative, sometimes literal, [...]. At the end of the novel he will go back to England vaguely defeated and strongly relieved.' (Heyns 2011: 28; original emphasis)

Nonyameko's comments function as metafictional layers to the narrative, highlighting the constructedness of migrant identity and how an increased awareness of self can be beneficial for migrants. As Marschall states, in her exploration of migrant identity,

[m]ore attention should also be paid to the ways in which individuals define and classify themselves. Whether someone considers him/herself an expatriate, a refugee or an immigrant says much about their sense of identity in relation to their place of origin, their current home and their potential desire to embark on a return journey. (2017: 25)

While Peter avoids introspection, preferring to observe the change in the people and places around him rather than the change within himself, Nonyameko, throughout the novel, constantly pushes him to define himself. An example is their conversation about identity:

'Is national identity the only kind of identity?' I ask [...].
'It is the first one,' she says [...]. 'The others follow on from that.'
'I'm sorry, I just don't agree. I have a social identity, a sexual identity, a professional identity, a racial identity...I even have a name, for heaven's sake. I have a bloody *passport* to prove it.'
She is unimpressed with this litany. 'And where in the midst of these identities, is the one you call yourself?' She asks. (Heyns 2011:96-97)

Peter struggles to define himself, as well as his relationship to South Africa. Although he has spent decades living in London, Peter has found no home there either, and has

lived in limbo, in a kind of emotional 'homelessness'. Peter's detached state can be better understood if one reflects on Zygmunt Bauman's insights into the matter of migrants in contemporary times. According to Bauman (as mentioned in 1.1.), there are two kinds of people on the move: 'tourists' and 'vagabonds'. By virtue of his economic advantage and position as a legal migrant, Peter is a tourist as he is similar to the privileged migrants of Bauman's theory who "stay or move at their hearts desire" and "abandon the site when the new untried opportunities beckon elsewhere" (Bauman 1996:14). His position is in direct contrast with the character of Vincent, a 'vagabond', an illegal migrant subjected to the inhospitality of both home country and host country, moving because he has "no other choice" (Bauman 1996:14).

Previously a legal advocate in his home country, Vincent is an immigrant from the Democratic Republic of Congo, currently a car guard in Alfredville. As somebody who has also left his own country, Peter takes an interest in Vincent. Although Peter has knowledge of the migrant experience of dislocation, he does not know the economically impoverished reality of an illegal migrant. Existing on the margins of society, Vincent is always seen outside the Queen's Hotel and on the street. He provides a key piece of evidence for Peter's investigation of Desirée's murder before he himself is murdered in a suspected xenophobic attack. His abrupt and unsettling exit from the novel symbolises the xenophobia that still exists in South Africa.¹⁰ It also sheds light on the complexity and diversity of experience encountered by migrants (by 'vagabonds' as compared with 'tourists'). As Ahmed has also stated,

[t]he subject who has chosen to be homeless, rather than is homeless due to the contingency of 'external' circumstances, is certainly a subject who is privileged, and for whom having or not having a home does not affect its ability to occupy a given space. (2000: 83)

To apply Bauman's clarification, Peter (the 'tourist'), unlike Vincent the 'vagabond', is a man with economic resources and political autonomy, so that his choice of home is dependent on preference: a situation which renders his inability to form an authentic attachment to either London or Alfredville very disconcerting.

¹⁰ Although *Lost Ground* was published in 2011, xenophobia still remains a major issue in South Africa, with many South Africans resorting to violence in order to display their dissatisfaction with the presence of disenfranchised foreigners in their country.

Peter's inability to form an attachment to either place can also be understood in the light of Bida who, inspired by Heidegger's theories of dwelling¹¹, explains the manner in which modern mass mobility has led to home being perceived in "calculative" ("quantitative") terms instead of affective ("qualitative") terms (2018: 17). Bida explains that

[w]hat Heidegger calls calculative thinking nurtures a drift toward ease, profit, or trends and fosters a culture of disposable and replaceable connections and investments, while dwelling and meditative thinking support a means of mooring experience and integrating it in a more representative manner that speaks to the qualitative nature of an individual's lived experience. (17-18)

Indeed, one might conclude that Peter fosters 'calculative thinking', which is evident in the fact that he returns to Alfredville not for any overt emotional reason but because of a journalistic project. He views his home of origin in 'calculative' terms, as a place in which to gather information for an article that he hopes will further his career. The extent of Peter's indifference can be seen in his interactions with Desirée's parents, Oom Blik and Aunt Dolly, in which he exploits the grieving parents for information about his cousin's murder. Peter, as Bida has explained of many migrants, exists in a "world of substitutes—including replaceable houses and other abodes— [which] strips away the intimate understanding of the experiences that can make up the personal and composite idea of home" (2018: 18).

The Childhood Home

Away from the neutrality of Queen's Hotel — a liminal place associated with a mix of locals and foreigners — is another place of significance within the novel: Peter's childhood home. Peter's complex re-negotiation of identity is also dependent on this space, as Marschall emphasises: the "old family home [is] a personal reference point, an anchor in one's sense of identity" (2019: 219). Peter's childhood home, once the place of his childhood (associated with safety and security) and his former life in Alfredville, is now deserted.

¹¹ In her discussion of home, Aleksandra Bida cites Martin Heidegger's *Discourse on Thinking* (1969) and "Building Dwelling Thinking" (2001).

On one of his many jogs through the town, Peter slows down outside his family's house and experiences an unexpected flood of memories "undifferentiated but powerful" (48). His old home reminds him of his childhood and his parents; however, its present desertion, its emptiness, embodies Peter's hollow relationship to his own past. Peter's childhood home, which was at one time so familiar, is now unsettling and strange. In fact, it is the house in which his cousin Desirée was murdered. His parents had moved to a different part of South Africa and sold the house to Desirée's parents, who in turn gave it to her as a wedding present. Therefore, Peter's childhood home is now an unsettling and uncanny site, a murder scene haunting him during his home visit.

Back from exile, Peter views his home — a space which has also been altered by time — from a different 'vantage point'. While he is still connected to the space through his childhood memories, Peter also perceives his home primarily as a site of investigation for Desirée's murder. This increases the uncanny quality of Peter's visit, escalating his experience of the "homelessness of the present, and haunting by the past" (Collins & Jervis 2018: 2).

Although Peter is determined to keep his personal history out of the investigation, it is consistently represented as entwined with Desirée's trajectory. To start with, his childhood home, his past haven, is the place of her death and thus distorted by the malevolent connotations of murder. Furthermore, Peter's uncanny physical resemblance to Desirée is often remarked upon and is represented as unsettling for the other characters. For example, in one scene, Desirée's grieving mother stares at Peter as if he were an "apparition" (Heyns 2011: 83) and later, she becomes distressed at Peter's resemblance to her late daughter:

'I'm sorry,' she says, 'but I'm still not used to it. She was such a beautiful girl.' She sobs twice, and then says, 'You know, I didn't want to say anything, and I hope you don't mind – but you look so much like Desirée, it really gave me quite a fright when you arrived.' (90-91)

In another scene, when Peter has dinner with Bennie's family, Chrisna, Bennie's wife also remarks on Peter's resemblance to Desirée:

Chrisna has been casting curious glances at me from time to time. She notices me noticing, and blushes lightly. 'I'm sorry,' she says. 'You must think I'm rude. It's just ...' and she hesitates. 'Just...?' I encourage her. She blushes more deeply. 'I hope you don't mind my saying so, but it's really remarkable, how much you look like your cousin.' (130)

The family resemblance is an element of the uncanny in the novel, as Desirée is suggested to be Peter's double (doppelganger), a phantom presence. According to Collins and Jervis, the uncanny is often displayed by the spectral which can "figure a state of ontological undecidability or tension, where there is an *insistence*, a *presence* of whatever resists us, recalcitrant to our understanding" (2008: 10; original emphasis). Therefore, the persistent presence of Desirée is illustrative of Peter's sense of dislocation and the tension in his relationship with his old home.

During his home visit, Peter constantly questions what could have been had he remained in Alfredville; this is what Jacobs (2016) refers to as Peter's "negative history" (249):

For 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. (239)

Hence, I would suggest that Peter's concern over his negative history finds its answer in the phantom presence of Desirée. Peter's dislocation within his homeland, and his struggle to come to terms with his self-imposed exile, is intricately tied to Desirée's fate. As indicated in his interior monologue:

But had I stayed in Alfredville, would I have had a more eventful existence? What was Alfredville but a very small town in a very small country on a backward continent? Did anything ever really *happen* to me here? Did anything *really* happen to anyone here? Except, of course, something did happen to poor Desirée. (Heyns 2011: 35; original emphasis)

Desirée's disturbing murder and her struggle to find herself in Alfredville prior to her death, emphasises how one's home of origin does not necessarily inspire a sense of belonging and safety. Desirée's fate provides another platform from which Peter criticises his home country. Moreover, it illustrates how Peter's continued stay in

Alfredville may not have been a better alternative to his present circumstances of 'homelessness' in England.

Peter's sense of place is represented as greatly affected by his prolonged self-imposed exile, as shown by his struggle to relate to the people of his home-town, as well as to the places that were previously of significance to him. His subjective response to his home country is affected by his British experience, as suggested by the multiple instances of juxtaposition of the two countries in the text. Peter's sense of place, a part of his re-negotiation of identity, is also affected by his 'calculative' attitude towards his old home. As a result of his emigration, he has lost his ability to perceive his home affectionately. Hence, the next section will focus on Peter's sense of self and the manner in which the home visit leads to introspection and a more 'qualitative' view of home. It will reflect on the effect of the return-home visit on the migrant's perception of self.

2.2. A SHIFTING SENSE OF SELF

In the previous section, it was established that Peter's sense of place was irredeemably changed by his exposure to the foreign culture of England. He is no longer able to relate to the physical environment of Alfredville, as his sense of place is vastly affected by his self-imposed exile. In addition to being affected by their sense of place, the migrant's return home is also dependent on their re-encounter with the people of their former home. These interactions with locals have an effect on the migrant's process of identity negotiation and the success of their visit home. Peter's encounters with the Alfredville villagers are significant as they help shed light on his positionality as a migrant. In order to illustrate the correlation between Peter's crisis of identity and his interactions with the people of his original home place, I will explore a variety of his relationships: the locals of Alfredville (with a focus on Bennie and Nonyameko) and the locals of London (with a focus on James). Peter's relationships with these characters are significant as they mirror the complexity of the self, both positively and negatively.

A Sense of Social Alienation in Alfredville and London

For many migrants, the trip to their original country "powerfully affirms their national identity and belonging to the old home"; however, for some migrants, the home visit emphasises that they "no longer truly belong" (Marschall 2017:146). Peter, like the latter group of migrants, feels a great sense of alienation during his home visit. In fact, his visit to his Alfredville home aggravates his sense of social alienation in both his home country and adopted country. As the next section will illustrate, Peter's encounters with the people of Alfredville and London are often polarising and place him in the position of the 'other'.

Peter and the Locals of Alfredville

Peter struggles to feel the familiarity and warmth conventionally associated with one's home and country of origin. As it happens, the old landmarks of Alfredville (the countryside, the Queen's hotel, Peter's old family home) have an ambivalent effect on his repressed self. Peter's experience of estrangement during his home trip is also due to his strained relationships with the locals.

Having become accustomed to a different culture in London, Peter no longer shares the views and beliefs of the locals of his old homeland; therefore, he now finds it difficult to find common ground. He is also alienated by those who criticise his decision to emigrate and his lack of national loyalty. An example of such a tension can be seen in an exchange between Peter and former schoolmate and hotel manager, Joachim Ferreira:

[Joachim:] 'In the New South Africa, I say, you must fit in or fuck off.'
His patriotic encomium seems to have ignited a suspicion in his mind, because he looks at me as if wondering whether I'm a fitter-in or a fucker-off.
'So where do you live now?' he asks me.
'London.'
'London England?'
'Yes.'
'So you fucked off, eh? Shit-scared of majority rule?'
'I left in '88, before majority rule,' I say somewhat stiffly, not liking to have to justify myself to this self-appointed tribunal. [...] I don't think it worth trying to bring home to Joachim the distinction between *buggering off* and principled emigration.
'So what are you doing here?' he continues. 'Heading back?'
I know from chance encounters in London that South Africans who stayed put tend to assume that all ex-South Africans would rather be living in South Africa, and are somehow slumming it in London because they can't make it back to their biltong and sunshine.
'Actually, no,' I accordingly say. 'I find that London has quite enough to offer.' To my surprise, he laughs in genuine amusement.
'More than Alfredville? You must be fucking joking! You just haven't been shown the sights!' I laugh too, relieved to be spared the acrimonious exchange which for a moment seemed imminent. (Heyns 2011: 23-4; original emphasis)

This uncomfortable and hostile conversation is an example of why Peter views the locals as "largely stagnant and no longer able to relate to [his] experience" (Marshall 2017: 144). His encounters with the locals are awkward as he is unable to relate to their monologic localism and their condemnation of his choice to reside elsewhere.

Although Peter does not find it easy to connect with the locals anymore, he is still ambivalent about his position. He does not want to be considered an outsider, as shown in his conversation with old school mate, Emmerentia Meiring:

‘So, what are you doing here?’ She asks – the inevitable question.
 ‘Oh, just passing through for a few days, I thought I’d come and check out the old haunts.’
 She laughs. ‘Hasn’t changed much, has it?’
 ‘Not very much, no. But the cafés are better.’
 ‘Yes, and more expensive. We have you tourists to thank for that.’
 ‘I hope I’m not a tourist,’ I say.
 ‘Well, visitors, then.’ (Heyns 2011:181)

As shown in the above conversation, Peter still yearns for some connection with his home-town. Encounters like these cause him to think about his ‘negative history’, whether his quality of life would have been better had he remained in Alfredville. He muses:

if I’d stayed in Alfredville [...] might I have married Emmerentia or someone like her? Instead of which I have, or *had* until recently, James. Is it possible that the same person could conceivably have been equally happy or unhappy with Emmerentia and with James? Except, I wouldn’t have been the same person, would I? Or would I? (182)

Peter’s encounters with the locals leave him with a “sense of otherness and difference” (Marschall 2017: 145). Neither tourist, nor local, Peter occupies a liminal position as he experiences severe alienation from his former community. Peter is unable to rebuild relationships which, according to Duval (2004), is the primary function of the return visit: “to renew, reiterate and solidify familial and social networks” (2004: 51). Dislocated and estranged, Peter is unable to renew any networks; in fact, he destroys familial ties with his Aunt Dolly and Oom Blik, who chase him away when they find out he is writing an article about their daughter’s murder (221 - 225).

Marschall also underlines the importance of interaction with local relations during the home visit, explaining that

a sense of home [is] conveyed through subjective, multisensory and bodily sensations such as the feel of the climate, the smells, sounds, and especially the taste of local food, but first and foremost through *social participation or interaction with local relations*. (2017: 147; my emphasis)

Unable to achieve meaningful interactions with the locals during the visit, Peter is represented as feeling greatly alienated and not in a position to achieve a sense of home. Dislocation — a condition usually experienced by migrants upon entry to a

foreign host country — is ironically also a feeling Peter has upon re-entering his old home country.

The alienated person who operates on the margins of society is a common figure of Heyns's *oeuvre*. Jacobs states that “[m]arginality is probably the most recognisable theme in Michiel Heyns’s fiction; a number of his novels conclude with the protagonists having to come to terms with their marginalised state” (2018: 138). Indeed, like many of Heyns’s other fictional protagonists, Peter must come to terms with his marginal status. Commenting on the representation of marginality in Michiel Heyns’s sixth novel, Andries Wessels describes the isolated protagonist of *Invisible Furies* as being in “emotional exile” (2017: 106). This description may also be applied to Peter’s positionality as he struggles to reconnect to places and people of his former home.

Another destabilising influence on Peter’s identity is his relationship with ex-partner James. His London experience and friendships have encouraged him to view his past South African life through a superficial lens of irony and sarcasm, pushing him further into ‘emotional exile’.

Peter, James, and the London Scene

Peter’s eleven-day narrative is interspersed with an on-going email exchange with James, who resides in London. Peter and James’s joint group of friends seem to have been more loyal to the latter. As Lenz has also explained, Peter was “always on the outskirts of James’s circle of friends, emotionally adrift and lost” (2017: 8). So, when James breaks up with Peter over his alleged “lack of emotional commitment” (111), Peter is alienated and restless, and therefore decides to travel back to Alfredville on a purportedly journalistic project. The real reason for Peter’s visiting Alfredville may have been his break-up with James, as he confesses to Nonyameko (111).

Peter’s periodic email exchange with James represents his loose and superficial connection to London while in Alfredville. The emails, scattered as they are throughout the novel, point to Peter’s fragmented sense of self, and his emotional oscillations between Alfredville and London. Peter’s experiences in his old home place, often profound and insightful, are often undercut by his email exchanges with James, which

are heavily laden with irony and petty commentaries. The emails, Peter confesses towards the end of the novel, are “humorous anodyne account[s] of Alfredville and its people, downplaying the murder and its ramifications, and overplaying the backwardness of Alfredville” (201).

Through Peter’s email exchanges with James and his reflections on their life together, one can infer that the repression of emotion in the guise of irony is a mode of existence in the London artistic scene. In contrast, while spending time with Bennie, who is unreserved with his emotions, Peter contemplates: “I’m not used to dealing with such unmediated emotion. In London we wrap everything in irony” (235). Irony is a major element of Peter’s migrant identity: it is the “condition of his diasporic dislocation” (Jacobs 2016: 254) — the reason why he had been able to distance himself from Alfredville following his emigration. According to Naidu (2013), irony is also what enables Peter to survive the catastrophic events of his return; “irony and narration are what enable Peter’s survival in a moment of extreme distress and dissolution” (737).

There is an inauthenticity and frivolousness in the manner in which James and the London artistic circle operate. Their cosmopolitan worldview encourages a seemingly superficial attitude to life. This superficiality becomes less appealing to Peter as he begins to spend more time with Bennie and Nonyameko, both of whom provide emotionally and intellectually stimulating relationships. During his home visit, Peter reflects on his diminishing interest in James and the London scene:

[t]wo days ago I would have relished the details, relished in particular James’s sardonic wit, but today I read his letter without much interest. The petty intrigues of a group of self-involved actors seem very far away from the pared-down passions I’m confronted with in Alfredville. And after Bennie’s bleak hopelessness, James’s scintillation is just the tiniest bit irritating in its implication that nothing really matters over-much to the cultivated mind. (Heyns 2011: 238)

After Bennie’s death, Peter’s relationship with James gradually disintegrates under the weight of Peter’s emotional distress, as he starts doubting James’s ability to deal with the tragic reality of his situation. He questions whether “James [can] understand something that in its primitive inarticulateness is so alien to him and his life in London, with its default assumption that all experience is subject to ironic analysis” (275).

Peter's psychological dislocation is represented through the trajectories of his relationships with James (London) and Bennie (Alfredville), as he reflects: "I don't think I ever told James about Bennie: in London, he seemed impossibly remote, a dim memory of a disowned past. And now it is James and our London life that seem dim and distant" (198-9). Peter's oscillating involvement with these two men mirrors his ambivalent relationship to his homes (in England and South Africa, respectively).

To illustrate Peter's experience of dislocation, and his brief reprieve from it during his home visit, the following section explores the manner in which his relationship with his erstwhile best friend, Bennie, and his new friend, Nonyameko, destabilise his repressed and alienated self. In the next few pages, I explore these two characters as they mirror important aspects of Peter's self, and therefore further illuminate the impact of the home visit on the migrant protagonist.

A Sense of Reconnecting with the Suppressed Self

Peter feels marginalised by the people of his home-town and is only able to connect with his homeland on an impersonal level. This changes when Peter reconnects with his childhood best friend, Bennie Nienaber, and becomes friends with Nonyameko: both these relationships — in contrast to British ex-partner James and the London crowd — challenges Peter to reflect on his personal history and repressed emotions.

Peter and Bennie

From the beginning of his home visit, Peter's narrative is interspersed with flashbacks of his life in Alfredville prior to his emigration. Bennie is a recurring presence in these flashbacks, and is represented as Peter's best friend, and also, as Matthew Blackman suggests, his "first 'misunderstood' love" (2013: n.p.). Yet, during his return to Alfredville, Peter only contacts Bennie because he is tipped off about Bennie's suspected involvement in Desirée's murder.

Based on this information, Peter decides to visit Bennie at the police station where he works as police station commander, hoping to get some information for his journalistic

investigation. Upon meeting Bennie, Peter is taken aback by the contrast between his old memories of Bennie as a young man and the aloof Bennie he encounters in the present. He now struggles to hold a conversation with Bennie and is taken aback by the contrast to the profound bond and camaraderie that once existed between them in the past, as he contemplates:

[t]he clichés of our youth clot the air between us; they've lost the slangy ease of youth, now seemed forced, inappropriate. Or perhaps it's just that I've moved off and on: I'm not longer *coming from* where I used to. (Heyns 2011: 133)

Bennie appears hostile and angry, while Peter is stand-offish: the hostility and awkwardness between the two former best friends stem from their differences. Peter, for one, had left his original country, and spent a significant amount of time in a global metropolis, and as a result has refined his mannerisms. Bennie, on the other hand, is a local who has remained rooted in South Africa and has never travelled abroad. As J.U. Jacobs states, Bennie's "has been a regular existence, engaged with the everyday realities of life in South Africa" and his "story has been the opposite of his [(Peter's)] own exilic one" (2016: 254). Bennie is therefore unable to comprehend the complexity of Peter's experience of migration, and the pain of adjustment to another country's culture. Such disharmonies are a common aspect of migrants' return-home visits. In her study, Marschall found that

changes were observed in the [migrants'] relationship with family members, friends, former colleagues and other social contacts. These prompted recognition of one's own changed identity, a dawning realization that the self has been fundamentally affected and modified through the migration experience and the prolonged absence from home. (2017: 147)

The discordances between migrants and locals are mutual, as migrants too struggle to understand the mind-set of locals (Marschall 2017: 220); Peter is also unable to relate to Bennie's experience as someone who has never left South Africa.

Both Peter and Bennie make assumptions about each other's lives and are therefore unable to regain the true quality of their old friendship. In addition to their differing positionalities, the ways in which Peter and Bennie behave are in contradiction with

each other. While Peter is reserved, and relies on irony to communicate, Bennie displays “unmediated emotion” (235). As Peter spends more time with Bennie, reminiscing about the old days (prior to his emigration and Bennie’s draft into the army), he becomes less reserved. These reminiscences, often taking place at a significant site from their youth, help Peter and Bennie reconnect. As Marschall explains, the interchange of memories during the visit “becomes a way of solidifying ties and re-establishing bonds, especially where a sense of alienation is noticeable due to the separation and resulting divergence of life worlds” (2017:17). An example of a meaningful encounter is Peter and Bennie’s jog to the dam, a destination they frequented in their youth. Looking over the dam, with its sparse vegetation, muddy rim and disintegrated jetty, Peter reflects that “[i]t’s not an inviting spectacle, and yet there is something appealing about the familiarity of it: in all these years almost nothing has changed” (Heyns 2011: 170). This familiarity is apparent in their playfulness as when, just like in their youth, Peter and Bennie race each other and wrestle in the dam. There used to be a genuine depth in Peter’s friendship with Bennie, a kind of friendship that Peter was not able to achieve in London.

Peter’s only significant relationship in London has been with his now ex-partner, James — and as mentioned previously, this has been a rather superficial liaison. After spending time with Bennie during his home visit, Peter reflects: “I can’t really imagine telling James about going swimming with Bennie. [...] There is a lot about my life, I realise, that James never understood – or I about his, I imagine” (200). Peter is beginning to realise that, in London, he had stopped being true to himself, and had been inauthentic in his relationships. This could also have been the reason that he had struggled to commit emotionally to his ex-partner. Intriguingly, James compared Peter to a traffic light: “all go one second, all caution the next and then total no go” (111). Supported by the familiarity of Bennie’s friendship, Peter is now able to reconnect with his old boyish self, and see through the alienation he has felt while in London.

During the home visit, Peter is also able to gain some insight into Bennie’s life. From the beginning, Bennie has expressed a deep dissatisfaction with his life in the last twenty years. He has a wife, children, and a well-respected job as policeman, yet he is deeply unhappy with his routine life. At one point, Peter asks Bennie “surely you

made a very successful life for yourself?”, to which Bennie replies with sarcasm: ““You mean I got a job and a wife and children. Yeah, fucking jackpot, cowabunga”” (234). It is evident that Bennie feels empty inside, as he yearns for something beyond his traditional patriarchal role. Bennie confides in Peter that, in an attempt to fill the void in his life, he had embarked on an affair with Desirée, which ended tragically. Bennie reveals he had been attracted to Desirée because of her cultivated ways and her resemblance to Peter:

I started seeing her. And she'd read all these books, and she talked to me about them, and she played me music.' He takes a deep breath, then seems to break down into a kind of sob. 'She even *looked* like you.' (Heyns 2011: 267; original emphasis).

As critic Dowling also asserts, the reason for Bennie's affair with Desirée is “a sublimated homoerotic impulse, and a small-town yearning to “own” cultural and aesthetic achievement” (2012: n.p.). This critic's view underscores Bennie's need for cultural emancipation — something difficult to find in a small town, and furthermore, ‘his homoerotic impulse’ — his love for Peter (who has a striking resemblance to his cousin, Desirée). In other words, as Lenz also explains, during Peter's absence, Bennie “transferred his love to Peter's female doppelganger” (2017: 6). However, Peter, who “prides himself on his cynical detachment” (Lenz 2017: 3), does not understand the true nature of Bennie's feelings. He does not understand the extent of Bennie's feelings and the value of their friendship until he loses Bennie tragically.

Lenz (2017) also details Peter's inaptness as a friend by illustrating how Peter has ‘betrayed’ Bennie three times: firstly, by leaving Alfredville (which Bennie takes as treachery); secondly, by returning not for Bennie but for his article; and thirdly, “by not giving Bennie the opportunity to unburden himself and express his emotions” (6). In my view, the greatest evidence of Peter's detachment and betrayal of Bennie is that — despite the lack of concrete evidence and his amateur detective skills — Peter is still inclined to believe that Bennie had actually killed Desirée.

At the climax of the novel, Peter accuses Bennie of Desirée's murder, and ends up fatally losing his best friend. The last meeting between Bennie and Peter takes place at a site of significance from their childhood: Kanonkop. Exactly twenty-two years

previously, in the same place, they had an emotional exchange in which Peter informed Bennie of his impending emigration, which led to a heated argument and the breakdown of the relationship. In the narrative present, the rising tension between the two characters finally comes to the fore. Peter, in pursuit of his amateur investigation, confronts Bennie about his suspicion that he might have killed Desirée. In response, Bennie, hurt by his friend's accusation, shoots himself in the same spot where, years ago, he and Peter had parted ways.

Naidu explains Peter's failed criminal investigation and its tragic consequences as a technique used by Heyns, a literary pretext to direct the reader's attention to the protagonist's suffering and dislocation (rather than to the investigation as such):

Although at one level *Lost Ground* purports to be a detective story, it is actually more a story about the dismal failure of a detective whose errors result in tragedy [...]. Most readers of *Lost Ground* will deviate from the protagonist in the detection process, having vital clues and obvious red herrings laid before them, but they are otherwise persuaded to identify with his suffering – the loss and sense of annihilation he feels at having so profoundly bungled the investigation. (2013: 735)

By focusing on Peter's subjective experience, *Lost Ground* subverts the traditional detective novel form: instead of focusing on the facts of the murder investigation, the novel emphasises the personal conflict of the detective. In this regard, Dowling aptly comments that "the crime investigates Peter more successfully than Peter is able to investigate the crime" (2012: n.p.). Despite having every intention of keeping his "personal history out of it" (Heyns 2011: 35), Peter ends up becoming embroiled in the amateur investigation. Naidu also asserts that Heyns subverts "traditional detective fiction elements in order to present the reader with a philosophical, psychological and political narrative about loss, identity, and betrayal in this self-reflexive, ironical novel" (2013:130).

Following Bennie's suicide, the narrative focuses on Peter's "loss, identity, and betrayal" as he is devastated for having, inadvertently, caused the death of his best friend (Naidu 2013:130). His protective ironic mask cannot withstand the emotional impact of losing Bennie in such tragic circumstances. He feels a disintegration of

substance, identity and spirit (Heyns 2011: 279). Peter has lost the only person he has really loved and whose friendship he has only just regained during the home visit.

Peter's misery only worsens when Chrisna (Bennie's widow) reveals that she is, in fact, Desirée's murderer (286). Chrisna further accuses him of taking Bennie away from her, but Peter defends himself, stating that he has his own life to lead. In response Chrisna criticises his lifestyle:

'You're living in a flat in London with someone you're not even married to. Do you call that a life? [...] It's not what I call a life. It's a life support system. It's like battery chickens who lay an egg every time they switch the lights on.' (Heyns 2011: 291)

As Chrisna accuses him of being superficial and insensitive towards Bennie's feelings, Peter feels even more dejected and depressed, reflecting:

I am drained, too devastated even to feel grief or shock or outrage. I have no volition, no identity even; I just feel empty, as if I never want to write another word. [...] Around me Alfredville is going its humble workaday way, perpetuating its pointless existence; but is it any more pointless than the same thing multiplied by millions, in London? (291)

After Bennie's suicide and Chrisna's revelation that she is actually Desirée's murderer, Peter writes to James, reflecting on his relationship with Bennie and the consequences of his failed murder investigation:

I returned to find that the joyful boy had grown into a troubled man, that his gift of life was not enough to help him cope with the complexities of adulthood. He tried to deal with them, the complexities, [...] but something was missing, and what was missing was what I in my ignorance had represented to him, and had taken away from him when I left. So he went looking for that something, and, finding it in my cousin, he destroyed it [or rather Chrisna his wife did]. And I, coming back, found what had been missing from my life, and I destroyed it. (Heyns 2011: 274-5)

Bennie's friendship had given Peter some reprieve from the sense of psychological dislocation he had felt being a "foreigner in two countries" (237). However, upon Bennie's death, Peter enters a state of complete desolation and alienation¹²; his only

¹² The relationship between Peter and Bennie is a significant and complex one that can also be explored through the theme of nostalgia. This dimension of their relationship will be illustrated in section 2.3.

solace is his friendship with Nonyameko. This relationship is an important aspect of Peter's home visit that will be explored in the next few pages.

Peter and Nonyameko

A common finding among critics — Duval (2004), Marschall (2017, 2018), Muggeridge and Dona (2006) — is that the home visit is an existential experience that can lead to a crisis of identity. The literary representation of Peter's home visit in *Lost Ground* mirrors the findings of these critics. This is evident, firstly, through Peter's inner monologue as he consistently grapples with the concept of identity, while also denying its importance. Secondly, and more palpably, the more profound aspect of the migrant's home visit is highlighted by the character of Nonyameko Mhlabeni. As Marschall explains, "the journey back home can induce *self-reflexivity* and lead to deeply significant insights about identity and a *shifting sense of self*" (2017: 214; my emphasis). As a psychologist, Nonyameko encourages Peter to become more introspective: through his discussions with her, Peter gains insight into his migrant identity, and comes to understand his feelings which are repressed under his ironic mask. Crucially, Nonyameko also helps him understand his position in relation to what is 'home'.

As mentioned in sub-section 2.1., Peter meets Nonyameko at the hotel bar and is drawn to her because she appears to be an outsider like himself. Nonyameko lives in Johannesburg, where she is director of the Institute of Women's Mental Health, at the University of the Witwatersrand. Like Peter, Nonyameko is visiting 'home'. She is in Alfredville, her former home, as she intends to open up a counselling clinic for impoverished pregnant women. During apartheid, she remained in South Africa and was involved in the struggle for democracy as a member of the ANC's militant force (Umkhonto we Sizwe). Similar to Bennie, Nonyameko is aware of the complex societal realities of South Africa. Although she has travelled extensively, she has remained very involved in South Africa's socio-political context as evident in her dedication to providing mental healthcare to the residents of her former home place, and also in her conversations with Peter.

As a psychologist and intellectual, Nonyameko is represented as a rational, rounded character — a ‘foil’ for Peter’s ironic pessimism. From the beginning of their friendship, Nonyameko encourages Peter to reflect beyond his default ironic persona. She explores with him the importance of identity and belonging (Heyns 2011: 96), issues he will have to come to terms with during his time in Alfredville. As I have mentioned briefly in 2.1., Nonyameko’s commentaries are also metafictional. Jacobs explains that this character provides a metafictional critique of the popular homecoming-from-exile genre in South African literature by satirising “the contemporary white expatriate South African writer who has trouble finding a subject in England and comes back to his mother country” (2013: 248).

In her reading of the novel as a typical example of the South African detective novel, Naidu reflects on the character of Nonyameko as Peter’s sidekick. Their relationship is aptly compared to one between a detective and sidekick, similar to some famous fictional detective duos: just like “Watson with Holmes, Nonyameko questions Peter’s methods and pricks his conscience” (2013: 736). In addition to helping Peter with the investigation, Nonyameko also helps Peter manage his crisis of identity.

Although Nonyameko initially satirises Peter’s position as a returned exile (see 2.1.), she also pushes him to look beyond the surface of his experience and accept the painful insights induced by his visit. Muggeridge and Dona also affirm the value of self-knowledge as triggered by the return-home visit:

[F]indings confirm the value of the first visit as a memorable event in and of itself, which no respondent regretted, independently of the emotions associated with it. Its main function is that of a *catalyst*: it put an end to waiting, to worry about family, and to wondering about 'back home'; it created the setting for *an assessment of progress (or lack of) in life and a verification of identity*. (2006 426; my emphasis)

Nonyameko consistently questions Peter in order to help him see the value of reflection on identity and belonging. After Bennie’s death, when Peter is in a state of desolation, Nonyameko consoles him, leading Peter to appreciate her as “the one most likely to be able to offer [him] the refuge of simple understanding” (Heyns 2011: 293).

The novel's last scene is most indicative of Nonyameko's significance in Peter's story and her ability to get Peter to confront the emotional reality of his situation: Peter checks out of his hotel and before he leaves Alfredville, he meets with Nonyameko one last time. They talk about the disastrous events that have occurred (Bennie's suicide and Chrisna's revelation) and Peter's future plans once he leaves Alfredville:

[Peter:] "Apparently I'm free to go."
[Nonyameko:] 'Free to go where?'
'Anywhere.'
'Anywhere is nowhere. Where do you want to go?'
'I don't want to go anywhere. But I'll head down to Knysna to see my folks. And then it's back to London, I suppose.'
'You suppose? Isn't that where your home is?'
'I suppose. But I'm not quite sure what that means any more.'
'Well, home usually means something quite specific!' (295-6)

Their conversation emphasises one of the central themes of the novel: the complexity of the concept of 'home' and 'homelessness'. It boldly foregrounds Peter's position as a "foreigner in two countries" (237), a border figure in both South Africa and England, with no attachment to his London home, and no desire to remain in his Alfredville either (296).

During this farewell conversation with Nonyameko, Peter — a man with no place to call home, no place of belonging — realises the significant loss he has experienced, and begins to lose his composure as he is approaching a point "where irony breaks down and you look at the blood on your hands in horror" (Heyns 2011: 296-7). Peter attempts to regain his composure by lapsing into his old pattern of ironic superficiality, stating that by the following week he would "be telling people in London about [his] weird adventure in Africa" (297). Confronted by his denial of something so obviously misguided, Nonyameko loses her own cool composure, and with "her great eyes filling with tears", she says: "Poor Peter [...] you still do not know yourself" (297). Feeling the impact of her words, Peter has an emotional breakdown. Dowling comments on Peter's breaking point: "[s]tripped of his cosmopolitan veneer [...] and unable to maintain his signature disengagement, the cool, cynical eavesdropping outsider breaks down" (2012: n.p).

Gripping Nonyameko's hand during his breakdown, Peter reflects:

And then the shell cracks, my time-hardened carapace, defence against feeling too much and showing too much, and I am left exposed on some desolate shore, delivered over to the furies that attend on human misfortune or misdeed. I cover my face with my free hand, and feel my body shaken with a violence of emotion I've never allowed myself, a flood of inarticulate horror overwhelming me. [...] But I hold onto Nonyameko's hand, for all the world as if I could thus anchor myself to some saving vestige of identity, as if her grasp could keep me from being swept away into oblivion. (Heyns 2011: 297)

Peter's 'time-hardened carapace', his repressed self, which has become such a well-hidden part of his migrant identity, has disintegrated. He is unable to bear the full force of his emotions resulting from his emotionally cataclysmic home visit. Peter has realised the "cost of his exile" (Jacobs 2016: 257), and that he has lost his emotionally authentic self, his best friend, and his home place. Overwhelmed by the "relentless pull of loss" (297), the only comfort Peter derives is from Nonyameko who, as Naidu suggests, symbolises "the possibility of redemption at the close of the novel" (2013: 736).

Peter's return to Alfredville and his interactions with its people cause him to reflect deeply on his place in the world. His 'shifting sense of self' is mirrored by his interactions with different characters. In his interactions with the locals of Alfredville, Peter feels his social alienation most acutely; in his exchanges with Bennie, Peter becomes aware of the profound loss of his authentic youthful self; and finally, through his friendship with Nonyameko, Peter learns how to perceive his emotional dislocation from a deeper, existential point of view. The exploration of all these relationships have, I hope, illustrated the self-reflexive aspect of Peter's return-home visit.

2.3. A SHIFTING SENSE OF TIME

So far, *Lost Ground* has been explored as representing the spatial and psychological dislocation associated with the return visits of migrants (sections 2.1. and 2.2. respectively). Temporal dislocation is another aspect of the migrant's home visit that I will illustrate through inter-related concepts of memory and nostalgia. My interest is in nostalgia and its impact on the migrant's experience of their original home. As mentioned in 1.1., the concept of nostalgia has, in recent years, been thought beyond its former understanding as merely idle sentiment or wistfulness, with critics like Dennis Walder explaining that

the rosy, sentimental glow most commonly associated with nostalgia is only a part of the story, and that 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)

The return-home visit “can lead to self-reflection, self-transformative experiences and shifts in consciousness, affecting the migrant's sense of belonging” (Marschall 2017: 140); therefore, the migrant's engagement with nostalgia as a ‘source of understanding and creativity’ is a significant part of this transformative experience.

The concept of nostalgia is omnipresent in *Lost Ground*: for one, it is alluded to, through Heyns's intertextual references to Marcel Proust, a writer predominantly concerned with memory and nostalgia. The epigraph of the novel, a quote from Proust — “[t]he true paradises are the paradises we have lost” — underlines the novel's concern with nostalgia and the exploration of the protagonist's past. Proust is referred to again, when Peter — while walking through his former village for the first time in twenty years — reflects that “Proust himself would have had a hard time with Alfredville” (Heyns 2011: 13). By quoting Proust, Heyns expresses the ambivalence Peter may have felt upon returning to his former home.

Beyond the intertextual references to Proust, nostalgia is also explored in *Lost Ground* through the techniques of text fragmentation and numerous shifts between the past and present. Peter is in a peculiar position during his home visit: he experiences uncanny feelings of dislocation in a place that is conventionally associated with belonging and contentment, these feelings of displacement being illustrated by his

fragmented interior monologue. On the one hand, the setting of his narrative oscillates between Alfredville and London (as embodied in Peter's email exchanges with James). On the other hand, his narrative is fragmented by his present experience of Alfredville and his memories of past experiences. This temporal fragmentation of Peter's monologue can be better understood in light of Bauman's typography of migrants ('tourists' and 'vagabonds').

In the beginning of this chapter, I classified Peter as a 'tourist' — a privileged type of migrant — as he has the economic means to move according to his "heart's desire" (Bauman 1996: 12). However, this freedom of mobility has a downside: the migrants' constant movement and non-commitment to one place causes them to perceive their experiences in a fragmented way. Migrants, according to Bauman, experience the "*fragmentation* of time into episodes, each one cut from its past and from its future, each one self-enclosed and self-contained" (1996: 10; original emphasis). These episodes are evident in Peter's fragmented narrative as he comes to terms with the current state of affairs in his original home, while being haunted by memories of the past. This simultaneous engagement with the past and present is at the centre of the concept of nostalgia.

Nostalgia, as explained by Walder, "can and should open up a negotiation between the present and the past, leading to a fuller understanding of the past and how it has shaped the present" (2011: 9). During his home visit, Peter is in a liminal state, temporally speaking: he is torn between the present reality of his original home and his nostalgic memories of it. Through 'double vision', he compares his present sense of estrangement from his homeland with his memories of belonging to it. In this way, during his home visit, Peter is able to see the effect of exile on his current state of mind.

Lost Ground mirrors Walder's assertion that nostalgia "begins in desire, and may well end in truth" (2011: 3). Peter desires to reconcile himself with his Alfredville home; however, the tragic events of his home visit reveal harsh truths about his repressed relationship to the people and places of his old home. As I will illustrate in the following section, nostalgia is a major part of the migrant's plight and their relationship to their childhood home.

Nostalgia: Loss, Longing, and Home

Nostalgia is intricately linked to one's relationship with one's home. Reflecting on how the word itself can be broken down into 'nostos' (return home) and 'algia' (longing), Boym describes nostalgia as a "longing for a home that no longer exists" (2001: xiii). She further explains that nostalgia is a "sentiment of loss and displacement" (2001: xiii); similarly, Rubenstein describes nostalgia as "displacement from an emotionally vital domicile" (2001: 5). Therefore, migrants experience nostalgia as a result of both loss of and longing for their home.

If nostalgia is, indeed, as Boym asserts, "a sentiment of loss", then, there is no greater nostalgic sufferer than Peter Jacobs. Heyns confirms in an interview with Naomi Meyer that although *Lost Ground* is a detective novel, "the focus was also quite strongly on the narrator's own plight, his sense of dispossession and loss" (2012: n.p.). The novel's focus on the protagonist's psychological processes — rather than the murder as such — is also confirmed by Naidu, who states that "the story of the murder in the sleepy Karoo town is actually the story of Peter's irrevocable loss" (2013: 132).

Peter's feelings of loss and longing are associated with his childhood home place. In section 2.1., it was established that Peter's sense of place has been altered by his experience of migration and that he had lost his ability to view Alfredville as a familiar place (that is, as a place of comfort and belonging). As also explained by Marschall, the migrant's prolonged exile turns home into

a place of longing, associated with nostalgic, sometimes traumatic memories, a foil for the projection of anxieties, needs and desires. The return trip – essentially a confrontation of one's own biographical past – may re-invigorate or shatter the myth; re-affirm or shift self-identity; fuel emotions and prompt insights about one's true sense of belonging, about the home, the host and oneself. (2017: 142)

Not only has Peter's perception changed due to his emigration, but the Alfredville landscape has also transformed during his absence. As a result, Peter feels dislocated as his childhood home is unrecognisable, his feelings of dislocation being exacerbated by his nostalgic memories, which emphasise the great contrast between his past sense of belonging and his present alienation.

During their visit, migrants are “confronted by their biographical past” (Marschall 2017: 142), as the memories of their former life in their original country (prior to their emigration) begin to re-surface. Marschall emphasises that “[e]ven for those who do not desire to return, even temporarily, the old home(land) is never completely forgotten and memories of the past invariably surface and overlay experiences in the present” (2018: 9). The recall of memories is linked to ephemeral multi-sensory stimuli of the original homeland, including “smells, sounds, tastes and tactile experiences [that] are equally important in precipitating memories of home among migrants” (Marschall 2018: 8). This is evident in the representation of Peter’s return visit to Alfredville, a visit interspersed with memories of his earlier life. For instance, the smell of magnolias in front of his childhood home catches him “unawares, releasing a flood of memories, undifferentiated but powerful” (Heyns 2011: 48).

Another moment of nostalgia is when Peter visits various sites of his former homeland; while jogging through the village, Peter reflects on the landscape:

I was too unaware, when I lived here, to form any conscious or coherent response to this landscape: it was simply the place we lived and played, and we didn’t ask ourselves, and certainly not one another, whether it was beautiful or ugly. Now, running through the empty morning, I feel a certain appeal in the very emptiness, something melancholy in its meagreness and yet comforting in its permanence. (2011: 62)

Peter’s ambivalence towards his original home place is painfully illustrated in the above quote. Whereas, in the past, he took his surroundings for granted, he now finds that the natural landscape of his Alfredville home has taken on new meaning as a source of both melancholy and comfort.

Peter’s nostalgic reminiscences are frequently undercut by irony. As I mentioned in 2.2., Peter subjects his experiences to ironic analysis, suggesting that he is deeply suspicious of his own feelings of nostalgia:

I groan inwardly at my dramatisation of the landscape, really just my self-dramatisation projecting itself upon insentient soil and sky. [...] James [Peter’s ex-lover] would say it’s the ex-pat syndrome [...]. ‘So you’ve left – now deal with it,’ was his take on ex-pat nostalgia. ‘We live in the age of emigration.’ (2011: 62)

As can be seen in the above extract, Peter's ironic stance emphasises his cultural disdain of sentimentality.

Although Peter attempts to resist nostalgia, not wanting "to be blackmailed into sentimentality by [his] past" (Heyns 2011: 176), he still experiences feelings of immense loss during his home visit, the greatest loss being his erstwhile friendship with Bennie. This was a crucial relationship in Peter's life, as he reflects while jogging past the various places in his village:

I try to people the place with memories, summon up the figures that then seemed arbiters of my happiness, that in some sense must have contributed to making me what I am. But they present themselves as inchoate, amorphous, blurred by time into a slightly resentful, muttering crowd, asserting claims that I don't know how to meet. The only one that emerges from the haze with any clarity or individuality is Bennie, who stands before my mind's eye with his insouciance undiminished by time. (Heyns 2011: 50)

It is only through his nostalgic memories that Peter can understand the depth of his relationship with Bennie and confront the reality of its loss. While in London, Peter had an unfulfilling relationship with James, and only comes to realise its fractured nature during his return-home visit (upon reviewing his relationship with Bennie, his best friend of yore). Marschall explains this dynamic and the role of nostalgic memories in relationships:

nostalgic memories of the old home and its attendant social relationships are confronted with the present reality. This leads to the sharp realization of what they [migrants] have been missing in the host country and a subsequent embracing and cherishing of these elements during the return visit. (Marschall 2017: 147)

The timeline of *Lost Ground* is deeply fragmented with flashbacks of the past, all of which involve Bennie. The multi-sensory environment of Alfredville is intricately linked with Peter's memories of Bennie. For example, the Queen's Hotel reminds Peter of an occasion when he and Bennie went on a disastrous double date (6-8, 36-44). He also remembers how he had first met Bennie, their school days, and that he used to ride on the back of Bennie's motorbike (51-61). In contrast to their distant relationship in

the present (see section 2.2.), Peter's memories of his youth suggest the close bond that once existed between the two friends.

Peter's nostalgic memories reveal the complexity of his friendship with Bennie, offering him (and simultaneously the reader) insight into what had led to the breakdown of their relationship. For instance, Kanonkop — a place that Peter and Bennie often frequented, both in their childhood and in the narrative present — is represented as an uncanny, liminal place. In the past, Kanonkop is where Peter and Bennie parted ways after an emotional fight; and in the present, it is the location of Bennie's tragic suicide. Peter's nostalgia is a result of his inability to re-establish a meaningful connection with Bennie in the present, as — according to David Medalie — nostalgia is a complex and “critical tool” that “deals with present realities” (2010: 36). Peter's exploration of his past memories around Bennie is a “regressive wish” (Rubenstein 2001: 3), a longing for the “ease of the past” (Boym 2001: xv), for the natural camaraderie that he once shared with Bennie.

“Nostalgia begins in desire, and may well end in truth”

During his visit, Peter displays a ‘double perspective’, both spatially (London and Alfredville) and temporally (past and present). He is — as Salman Rushdie would say — “obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost” (1991: 11). It is through these ‘fragments’ that Peter gains perspective on his Alfredville home and the illusionary ideal of home.

Although he has been immersed in the cosmopolitan culture of London, Peter's sense of belonging in Britain was to a great extent reliant on his relationship with his British partner, James. Therefore, after their separation, Peter felt isolated and unsettled in London. So, he returns to Alfredville, desiring to reconnect with his former home; however, during his visit, he is deeply affected by nostalgia. Peter's experience can be better understood by reflecting on Boym's view of nostalgia as “double exposure, or a superimposition of two images — of home and abroad, past and present, dream and everyday life [which, when forced] “into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface” (2001: xiv). Accordingly, Peter is torn between two images of his original home: one image is influenced by his nostalgic memories, and the other, by

his uncanny experiences in the narrative present of the home visit. The former images represent belonging and a carefree adolescence, while the latter, indicates dislocation and his current crisis of identity.

The great contrast between these two images illustrates that Peter's lifestyle and outlook have changed. Furthermore, in his absence, the village — the places and people of Alfredville — has changed too. Therefore, due to what Boym refers to as "temporal irreversibility", it is impossible for Peter to return to the Alfredville he had left, and to regain the sense of belonging he once had. Peter's situation also highlights Rubenstein's suggestion that while "homesickness refers to a spatial/geographical separation, nostalgia more accurately refers to a temporal one" (2001: 4).

Peter's memories of home illustrate his "longing for a home that no longer exists" (Boyman 2001: xiii). Interestingly, Proust, whose epigraphical quote guides the novel, also refers to an individual's experience of the sensory environment and the manner in which such experiences conjure up memories. Referring to Proust's seminal work, Walder explains that

[t]he past figures importantly in people's self-representations in general, because it is through memories of the past that we represent ourselves to ourselves, and often through narrative; although those narratives are not necessarily literally written, as is commonly assumed, but may be oral, tactile, visual, dramatic, or may even rely on the sense of smell and taste, as Proust's immense researches in *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* demonstrate at length. (2011: 35)

Triggered by various stimuli, Peter explores his past memories in the narrative present of the home visit. Boyman suggests that such intense explorations of the past are linked to the migrants' dislocation, as "defamiliarization and sense of distance drives them to tell their story, to narrate the relationship between past, present and future" (2001: 49). In the narrative present (during his home visit), Peter does not feel a real sense of belonging or connection to Alfredville; therefore, his nostalgic flashbacks may be interpreted as alleviating his current physical displacement and emotional distance from his home.

Peter's nostalgic recollections reveal that in the narrative present, Alfredville does not feel like home¹³. In the past, Peter's sense of belonging was associated with his parents and Bennie. In fact, the majority of Peter's narrative explores memories of Bennie and their shared childhood and teenage days. However, due to the tragic turn of events during his home visit (his failed criminal investigation and Bennie's suicide), Peter's fragile re-connection with Bennie is irrevocably destroyed, and he cannot reconnect emotionally with Alfredville either.

During the home visit, Peter's struggle to feel at home in his own home place subverts conventional definitions of 'home' as a place of belonging, safety, and security. Although South Africa is Peter's country of origin, his experiences abroad and during his subsequent home visit have complicated his claim to it. Towards the end of the novel, Nonyameko calls Peter an "honorary citizen" as it becomes apparent that, although he is not at home in London, he will not remain in Alfredville either (295-296).

Although, for Peter, Alfredville has become inhospitable, it still remains an important place for him. The landscape and the people, and the nostalgia they inspire, are invaluable for him, as they remind him of his past and encourage him to reflect on his life's journey. Marschall states that

[t]he trip back home is a trip back into one's autobiographical past; planned or surprise encounters with one's remembered past facilitated through multisensory experiences and social encounters during the travel are not only important episodes in the narration of the journey, but also in the story that forms the basis of narrative identity and narrativized subjectivity. (2017: 217)

Peter's home visit — a trip back into his 'autobiographical past' — provides him with the opportunity to reflect on how much his experience of migration has changed him. As explored in 2.2., the home visit has an existential dimension to it, leading migrants to epiphanies about their identity and their idea of 'home'. Feelings of nostalgia for the past add a significant layer of meaning to the migrant's inner growth. The cathartic

¹³ Peter's parents relocated to a different part of the country and sold the family home to his aunt and uncle, who thereafter gifted it to his cousin, Desirée. So, Peter's childhood home, which would conventionally be associated with safety and security, is (in the present narrative) uncannily associated with the death of Desirée. His childhood home with all its memories is reduced to a crime scene, as this is the site where Desirée was violently murdered (refer to section 2.1.).

experiences of the return-home visit also enable migrants to perceive the effect of their exile (whether voluntary, or not) on their relationships to the people and places of their former home. In *Lost Ground*, Peter is represented as experiencing a crisis of identity, through which he is able to understand the loss of his intimate bond with Bennie and the loss of his sense of belonging in Alfredville.

Earlier, I mentioned that according to Walder, “[n]ostalgia begins in desire, and may well end in truth” (2011: 3): Peter returns to Alfredville, hoping to reconnect with his homeland. However, during his home visit, he is confronted with the truth: the impossibility of return. Peter’s nostalgia, therefore, is a “strategy of survival, a way of making sense of the impossibility of homecoming” (Boym 2001: xvii). He realises the value of what he had neglected during his self-imposed exile (of his friendship with Bennie, home and a sense of belonging). Furthermore, Peter comes to terms with the fact, that after twenty-two years abroad, he can neither return to Alfredville nor regain what he has lost.

Underneath its frame as a crime novel, *Lost Ground* is a profound exploration of a migrant’s complex identity slippage upon his return to the original home. In fact, Heyns subverts the traditional techniques of the detective novel in order to emphasise the intricacies of the migrant positionality. Whereas in a conventional crime novel, the detective figure is usually the “antidote to disorder, violence, and uncertainty” (Warnes 2012: 986), in *Lost Ground*, Peter creates chaos. Peter’s exile — his distance from the people of his old home — causes him to misinterpret clues and confuse his investigation. This results in the tragic suicide of his best friend, Bennie, and in Peter’s “loss and sense of annihilation” (Naidu 2013: 735), conditions associated with the emotional dislocation experienced by many migrants. As I hope I have demonstrated, the novel is a literary mirroring of the migrant’s home visit, and related concepts of home, dislocation, and nostalgia.

Although Peter returns to Alfredville to write an article exploring aspects of the public sphere (the racial attitudes still prevailing in post-apartheid South Africa), his criminal investigation leads to profound insights about himself. His home visit, his reencounter

with his home environment after two decades of exile, is a powerful existential event that “entails complex interactions with places and people, in which memories play a fundamental role and new perspectives on what it means to be ‘home’ emerge” (Marschall 2017: 147).

In an attempt to reconnect with his former home, Peter goes to places that were once significant to him (Queen’s Hotel, his childhood home, Kanonkop). However, his sense of place has changed as he does not reconnect with the emotions traditionally associated with one’s home. Dislocated and nostalgic, Peter realises that his experience of migration has changed his overall outlook on life — he has returned to Alfredville as a cynic, with an ironic sensibility echoing the attitudes of his London entourage. Peter also becomes aware of changes that have occurred in Alfredville during his absence. He left during the apartheid era to avoid conscription and returns to a post-apartheid society overwhelmed by a multitude of other concerns (crime and corruption).

It is Peter’s encounter with the diversity of Alfredville people that breaks his “time-hardened carapace” (Heyns 2011: 297), and affirms the life-changing nature of the home visit:

I try to people the place with memories, summon up the figures that then seemed arbiters of my happiness [...]. The only one that emerges from the haze with any clarity or individuality is Bennie, who stands before my mind’s eye with his insouciance undiminished by time. (Heyns 2011: 50)

Peter’s reunion with his erstwhile best friend, Bennie, helps him reconnect with his boyish self and ease his present weariness. Although brief, this attempt at reviewing their friendship also gives Peter a chance to reflect deeply on his life choices.

Peter’s interaction with the people and places of Alfredville causes him to feel painfully nostalgic. Through his nostalgia, more a way of critical reflection than mere wistfulness, Peter evokes his memories, thus alleviating the loss of his Alfredville home. His nostalgic reminiscences emphasise the aptness of the novel’s title, *Lost Ground*: there is a sense that the past is irretrievable and that the old home is not a ‘home’ any more. As can be gleaned from this novel, the ‘home visit’ is an important trope that contextualises the manner in which the migrant’s return visit can “lead to

self-reflection, self-transformative experiences and shifts in consciousness” (Marschall 2017: 140), and moreover, profound insights about the ambiguous nature of home.

In continuation of my discussion on the trope of the migrant’s home visit, the next chapter will explore Zoë Wicomb’s *October*, another contemporary novel that focuses on a migrant’s return to the original country. The narrative follows Mercia Murray, who, like Peter Jacobs, struggles against conventional definitions of home and experiences cathartic insights during her time back home.

3. THE REPRESENTATION OF THE MIGRANT'S HOME VISIT IN *OCTOBER*

INTRODUCTION

Zoë Wicomb's *October* (2014) focuses on Mercia Murray, who — like Peter Jacobs — returns to her original home in South Africa after a significant time abroad. Set in Kliprand and Glasgow (Scotland), the novel explores the protagonist's ambivalent association with both localities. Written in a third person, often omniscient narration, this multi-layered non-chronological story centres on Mercia's experiences of migration. The novel explores the effect of Mercia's complex migrant positionality on her relationships, her psyche, and her perception of 'home' — which culminates during her cataclysmic return-home visit.

At the age of fifty-two, Mercia Murray is heartbroken when her Scottish partner, Craig, ends their relationship. While she is grieving the end of her relationship with Craig, she receives a letter from her younger brother, Jake, urging her to return to Kliprand (South Africa) and take her nephew Nicky to live with her in Scotland. Although reluctant, Mercia returns 'home' and finds that her brother has become an alcoholic and is unable to take care of his son and wife, Sylvie. While in her Kliprand home, her brother, who is gravely ill due to his alcohol abuse, refuses to see her, and Mercia is forced to spend time with Sylvie, her sister-in-law, with whom she is at odds. Despite not wanting to take over his care, Mercia connects with her nephew Nicky, with whom she spends a lot of time exploring the veld of her Kliprand home and communing with nature.

During her visit, Mercia reflects on her childhood in Kliprand, as well as on her self-imposed exile in Glasgow. She experiences a crisis of identity and is forced to confront her complicated feelings about her 'home'. Mercia's already precarious relationship with her original home is compromised when Jake reveals the reason behind his deterioration: their staunch, patriarchal father, who had abused them as children — had also sexually abused Sylvie when she was a teenager; the father had then, years later, manipulated Jake into marrying Sylvie. The symbolic pillar of their household, Mercia's strict father, is thus revealed as a hypocrite, and a villain.

Disturbed by this terrible family secret, Mercia checks Jake into a clinic and returns to Scotland. She struggles to recover from the events of her home visit, but feels even more displaced back in Glasgow than she felt prior to her Kliprand visit. Not at home either in Scotland or in South Africa, she briefly considers relocating to a third country altogether. Eventually, Mercia decides to remain in Scotland, but when her brother dies, she returns to South Africa, with the intention of taking Nicky back to Glasgow with her. However, when she tells Sylvie of her decision, Sylvie is outraged as she was never willing to give up her child; she had also been unaware of Jake's request that has brought Mercia back to Kliprand. Affected by her gross misunderstanding of the situation and also by the recent events in her life, Mercia has an emotional breakdown. The novel ends with Sylvie ensuring that Nicky would one day visit his aunt, Mercia, in Scotland.

With regard to genre, *October* is a postcolonial novel with postmodern inflections. It explores the politics of home and migration in a non-chronological, stream-of-consciousness narrative. According to Samuelson, the protagonist's experience of migration is represented through "chronotopic disruption [which] is produced out of vertiginous movements between both temporal zones and the spatial settings of Glasgow and the Cape village of Kliprand" (2017: 180). The dual setting of Kliprand and Glasgow places *October* in continuation of Wicomb's earlier novels¹⁴. The "Cape Town-Glasgow axis" reflects Wicomb's own experience of migration (Jacobs 2016: 95), and her "consistent interest in the mutual entanglement of her two 'home' spaces" (Attridge 2017: x).

As mentioned in my Literature Review (1.2.), there are various critical voices around this novel. Critics such as Jacobs and Attridge have analysed the novel's theme of belonging. Jacobs reflects on Wicomb's use of intertextual references to explore ideas of home and belonging (2018:102), and Attridge notes the contrast between Mercia and Sylvie as emphasising the fact that "belonging is a problematic concept" in the novel (2017: 5). Additionally, Pretorius and Samuelson have also provided perspectives on Mercia's complex relationship with her sister-in-law, Sylvie. While Pretorius highlights food as symbolising the cultural difference between the two

¹⁴ Wicomb's novels *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* (1987), *David's Story* (2000), and *Playing in the Light* (2006) also emphasises the 'Cape Town-Glasgow axis' of her writing by its dual setting of Kliprand and Glasgow.

characters, Samuelson calls the novel a “tale of two women” (2017: 186): by comparing Sylvie, ‘the countrywoman’, with Mercia, the cosmopolitan traveller. Other critics who have engaged with the novel have also recognised Wicomb’s representation of autobiography (Lochner 2018), cosmopolitanism (Samuelson 2017), and transnationalism (Eastley 2017).

While the above-mentioned critics provide valuable reflections on *October*, my interest is the novel’s fictional mirroring of the migrant’s return-home visit. *October* provides an apt fictional reflection of the migrant’s ambivalent return to her country of origin. In my reading, Mercia is an emigrant whose return home is cataclysmic, overdetermined by notions of ‘home’ and her feelings of nostalgia. Her experiences during her home visit highlight the precarious migrant positionality, and from a wider perspective, the need to bypass conventional definitions of home that cripple the postcolonial migrant.

Reflecting on Sabine Marschall’s analysis of the migrant’s return visit, my chapter on *October* will centre on Mercia’s visit to her Kliprand home place. The home visit is a significant event “in time and space that consists of both emotional and cognitive reactions [...] involving complex interactions between individual and place” (Marschall 2017: 142). Hence, as with my chapter on Heyns’s novel, my analysis will be underpinned by three aspects of the migrant’s home visit: *place*, *self*, and *time*. In the next section, I will begin my exploration of Mercia’s home visit by discussing her shifting sense of place.

3.1. A SHIFTING SENSE OF PLACE

Having emigrated from South Africa during apartheid, Mercia has lived in another country for a significant amount of time: she has remained abroad while her home country has shifted to a democratic society. During her return visit to South Africa, Mercia expresses criticism about many aspects of life — for example, mainly the country's infrastructure: the poorly designed RDP houses (54, 231) — and finds that despite the passage of time, there is “much of the old South Africa is still in place” (25).

Mercia's criticisms are due to the fact that she, like her 'home country', has changed too. She had left South Africa twenty-six years previously, having accepted a scholarship to study at the University of Glasgow, and has since established a career as an academic in Scotland. Mercia is similar to many emigrants who have “become accustomed to a higher standard of living, conveniences and a more developed infrastructure in comparison with their country of origin” (Marschall 2017: 220). For years, she has lived in an upmarket apartment in the city of Glasgow, in sharp contrast to her deteriorated childhood home surrounded by the Kliprand veld.

Having lived in Scotland for so long, Mercia — as Marschall has explained of returnees — sees South Africa “with new eyes, from a different vantage point” (2017: 220). Paradoxically, upon return to South Africa, Mercia is in a unique, and liminal position: she is both an insider and outsider. Her new Scottish social status influences her view of her old home as she is overdetermined by her double perspective (her comparative understanding of both homes). As is the case with many migrants, the “perception of the host country would invariably have become a foil against which the home is experienced during the temporary return visit” (Marschall 2017: 218). For Mercia, therefore, the experience of her self-imposed exile in Scotland is a ‘foil’ against which she perceives her Kliprand home.

Mercia's lengthy absence from her home of origin means that she must now re-establish her place in South Africa. A sense of place comprises “both an interpretative perspective on the environment and an emotional reaction to the environment” (Hummon 1992, cited in Mendoza and More'n-Alegret 2012: 764). During her return visit, Mercia must confront her shifting sense of place. In the next few pages, I will illustrate Mercia's attempt to relate to her old home and interrogate conventional

definitions of home that seem to contradict her experience as a migrant. I begin by exploring the manner in which Mercia's 'home' country and 'host' country are juxtaposed, in order to show the manner in which her place in one country has affected her perception of the other.

The Juxtaposition of 'Host' Country and 'Home' Country: From Scotland, back to South Africa

If nowadays ambition cannot accommodate the old notion of home there has surely always been ambivalence, the impatience for something new, for moving on, across the world, whilst at the same time, at times, feeling the centripetal tug of the earth. (Wicomb 2014: 28)

Throughout the novel, Mercia reflects on the concept of 'home' in light of her position as a migrant. As shown in the above extract, her relationship to both countries results in 'ambivalence': as neither Scotland nor South Africa provides Mercia with a conventional feel of home. In this novel, the "web of associations between Glasgow and Cape Town", as Gurnah has stated, illustrates "the tension in [Wicomb's] writing between the value of travel and the value of rootedness" (2011: 261-2).

Despite living in Scotland for over two decades, Mercia does not consider Glasgow to be her home, and this is suggested by her emphasis on the difference between 'staying' and 'living':

In Glasgow Mercia insists on the distinction between living and staying; she is only there temporarily; it cannot be her home. She visits Kliprand often, but knows at the same time that to stay there would allow the soul to die rather than to live. (Wicomb 2014: 23)

On the other hand, Mercia's home of origin — her Kliprand home — is not homely either, as when she reflects that

[t]he thought of the Cape as home brings an ambiguous shiver—the small town in Klein Namaqualand, Kliprand. Hardly more than a village. *How could anyone want to live there? Why would anyone stay there?* These are questions that Mercia too must ask, although in those parts the words live and stay are interchangeable. (Wicomb 2014: 23; original emphasis)

The above quote illustrates the manner in which “Mercia’s ambivalence about Glasgow is presented in counterpoint to her ambivalence about her childhood home in Kliprand” (Jacobs 2016: 104). Mercia’s ambiguity towards both ‘homes’, her liminal position, is highlighted during her return visit in which her reflections on Kliprand and Glasgow are juxtaposed.

Unable to find a conventional sense of home in either place, Mercia often takes solace in nature and in reading fiction. In an attempt to understand her association to both places, she often compares the natural landscapes of both countries. For example, Mercia travels from one country to the other because she prefers warm weather:

In the past Mercia has rushed off to escape the disappointing weather. Now the gardens in Glasgow compensate for staying put. With the enduring summer light comes wave after wave of bold efflorescence, which anyone would prefer to drought-stricken Namaqualand. Mercia watches over the fading of glorious forget-me-not, the powdery fragrance of lilac, species after species of flowering rhododendron, and the trellises spangled like so many stars with clematis. She awaits the explosion of flamed poppies, the roses that will stay in bloom until the autumn. That is when she ought to be away, in the month of October, when the sadness of retreating light strikes. (Wicomb 2014: 27)

In this way, the two countries are contrasted in the protagonist’s mind; when one country feels overbearing, the other provides solace. In fact, it is important to note that it is in the month of October that Mercia visits Kliprand: she takes comfort in the “moderate October heat” and reflects on her love for “the familiar view of gray-green scrub with flat-topped mountains looming blue in the distance” (Wicomb 2014: 146). On the other hand, in Scotland, Mercia is aware of “the melancholia that descended on her in October, [and] how it took years in the Northern Hemisphere before she realized that the sadness came regularly at autumn” (139). Hence, the novel’s title *October* is a symbolic reference to her ambivalence regarding home. Indeed, as Jacobs has explained, the “ambivalence of exile is configured in the month [October] in which Mercia decides to go back home” (2016: 104).

The novel’s title is also a reference to Dylan Thomas’s ‘Poem in October’, the gist of which is one’s perception of the past. An extract of the poem (one of the novel’s three epigraphs) highlights the novel’s exploration of the protagonist’s past. Indeed, Mercia

is confronted by her past when she returns to Kliprand. As Duval asserts, the migrant's home visit is "[m]arked by an awareness of the passing of time, it provides [...] a measure of one's progress (or lack of) in life" (2004: 415). Imbued with this 'awareness' during her visit to her childhood home, Mercia reflects on her life, including the two decades spent in Scotland. These memories are embedded in the narrative present, the text shifting between Mercia's present visit in South Africa and her past in both South Africa and Scotland, thus emphasising Mercia's inner, psychological fragmentation.

The novel's two other epigraphs are extracts from Toni Morrison's *Home*, and Marilynne Robinson's novel, also titled *Home*.¹⁵ Both novels are also referred to within Wicomb's narrative, as signified by Mercia turning to fiction in an attempt to comprehend her equivocal experience of 'home'. When in Scotland, Mercia reads Robinson's novel, which is reminiscent of her own family and eventually leads her to return. In fact, while in Kliprand, Mercia wishes that she had brought the novel with her: "Mercia having then settled into identification with the story, the characters—a child with a dressing-up box—wonders what it would be like reading the novel now, at home, where she grapples with being back" (Wicomb 2014: 165). Reflecting on Robinson's novel in both Scotland and South Africa helps Mercia consolidate her relationship to her home in both countries.

Exploring Mercia's relationship to Kliprand and Glasgow, Driver has described Wicomb's engagement with these two places as "translocal", as Wicomb's "astute attention to spatial juxtapositions and interaction" on a local level rather than a national one (2017: 7). Driver further explains that

[i]n the translocal, focus is on spatial interactions within and across spaces that reveal, generate, confirm and disturb relations between character and place, saturating spaces with meanings brought into being by different perspectives, discourses, events and behaviour. (9)

¹⁵ It should be noted that Wicomb also wanted to call her book "Home" as a nod to Morrison's and Robinson's novel. In an interview with Anna James, Wicomb states "I was determined to call it *Home*, as homage to Robinson and Morrison, but also because the theme of deracination and return to the homeland became central in my novel. The publishers refused, so I settled on *October*, the month in which most of the events in base time occur. Then there is Dylan Thomas's beautiful "Poem in October" which also resonates with my theme of revisiting and reflection on the past" (2014: n.p.).

Mercia's movements between Kliprand and Glasgow have complicated her idea of home, and also her claim to both places. It is during her return-home visit that Mercia gains perspective on her relationship to both countries and the nature of home.

Sites of Significance

When Mercia receives the letter from Jake urging her to return, she is reluctant to visit her old home in Kliprand. However, as Marschall has stated, migrants' return to their childhood home is often "underpinned by deeper psychological needs" (2017: 142): Mercia is grieving her lost relationship with her Scottish partner, Craig, and is persuaded to return to Kliprand as "[m]aybe that is the place where she might stop crying—at home, a place where a heart could heal" (Wicomb 2014: 23).

Mercia, a "woman of fifty-two years who has been left" (Wicomb 2014: 11), as the opening lines of the novel state, experiences profound inner conflict: her new position as a single woman is interwoven with her precarious position as a migrant. Her association to Scotland was largely grounded in her relationship with Craig, and after the relationship's abrupt end, she finds herself restless in the country she has lived in for the last twenty-six years. Indeed, Eastley asserts that in this novel, "Wicomb juxtaposes two types of separation: relationships that end, and quitting a country through migration" (2017: 169). So, when Mercia returns to Kliprand, she reflects on her place in the world: this is shown by her interactions with sites of significance in her 'original home'.

The Childhood Home

Not even a full day has Mercia been here in Kliprand, and already she would like to wash her hands of these people who are her own, would like to pack her bag right away and leave. But that is not possible. One does not walk away from family. Patience and kindness, that is what family lays claim to. Which may mean that one should not come to see them in the first place. (Wicomb 2014: 35)

Back in her Kliprand childhood home, where her brother, Jake, and his family now reside, Mercia is miserable and regrets her decision to return. Her brother who has

summoned her there, refuses to see her and she is at odds with her sister-in-law, Sylvie. Throughout her visit, Mercia has awkward exchanges with Sylvie. Mercia and Sylvie cannot relate to each other: while Mercia has travelled, and spent the majority of her adult life away from Kliprand, Sylvie has remained in Kliprand her entire life, and still has very traditional, conservative values. According to Marschall, many returnees struggle to relate to traditions of their former home, “no longer finding local rituals and customs meaningful” (2017: 220). A similar situation is reflected in the novel, as Mercia is unable to relate to local traditions and often ends up insulting Sylvie. For example, Sylvie prepares a range of local dishes as a sort of welcoming gesture; however, Mercia becomes irritated at what she feels is Sylvie’s excessive preoccupation with food, exclaiming: “[d]oes the girl think of nothing but food?” (Wicomb 2014: 191).

Whereas Mercia hoped that returning to her childhood home would help her recover from her break-up with Craig, her constant conflict with Sylvie, and Jake’s refusal to see her, makes her wish to be back in Scotland: “far away from this place called home. Never again will she complain about the pressures of academic life, the nightmare of trying to write. Being with family is far more stressful” (Wicomb 2014: 56). So, to pass the time, Mercia works on her memoir, which she had started in Scotland shortly after Craig left her. The memoir, as Jacobs has stated, is another discourse through which Mercia explores “her homecoming to her brother’s house in Kliprand in Namaqualand, and her further unhoming” (2016: 94).

Within the confines of her childhood home, Mercia finds comfort in working on her memoir that she has significantly titled “Home”:

The icon of the memoir beckons from the desktop, offers itself as diversion from the awfulness of being in this house. Mercia thinks of this writing as private, but she can’t help wondering what Jake would make of being translated into these words. Still, how else is she to get through the days in this place called home? (Wicomb 2014: 196)

The narrative of Mercia’s actual visit is interspersed with her writing a memoir; for it is during her visit to her childhood home place that Mercia is able to reflect on her old family history, which she perceives as what Marschall terms “a personal reference point” (2017: 219). Marschall has also asserted that the “trip back home is a trip back into one’s autobiographical past” (2017: 217), and that migrants “draw on episodic and

autobiographical memories of concrete places and social relations in their home country” (2018: 8). Mercia’s reflections on her family are interwoven with incidents of the narrative present. She reflects on her childhood: her oppressive father, her distant mother, and her suffering baby brother, Jake. Mercia’s memoir helps her express the ambivalence she feels for her Kliprand home, and understand why she is now so unhappy to be there, in a place conventionally imbued with a sense of comfort and belonging.

Her memoir focuses on her father, Nicholas Murray, who is revealed to have been abusive — responsible for creating an oppressive home environment, subduing her mother into silence, and pushing Jake towards rebellion. Physically, Nicholas abused his children during his habitual Sunday night beatings; mentally, he imposed on his children his corrupt ideologies of race, class, and religion. Mercia and her brother were not allowed to socialise with the diverse people of their community as “[i]t was, according to their father, important to remember that they did not belong there” (Wicomb 2014: 95). He believed that “they were different, that living amongst the Namaquas did not make Namaquas of the Murrays. The people around them were not their kind” (94). Mercia reminisces on her father’s words, his ideas of ‘belonging’: “his children should not think of this place of their birth, burdened as it is with the arcane complexities of belonging, as their home” (166), they are “above geography” and “free to belong anywhere” (167).

What Mercia’s father describes as ‘freedom’ has a negative effect on Mercia’s sense of place. Especially after Craig has left her, she yearns to belong, to make a choice of home between Kliprand and Glasgow: “[w]hilst living with Craig, she refused to think of Glasgow as home. Now, rehabilitating, did that not demand that she take a stand? Was there not the risk of being irretrievably lost? between cities? between continents?” (Wicomb 2014: 128)

Her father’s warped vision of race and belonging contributed to Mercia’s ‘unhoming’, while his psychological oppression has driven Mercia to seek refuge in a foreign country, a refuge from the tense atmosphere created by her father:

[h]ome, the place she has not lived in for more than twenty-six years. Hot, oppressive, and heavy with the memories of growing up under the eagle eye of the old man, Our Father, Old Who-art-in-heaven, as the seven-year-old Jake mocked irreverently, but whispered all the same. (Wicomb 2014: 27)

The 'presence' of Mercia's late father haunts her memories of her family home, but more so through the revelations of his hypocritical, clandestine actions that have destroyed the family fabric. Mercia's uncomfortable home visit turns catastrophic, when Jake reveals the reason for his deterioration: their father — the well-respected patriarch — had influenced Jake to marry Sylvie, the woman who Nicholas had sexually abused in the past. When this family secret is revealed, Mercia is devastated: she rushes to Cape Town because "she cannot stay there. Not in that house. Not in Kliprand" (225).

Commenting on Mercia's emigration, Eastley states that "Mercia has chosen a life abroad not primarily for political reasons or even for economic opportunity: she migrates to get away from her family" (2017: 169). Indeed, Mercia's memoir and the events of her home visit underline the fact that Mercia had left her home to escape her family; she reflects on how "[t]he scholarship in Scotland that was meant to be no more than a break from the oppressiveness of home led to Craig and lifelong exile" (Wicomb 2014: 187). During her home visit, Mercia's childhood home reminds her of the 'oppressiveness of home' and causes her to yearn for her life in Glasgow, where her biggest concern was the "pressures of academic life" (2014: 56). In this way, Mercia's complex sense of place is highlighted, her sense of belonging oscillating from one country to the other: when she is heartbroken by Craig, she returns to Kliprand to heal; when in Kliprand, after the revelation of the family secret, she rushes back to Glasgow.

While the childhood home reminds Mercia of her oppressive, unhappy childhood and of why she has remained away so long, the veld that surrounds her Kliprand home reminds Mercia of why she has now returned, thus giving her insight into her ambivalence regarding 'home'.

The Veld

In addition to working on her memoir, Mercia spends a lot of time exploring the veld with her nephew, Nicky. Like the memoir, Mercia's interaction with the natural environment of her homeland helps her express her complicated feelings regarding her Kliprand home. While exploring the veld with Nicky, Mercia communes with nature. When she comes across flowers, which, in Afrikaans — the home language of Kliprand — are referred to as "kalkoentjies", it is oddly the flower's official name that affects Mercia:

Then she remembers, unsolicited, the official name: *Gladiolus alatus iridaceae*; she had looked it up many years later. Why is it this name rather than the homely Afrikaans, kalkoentjie, that makes the eyes prick? Does Mercia know that what threatens are tears of self-pity, that she is touched by her own difference, her distance from home? (50; original emphasis)

Mercia's connection to the flower's official name rather than the more 'homely' Afrikaans version emphasises her alienation from her Kliprand home. Marschall has stated that "[t]he more the migrant tourists struggle to reconnect with the familiar and ordinary, the more they become aware of their own difference" (148). Hence, Mercia's 'eyes prick' as she realises her emotional distance from her childhood home as when she foregoes the 'homely' term for flowers, "kalkoentjies", for the official term.

"[T]he realization of this 'otherness'", Marschall asserts, "may bring about a shift in their sense of identity and personhood" (148). Accordingly, in addition to revealing her emotional distance from home, the veld also provides Mercia with a symbolic understanding of her migrant identity. On one of their many explorations of the veld, Mercia and Nicky come across a tortoise. She explains to the child that the "tortoise carries its house on its back", to which the child, wanting to take the tortoise home, says the "tortoise won't mind where it lives if its own home is on its back" (177). The conversation is symbolic for Mercia's predicament as a migrant, and the tortoise is an insistent metaphor for Mercia to describe herself. For, similar to the tortoise, Mercia carries "her home in herself" (Eastley 2017: 172), and she does not have a single home location, being ambivalent about both her Kliprand and Scotland homes. The tortoise motif is further emphasised when, upon her return from South Africa, Mercia

says to her Scottish friend, Smithy, “[y]ou know what a tortoise I am” (258), in attempt to describe her migrant identity.

The tortoise's aquatic counterpart, the turtle, also provides a powerful metaphor later in the novel, when Mercia has to decide whether to leave Scotland for yet another country. Disappointed with her sense of non-belonging in both South Africa and Scotland, she applies for a post at the University of Macau. While exploring the university campus, Mercia observes a pond of turtles, in which a younger turtle struggles to get the attention of an older turtle. Strangely, the sight of turtles chasing each other symbolically prompts Mercia to reject the Macau opportunity and return to Scotland, before visiting Kliprand again. The turtles perhaps reminded Mercia of her own troubling childhood and her responsibility towards Nicky, whose care she still had not decided to take over (despite her brother's request). Nature, therefore, is shown powerfully to express Mercia's experiences and precarious migrant positionality. As Jacobs explains, the novel provides “zoological instances of the homing instinct as metaphors for contemplating Mercia's story of homecoming and unhoming” (2016: 107).

Back in the narrative present, on her return-home visit, Mercia finds a measure of comfort in her explorations of the veld. She reminisces on happy memories of her childhood as

[w]hen the sun's lingering on Capricorn brought the fiercest heat, Mercia and Jake would sleep under the stars on the old wooden trailer [...]. Jake was her darling baby brother whose antics made her laugh, for whom she feared, and as the fresh morning air arrived the children snuggled close together under the yawning stars. (88)

She recalls how, as a child, she had also found a sense of security in nature by creating her own type of home:

On lovely days cooled with cloud, she stepped out of the real to play alone at her secret place, a thornbush decorated with the silver paper rescued from Christmas sweets. In spring tiny green leaves burst from the gray stems, and later, at the end of summer, red berries shone as brightly as the silver paper. (86)

Mercia also reflects on the manner in which, when she was in Scotland, she yearned for the natural landscape of her Kliprand home:

Mercia drifts from the southern December to the lingering light of the Scottish summer. After all these years the slow inching of day to darkness still brings melancholia; for all its reliability still creeps upon her as a surprising ache of *weltschmerz*, until darkness finally engulfs the day. Now sitting in Sylvie's yard, she thinks of that dusk-bound sadness as a longing for the African night, for blackness that like a screen is swiftly, securely drawn across the sky, obliterating the day in a quick, decisive death—obliterating guilt. (88-9)

Based on the above discussion, it is evident that Mercia's connection with nature, particularly with the veld that surrounds her Kliprand home, reflects her shifting sense of place. Mercia's original home place is both unbearable and consoling; her home visit — her subjective interactions with sites of significance — emphasise her ambiguous, unconventional experience of home.

In addition to her shifting sense of place, Mercia experiences a further crisis of identity when she returns to her family home. According to Duval, migrants' home of origin "might function as both an adaptive mechanism and a tool for the negotiation of identities in both localities" (2004: 50). Mercia's interactions with the places and people of her old home also reflect her shifting sense of self. The next section will focus on various social interactions that shape Mercia's existential crisis.

3.2. A SHIFTING SENSE OF SELF

Mercia's home visit is characterised by the ambivalence she feels towards both her 'home' country and her 'host' country. She has become accustomed to a different way of life in Glasgow, and upon her return to South Africa, she views her original home with 'new eyes'. During her visit, Mercia interacts with sites of significance: her 'childhood home' reminds her of her family and troubled childhood, while 'the veld' provides her with a place to bond with her nephew and contemplate her feelings of alienation and dislocation. While her sense of place shifts between Kliprand and Glasgow, neither 'place' provides a stable feeling of 'home' and belonging. Mercia is, therefore, urged to turn her gaze inward and reflect on how her change of self has contributed to her emotional estrangement.

Marschall has explained the manner in which "memory-based comparisons underpin the experience of the home journey, its places, people, tangible and intangible aspects, and how this induces reflexivity about the meaning of home and for some a shift in consciousness and sense of self" (2017: 143). Therefore, in addition to a shifting sense of place, Mercia's return to her original home causes her to have an existential crisis in which she re-evaluates her sense of self. She finds herself in a crisis of identity, which is reflected in her relationships. In light of this, the next sections will explore Mercia's interactions with other characters — Craig, Sylvie, Jake, and Nicky — and the manner in which these relationships reflect aspects of her identity and influence her sense of home.

A Sense of Social Alienation in Glasgow and Kliprand

Mercia's relationships with the people of both her 'home' country and 'host' country are complicated by her precarious migrant positionality. This comes to light during her home visit, when she is prompted to reflect on her personal history. In both Glasgow and Kliprand, Mercia has often found herself in an estranged position: in the former place, it is because of her relationship with her ex-partner Craig and his 'othering' of her; in the latter, it is her relationship with Sylvie that brings about feelings of alienation and otherness. The next few pages will illustrate Mercia's social alienation in both her Scottish and South African homes.

Mercia and Craig

Mercia is often misunderstood and ostracised by other characters, many criticisms coming from Craig, Mercia's Scottish ex-partner. Throughout the novel, Mercia is described from Craig's point of view, and in relation to her migrant identity. As mentioned before, Craig is one the reasons Mercia embarks on her home visit: after he abruptly ends their twenty-four year relationship, Mercia feels out of place in Glasgow and returns to her home country to escape "the emptiness of the apartment" they once shared (Wicomb 2014: 59). She returns to Kliprand, hoping that it could be a "place where a heart could heal" (23), and therefore, spends a lot of her visit reflecting on her relationship with Craig.

The return-home visit is a good opportunity for Mercia to reminisce about her more recent past, her time in Scotland and her relationship with Craig. As asserted by Marschall, "memory and the comparisons it induces is at the core of experiencing home as destination for migrants on return trips. This includes memories of previous lived experience in the home country; memories of the migration itself and life in the host country" (2017: 147). Many of Mercia's memories about Scotland refer to Craig, and reveal him as being ignorant of her plight as a migrant. In great contrast to Mercia, — whom he refers to on numerous occasions as a "citizen of the world" (Wicomb 2014: 254) — Craig is deeply rooted in Scotland, and as a result, unable to relate to Mercia's experiences of migration:

Dr. Ants in Her Pants. That's what Craig called her when he first flicked through her passport. Only five years old and already bursting with border-control stamps. Where have you not been? he asked, shaking his head. [...] Look, he said defensively, I come from a country of folk who once upon a time rushed about colonizing the world, and so freeing those left behind of the horrible Christianity they took along to dump on others. Thereafter, folk needed only to move across the border, either to make good or to relish being in exile. Now, having recovered ourselves, we no longer have to do that, so I've come back to Glasgow and this is where I stay put. Healthy or what? (253).

Contrary to Mercia's 'translocal' ambivalence, Craig is able to find an authentic sense of home in his 'home country'. The contrast between Craig and Mercia is metaphorically illustrated in a powerful scene. The scene refers to a time when Craig

took her to Pots of Gartness on Endrick Water¹⁶ to watch the salmon leap, a place he visited as a teenager (139). The salmon, having travelled to the Norwegian Sea and back, leap upstream (a dangerous jump in which many die) in order to return to their pond of origin (the Pots of Gartness). While Craig looked at the salmon phenomenon with awe mixed with nostalgia for his adolescence,

Mercia felt embarrassing tears prickle as the indomitable creatures were repeatedly beaten, some cut by the rock as they fell back, leaving trails of blood. In the quiet pools the less vigorous salmon flopped about, exhausted, before taking up once more the quest of that circular journey now so near its end. (142)

The stark contrast in their reactions to the salmon spectacle — Craig who is enthralled and Mercia repelled — illustrates their differing positions. Once again, Mercia sees the natural phenomenon as a metaphor for her own ambiguous position. The salmon, which leap upstream through a life-threatening battle with the rapids, reminded Mercia of her own ‘Atlantic trip’, of her own precarious relationship to her home place of origin, Kliprand. She scrutinised the phenomenon: “It was indecent; the place should be fenced off; humans should be sheltered from Mother Nature’s cruel displays. *How awful that return*. She for one did not want to see it” (143; my emphasis). The sight of the salmon struggling to return to their original pond is symbolic for Mercia’s own conflict with her place of origin. According to Eastley, the salmon is a central metaphor in the novel, as similar to the salmon, “contemporary human travellers who, not unlike Wicomb herself [and of course Mercia], often live lives that take them back and forth between very different homes” (2017:157).

While Craig views Mercia’s social mobility negatively, Mercia is proud of her ability to navigate new cities with ease:

Mercia has always had that fifth sense, even in strange cities, where, after a cursory consultation of a map, she was able to move swiftly through a crowd, confident about her whereabouts. Like a springbokkie, her father used to boast, lifting its nose to smell the direction of the wind, pounding a hoof into the earth, before, quick as a flash, having found its bearings, it leaps off straight as a die to its destination. That is still how Mercia sees herself, propelled effortlessly through the world, eager to

¹⁶ The Pots of Gartness are rocky pools found on the Endrick Water river in Scotland. Tourists gather to watch the salmon leap, a dangerous upstream jump. Salmon that were spawned in this river travel downstream to the Norwegian Sea and return, as adults, to leap upstream back to their pond of origin.

see yet another place. Not pathological restlessness, as Craig later diagnosed. (Wicomb 2014: 254)

Whereas Mercia is eager to explore new places and new countries, Craig is eager to explore familiar local attractions in Scotland, his home country. In fact, reflecting on Bauman's typography of migrants (refer to section 1.1.), Mercia can be understood as a 'tourist': an elite type of migrant — financially and politically liberated with the choice of which place to call home — who finds comfort and control in a "mobile angle of view" (Bauman 1996: 12). For 'tourists', Bauman explains, "[m]obility is the name of the game: one must be able to move when the needs push or the dreams call. This ability the tourists call freedom, autonomy or independence, and they cherish it more than anything else" (12). Hence — Mercia, a 'tourist' who cherishes mobility — prefers to travel to new places and therefore insisted with Craig that they should holiday somewhere sunny and new. However, his response underlines his incomprehension of her migrant identity:

'What's wrong with you? Why can't you stay put, enjoy leisure without thrashing about in airports? Are you not getting too old for this wanderlust? You know that banging on about sunshine is an excuse. You just want to be on the move, get to as many places as possible. Tick them off. Conspicuous consumption of space, eh?' (229)

Mercia feels alienated by Craig's insensitive comments about the nature of her migrant identity, and at the same time, she also feels ostracised by the locals of Glasgow. This is how she had attempted to express it to Craig:

'In Scotland, does the word yes count as a greeting? Or is that just used in Glasgow? I don't remember coming across it in the south.'
'What do you mean? Where are you greeted with yes?'
'In public places—shops, restaurants, libraries, dentists. The person at reception, often a woman, will ask in a rising tone, which is to say a puzzled tone, or even something of a bark, Yes? As if you had stumbled into the wrong place. And that before you've got round to saying anything. Perhaps it's not said to men?'
'Well, I can't say I've ever heard it. Could it not be a friendly tone? Perhaps it's your paranoia—you really should watch yourself, not watch out for the imaginary slight.' (Wicomb 2014: 232)

As shown in the above extract, Craig did not understand Mercia's estrangement and sense of otherness. He was unaware of the subtle ways in which Mercia was

marginalised by the locals as a foreigner. Instead, he asked her to 'watch herself' and to 'not watch out for the imaginary slight'.

Ironically, though, Craig had also fetishized Mercia's foreignness. This is evident in a scene about a dinner party when Craig boasted about "Mercia's Cape dishes, her use of spices, learned, he announced to guests, at her mother's knee" (195); ironically, Mercia had cooked based on a British recipe. Critic Antoinette Pretorius offers an interesting explanation of this scene:

Mercia's partner, Craig, fetishizes the exotic appeal of her cooking [...]. While cooking the foods of home might provide Mercia with comfort and might serve to authenticate the cultural identity from which she feels severed, Wicomb undercuts this idealized cultural performance through stating that Mercia in fact learned to cook these dishes from the British chef "Jane Grigson's recipes" (194), and not from her own mother. This problematizes Mercia's cultural identification, and furthermore undermines broader notions of cultural authenticity. Significantly, though, Mercia is aware of these complexities, and yet does not say or do anything to alter his outlook. Because of her status as an emigrant living in Scotland, she appears to participate in the process that fetishizes her otherness. (2015: 651)

While Craig certainly contributed to Mercia's sense of alienation in Glasgow and her reticence to accept Glasgow as 'home', it is mainly Mercia's own precarious migrant positionality — which "is inherently informed by ambivalence" (Pretorius 2015: 650) — that prevents her from arguing against her own 'othering'.

Craig's attitude towards Mercia's identity contributed to her inner crisis and placed her in the position of 'the other' in Glasgow, despite her having lived there for twenty-six years. When his quip about her being a 'citizen of the world' is repeated by her Scottish friend Smithy, Mercia is shocked and reflected on whether: "they, Smithy and Craig and who knows who else, [have] been making fun of her?", and decides that she "must not be paranoid; she cannot afford to lose her friendship with Smithy, so she laughs it off" (2014: 260). The comments about her migrant identity result in her sense of insecurity and alienation in her Glasgow home.

During her home visit, Mercia examines her relationship with Craig from the distance of her Kliprand home. In retrospect, he is represented as being oblivious to her

tumultuous struggle with her past and the problematic of 'home'. Craig's inability to understand her mobile identity deepens Mercia's deep sense of insecurity and contributes to her non-belonging in Glasgow. According to critic Rosie Roberts,

[e]motional subjectivities are central to such discussions because people's mobility in terms of whether they belong or don't belong in a new location, whether they stay temporarily or are able to become permanent residents, is affected as much by their emotional experiences as it is by the legal constraints which govern the length of their stay. (2018: 26)

Despite the fact that Mercia has Scottish citizenship, her feelings of alienation and her break-up with Craig cause her to seek emotional refuge in her original home in Kliprand, where ironically, her sense of belonging is also called into question. It is a home visit in which she is made aware of her ambivalent, liminal positionality. The next few pages will discuss Mercia's return visit to Kliprand and her precarious relationships with members of her family that prompt an intensive self-reflection.

Mercia and Sylvie

While, in Scotland, Mercia felt alienated as an 'emigrant', upon her return to her home country, Mercia has a sense of relief from the stereotypical identity labelling as an 'outsider'. As Marschall states,

[t]he home trip offers a temporary escape from loathed group identities (e.g. 'foreigner') ascribed to them and discursively constructed in the host country. However, the prolonged time away from home renders previously familiar roles and identity positions more complex and requires their renegotiation. (2017: 217)

Although Mercia is not seen as a 'foreigner' in Kliprand, she feels estranged here as well. So, ironically, upon her return to the home of her origin, she must re-negotiate her position. Many critics of mobility studies have recognised this phenomenon, Duval, for example, asserts that the return visit is "a unique process of identity negotiation" (2004: 57). Hence, it is during Mercia's home visit that she has a severe crisis of identity as her encounters with her Kliprand family reveal hidden aspects of herself, and alerts her to the effect of emigration on her sense of self. Mercia's estrangement and shifting sense of self are most palpable in her relationship with her brother's wife, Sylvie.

In great contrast to Mercia, the 'citizen of the world', Sylvie is an emblematic country woman. In the same manner that Craig is rooted in Scotland, Sylvie is rooted in Kliprand. She has lived in Kliprand her whole life, thus representing a 'foil' to Mercia, who has travelled extensively. This is why Samuelson refers to the novel as "a tale of two women":

One a restless 'citizen of the world', the other comfortably inhabiting the position of 'countrywoman'; one a savant who has renounced the 'business of reproduction', the other a butcher still breast-feeding her five-year-old child; one fretting over a memoir that fails to develop and is finally abandoned, the other producing a luminous collection of self-portraits, which spill out of an envelope from a time 'she would rather not think of'. (2017:186)

It is, therefore, through Mercia's exchanges with Sylvie that she experiences severe alienation in her Kliprand home place. Mercia is similar to many emigrants who have spent a significant time abroad, and return to their original home conscious of their "superior social status, educational level and 'worldliness'" (Marschall 2017: 220). Influenced by her 'superior' social status, Mercia disapproves of Sylvie:

Mercia remembers the day, some years ago, when Jake [her brother] told her that he was going to marry the Willemse girl. She could not hide her dismay. Now there's a surprise, she said, but why marry? No, you're not surprised. And marriage is not the issue. The truth, dear sissie, Jake cackled, is that you disapprove. You're no different from the old man. You don't even know Sylvie, but you do know that she's not your kind, not good enough for your brother. You've become European, too grand for us; you don't belong here anymore. How bourgeois you've become, Mercy, a fine liberal you are. (Wicomb 2014: 181-2)

As Jake suggests, Mercia's disdain of Sylvie may be seen as a result of her changed social status:

[o]nce upon a time she used to think of bourgeois as a dirty word. But the truth was that over the years the label of bourgeois like a garishly colored garment had faded into something less offensive, something perfectly wearable. Acceptable, because she was wearing it. (182)

Jake's insinuations about her new 'bourgeois' stance make Mercia realise that "her view of the girl [Sylvie] was inexcusable, so that she would make every effort to get to know Sylvie and rise above her prejudices" (182). However, in the narrative present

of her home visit, Mercia finds that “[f]or all her belief in female solidarity, she simply cannot take to this girl” (74).

Mercia’s education and new lifestyle are seen by her brother and sister-in-law as a negative aspect that separates her from her family. Many migrants who have returned home have viewed “themselves as having advanced while locals were perceived as largely stagnant and no longer able to relate to their experience” (Marschall 2017: 144). For example, Mercia reflects on one of her previous home visits, when she explained her academic work to Jake:

Jake asked, Do you call it work, the stuff you do? And a laughing Sylvie interjected, You should come to the butchery on a Saturday morning to see real work. I’ll do that, Mercia said stiffly, I’m happy to find out about the different ways of working. Mine may not be the chopping up of carcasses, but it’s work all the same. (56)

Mercia’s academic work is mocked by both Jake and Sylvie, and is not seen as ‘real work’ when contrasted with Sylvie’s manual work as a butcher. Therefore, Mercia feels that her immediate family are no longer able to relate to her experience and her academic career. In her sociological study of the migrant’s home visit, Marschall comments that “participants hesitate in describing their friends and family, not wanting to sound judgmental or condescending, yet they are acutely aware of their superior social status, educational level and ‘worldliness’” (2017: 220). A similar situation is represented in the novel, when during her home visits, Mercia is made aware of how much her ‘superior’ social and educational status separate her from Jake and Sylvie. This is also emphasised by Lochner, who asserts that *October* “questions the value of an education to learn how to live in the world” (2018: 6). For instance, Lochner illustrates the manner in which Sylvie views Mercia as ignorant:

Sylvie, confronted with Mercia who, ‘for all her supposed cleverness knows nothing of either children or sheep’ (62), is incredulous that the latter, ‘immersed in a tricky chapter’ (131) of her monograph, had clean forgotten to get dinner. (2018: 6)

Sylvie’s domestic knowledge, as embedded in and associated with Kliprand, is contrasted sharply with Mercia’s ‘worldly’ intellectualism. Their conflict over food highlights their differing positions. While Sylvie attempts to make Mercia feel ‘at home’

by preparing traditional dishes, Mercia (having lived abroad for so long) has lost the taste for it and often under-appreciates Sylvie's efforts. For example, when Sylvie prepares *roosterbrood* and begins to share the recipe, Mercia interrupts by saying that the bread from her local Glasgow bakery is also very good and that there is "no need to go to all that trouble nowadays" (Wicomb 2014: 68). Sylvie is offended at Mercia's remark:

Sylvie looks at her askance. What a strange thing to say after she stayed up the previous night to knead, and rose early to make a fire so that there'd be something warm for breakfast. Well, so much for the blarney woman's grandness, for all that education. (68)

Mercia does not recognise that Sylvie has gone through the effort of making bread the traditional way as a gesture of hospitality. Throughout Mercia's visit, Sylvie goes to great lengths to prepare traditional food for her, which — according to critic Antoinette Pretorius — is Sylvie's "attempt at maintaining an appearance of homeliness" (2015: 652). This attempt backfires as Mercia becomes irritated with what she feels is Sylvie's excessive preoccupation with food. She emphasises her disgust with meat, which also signals her disdain for Sylvie, a butcher by trade:

[Mercia] returns to the question of why she finds meat difficult to eat here in Kliprand. It is not only the head. The faint nausea that has gripped her over the last couple of days is undoubtedly linked to meat. Is it connected with Sylvie, the butcher girl? Back home in Glasgow, Mercia had no such misgivings about meat. (Wicomb 2014: 193 -194)

Food then, as Antoinette Pretorius has explained, becomes a "marker of difference" (2015: 656), for, Mercia's inability to appreciate local dishes sets her apart from her Kliprand family. Pretorius further analyses Wicomb's representation of food as "inherently informed by a sense of the uncanny: food is represented as being both familiar and strange, and both empowering and dangerous" (655). Whereas Craig's comments on Mercia's preparation of food alienate her in Scotland, Sylvie's preparation of traditional dishes in South Africa have the same effect on Mercia.

Mercia's inability to enjoy local food is not an uncommon phenomenon among migrants who spend many years living in another country and become accustomed to

a different type of cuisine. As a result of her different preferences, Mercia experiences emotional 'slippage', as Marschall has observed about migrants:

Slippage occurs when their search for the familiar environment prompts them to notice changes and developments and – more importantly – when their attempt to reconnect with remnants of their pre-migration life leads to the discovery of changes within themselves. *No longer being able to eat the local food; no longer finding local rituals and customs meaningful; no longer being able to imagine living in the village or homestead in which they grew up; no longer being able to relate to some of the local people* are indicators of such change, which induce a gradual awareness of one's own development and a shifting sense of self. (2017: 220; my emphasis)

'Slippage' occurs frequently in Mercia's interactions with Sylvie: her inability to relate to Sylvie herself, or to her food, makes Mercia aware of how much she has changed since her emigration and how she feels 'unhomed' in her old home. Mercia's 'unhomeliness' is particularly palpable when confronted with Sylvie's unquestionable belonging to Kliprand, a place about which Mercia can only feel ambivalent. The contrast between these characters, according to Attridge, highlights the theme of belonging, a common exploration in Wicomb's *oeuvre*. Attridge explains that characters like Sylvie "who, without questioning it, belong to their place [...] establish a contrast with those who are uncertain of where they belong or for whom belonging is a problematic concept" (2017: 5). Like Craig in Glasgow, Sylvie is able to find a conventional sense of home and belonging in Kliprand. Mercia, on the other hand, continues to struggle to find a sense of belonging during her home visit, being constantly confronted by the stark difference from the people of her old home.

A Sense of Reconnecting with the Suppressed Self

Upon return to the original home, many migrants struggle to find a familiar foothold in a place that was once their only home, with many elements of their suppressed self being exposed. During her home visit, Mercia is able to reconnect with memories of her childhood through her bond with her young nephew, Nicky. She also works on her memoir, which explores her childhood and prompts insights into her brother Jake, her father, and more importantly herself. Furthermore, a vital secret of Mercia's family history is revealed to her during this particular home visit. Hence, the next two sub-

sections will discuss Mercia's home visit, particularly, her reconnection with her repressed self, as reflected in her interactions with her family.

Mercia, Jake, and the Memory of their Father

In her exploration of the migrants' home visit, Marschall emphasises the manner in which "memory underpins the encounter with the home(land) and its social relations" (2017: 214). This is evident in *October* as, during her home visit, Mercia is overwhelmed by her suppressed memories of her brother, Jake, and her deceased father, Nicholas. Through her reflection of these memories, Mercia gains insight into her relationship with her family, particularly Jake. As revealed, the breakdown of Mercia's bond with Jake coincides with her deteriorating relationship with her Kliprand home place.

One of the main reasons for Mercia's visit is Jake's letter, his request that she come home and take her nephew back to Scotland with her. For the majority of her visit, however, Jake refuses to speak to Mercia: he remains in his room, confined to his bed, and sickly from his alcohol abuse. So, Mercia decides to work on her memoir, because "[i]f she can't speak to her brother, she could at least write about him, about growing up in that place. That would be her only way of reaching Jake" (Wicomb 2014: 131).

Mercia's memoir weaves itself through the narrative present of her home visit. The text's oscillation between Mercia's present visit and her past experiences emphasises her emotional dislocation. She had started her memoir shortly after Craig left her, and now back in her old childhood home, her explorations of the past are vivid. As Marschall has stated, the "trip back home is a trip back into one's autobiographical past" (2017: 217).

Mercia's memoir, a pursuit of past memories, allows her to confront her shifting sense of self, as Marschall has also explained:

[t]he process of remembering is associated with the desire to consolidate our own sense of self; we tend to shape our memories in ways that are consistent with particular 'self-identity goals' and definitions of self at any given time. (217)

Mercia's memoir also reveals the tragic circumstances of Jake's life as "her story is also Jake's, and has she not always, or in some ways, avoided Jake's story, avoided being caught up between him and their father?" (Wicomb 2014: 21). In recent years, Mercia had begun to think of Jake as an abusive husband and irresponsible father. However, during her time in Kliprand, she comes to understand Jake better: she now sees him as a man overdetermined by their terrible childhood environment, which he could not leave behind as Mercia had. Through her memoir, Mercia delves deeper into her early past, with Jake being revealed as her "darling baby brother" (88) whose life was ruined by their father.

Mercia's reflections on her childhood reveal an absent mother, and an abusive father, and a brother (Jake) who had been subjected to the brunt of her father's physical and emotional abuse, all of which had led to his present state of deterioration. During Mercia and Jake's childhood, their father, Nicholas, imposed his toxic ideas of class, race, and religion on them. Reflecting on her childhood, and how they had "lived in a state of perpetual fear and guilt" (85), Mercia wishes that she could have offered Jake more protection: "Poor Jake. Too vulnerable for the idea of manliness that their father imposed on him. If only she had been old enough to protect her brother" (100).

Mercia also reminisces about the times when her "[f]ather grew less stern and read to them" (85). She had enjoyed these nights, as even in childhood she took comfort in literature, "transported by stories, [she] was prepared to take the evening's suspension of harsh parenthood at face value" (85). Jake, in contrast, would sit "stiffly, on the edge of his chair, as if bracing himself for an unexpected blow" (85). Jake did not find solace in fiction, but only in his relationship with Mercia; she fondly remembers moments when "they huddled together in a mealie field, where the sky above had shrunk into a narrow blue strip, the satin edge of a familiar blanket in which they wrapped up together, protected from the world of adults" (103).

As young adults, Jake and Mercia still shared a strong bond, which had been created during their turbulent childhood. In fact, the relationship between Mercia and Jake is one of importance in the novel: this is also underlined by the novel's intertextual references to Toni Morrison's *Home*, and Marilynne Robinson's novel, also titled

Home. Both novels focus on brother-sister relationships as the protagonists' relationship with their sibling is a key factor in the trajectory of the novel. The significance of the relationship between Mercia and Jake is also emphasised by Jacobs, who states that "in both its *Home* intertexts, the central relationship in Wicomb's *October* is between a sister and brother" (2016: 101). Mercia reflects on how although the sibling relationship represented by Robinson is similar to her relationship with Jake, the two of them were particularly affected by South Africa's apartheid, and by their abusive father:

Strangely familiar, this story of siblings, brother and sister, that turns out also to be one of father and son. But theirs—Mercia and Jake's story—is from a different continent, a different hemisphere, a different kind of people, a kind so lacking in what is known as western gentility. Theirs is a harsh land that makes its own demands on civility. Their father too, a good man, even if he does not know how to show his love for an errant son. (21)

Mercia's relationship with Jake had been mutually enhancing: "[w]ith her, Mercia, he had always been gentle, had appointed for himself a place in her heart, had wanted her approval" (84). Together, they had argued over the events of their childhood, their father's convoluted ideas and Mercia's 'bourgeois' stance. Most importantly, Jake, despite their back and forth, had been able to make Mercia 'feel at home' as "[f]or all the sparring and Mercia's exasperation, Jake became once again the exuberant brother of her youth, who made her laugh with his impersonations, his parodying of members of their family and of politicians" (103).

Mercia and Jake had generally disagreed over their childhood experiences: Jake had always tried to convince Mercia of their father's maliciousness, while Mercia always defended her parents:

Mercia felt a rush of sympathy for their ineptitude as parents. She could hear Jake's cynical reprimand, that it was in her own interest to believe that the old folk did what they did because they believed it to be for the best, to be in their children's interest. How could you buy that shit? he asked scornfully. Mercia does not understand why Jake has hardened his heart, why he seems angrier than ever. Surely people grow more relaxed about their parents' faults as they grow older. After all, Nicholas and Nettie would have been damaged in turn by the weird beliefs of an earlier generation. (172)

During her visit, Mercia becomes fully aware of how much her relationship with Jake has disintegrated. Jake refuses to see her, and when she finally sets eyes on him, he is dishevelled and tells Mercia that he has made a mistake in summoning her back home. Mercia is forced to spend time with Sylvie, who exacerbates the ‘unhomeliness’ of her old childhood home. After a few days in Kliprand, Mercia has had enough of Jake’s avoidance and drunken behaviour, and confronts him. It is during this confrontation that he reveals a horrible family secret: that their father had sexually abused Sylvie when she was a teenager, and furthermore, had prompted Jake to marry her.

After Jake’s revelation, Mercia has to confront the truth about her own past and the fact that their father had abused their trust and ruined their childhood. With the suppressed truth about her family revealed, Mercia gains more insight into her brother’s life, and is finally able to understand why Jake had “hardened his heart” and seemed “angrier than ever” (172).

The existential and often cataclysmic nature of the migrant’s return home often leads to “small epiphanies that constitute truly meaningful points of interaction between the present and the past” (Pearce 2012, cited in Marschall 2017: 217). Indeed, during her home visit, Mercia has profound insights into her family life, and most importantly, in relation to Jake:

She cannot rid herself of Jake’s disclosures, of the injustice done to him. It is on Jake that she must focus. When she drifts off momentarily, she is assailed by nightmares, by lewd images of Nicholas. She wakes up screaming with an image of her own clubbed head, of blood trickling into her gaping handbag, of her father looking on. (241)

Her father’s abuses are undeniable and Mercia is now forced to confront her ambiguous feelings regarding her childhood home, feelings that she has suppressed for so long. Prior to the cataclysmic revelation of the home visit, she had been unable to confront the full reality of her Kliprand home. Instead, she had “chosen a life abroad [...] to get away from her family” (Eastley 2017: 169). Through Mercia’s memoir and excursions into the past, she can now piece Jake’s tragic life together. Jake is haunted by his father’s clandestine actions: he is unable to recover and dies shortly before

Mercia is scheduled to return to Kliprand once again. Mercia is scarred by this loss and decides to abandon her memoir:

Mercia cannot cry for Jake; she is infused with loss, with the sadness of his ruined life. She finds the photographs of Jake as a child, the little boy in short trousers bunched around the middle with a snake belt. A laughing Jake restrained by Mercia, whose arm is around him. A young man with a huge Afro hairstyle to annoy his father. Jake in his businessman's suit. Always with laughter in his eyes. Before Mercia goes to bed she finds the file, Home, still on her desktop, and without opening it, drags it into the trash bin. (Wicomb 2014: 268-269).

Mercia feels an immense sadness and guilt over Jake's ruined life and wishes she had done more to help Jake out of his forlornness: "[t]here was something unspeakably forlorn about Jake. For all his callous talk about their father, he seemed more distressed than he would admit. Jake needed her, but then, Jake had always needed her, Mercia thought guiltily" (25). Absorbed by her life in Glasgow, she had not noticed the extent of Jake's anguish, and regrets that she had not questioned his drinking before (57). Although as children they had been close, later on, Jake had felt abandoned by Mercia and told her: "go home, leave us alone like you've always done" (200). Although Mercia is remorseful over her neglect of her family (especially with regard to Jake), her home visit also provides her with an opportunity for renewed hope and symbolic redemption through her nephew, Nicky.

Mercia and Nicky

During her home visit, Mercia builds a bond with Jake's son, Nicky, — she is charmed by the child's innocence and his immediate attachment to her, and is also reminded of her own childhood. Contrary to her brother's emotional absence and her strained relationship with Sylvie, Mercia's relationship with Nicky is effortless and light-hearted. When not working on her memoir, she spends a lot of her visit exploring the veld with the child, who reminds her so much of her brother, Jake. Nicky draws Mercia's attention to the veld, and helps her reconnect with the natural environment of her Kliprand home.

Both Mercia and Nicky bond over their mutual fascination with nature. Exploring the veld with Nicky, Mercia is inspired to reflect on her life. Feelings which she had suppressed in the bustle of her daily life in Glasgow resurface when Mercia is immersed in nature. For example, as mentioned in 2.1., the official name of a flower (instead of the 'homely' Afrikaans one) causes Mercia to feel emotional as "she is touched by her own difference, her distance from home" (50). On one of their other excursions, Nicky comes across a tortoise and Mercia explains that it "carries its house on its back" (178), the animal becomes a symbol of 'homelessness'.

Although she is initially unsure of whether to take Nicky away to Scotland, after spending more time with him, she begins to imagine him in her Glasgow apartment (52-53). When Mercia's home visit turns cataclysmic (after the revelation of the disturbing family secret), and she decides to leave Kliprand, it becomes evident that she and Nicky have formed a strong bond:

Nicky, who has wriggled off Mercia's lap, helps her pack. He searches his pockets frantically, then rushes off to consult his mother, who arrives with his good trousers. From their pockets he extracts a piece of string, a glass marble and a pigeon's tail feather, whilst his mother looks on smilingly. Here, he says, he has found these presents for Mercia, but if he had known she was going so soon, he'd have got her something special like the porcupine quills he left at his ouma's house. Mercia says that these are the best presents she has ever had. She swallows back the unexpected tears as she kisses him goodbye. It won't be long, she promises, before she'll be back for those porcupine quills. (249-250)

Upon Mercia's return to Glasgow, the events of her home visit weigh heavy on her, and she feels even more unsettled in Scotland than she had been prior to her home visit. She feels as if

[s]omething is wrong, a disturbance of some kind, as if someone has rearranged everything ever so slightly, so that she can't put her finger on it, can't say with conviction that the coffee table has shifted an inch to the left. Which is, of course, nonsense. Is this where she lives? Is this her home? What does she do with all these things, all this space? What would any single person do with all this space? (251).

So, in order to escape the 'unhomeliness' of both her Glasgow and Kliprand home, Mercia begins to spend time in nature. She comes across a pond of turtles, in which

a younger turtle chases an older one. The young turtle which seeks attention from the older one is a metaphorical reference to the manner in which Nicky seeks care from Mercia:

[s]he is drawn to the strange movements of a small turtle with yellow markings on its shell, the markings, she assumes, of youth. It swims in circles, apparently trying to gain the attention of a large, older turtle that clumsily turns away and moves off, only to find itself repeatedly confronted by the youth.[...] [W]hen the older turtle is lulled into dropping its guard the younger slips round and deftly confronts it once more, face-to-face. [...] The young turtle scrambles onto the lifeless back and lays down its head wearily, its delicate hands still stretched out. It might as well whimper into the concrete carapace: I am here. Acknowledge me. It is I. Perhaps it is resting up, thinking whether it should try a different grown-up next time. (263-265)

Similar to the viewing of the salmon at Endrick Water and the tortoise of the Kliprand veld, Mercia recognises herself symbolically in the turtle scene. Like the older turtle which is confronted by the younger one's appeal for help, Mercia feels Nicky's strong appeal for support. Upon seeing the turtles, Mercia decides to visit Kliprand again. However, shortly before this new visit, she receives the news that Jake has died. She is devastated by this immense loss, and becomes even more determined to provide for Nicky, as a tribute to Jake:

She must do it for Jake. She can see herself in a new, cheaper apartment in Glasgow, on the south side, with the bright little boy who is so like Jake. Mercia would, of course, send him back to spend summers with his mother, just a question of pulling in the belt, and if perhaps Sylvie would want to visit, well, she could handle that. (269)

Mercia is now determined to take Nicky back to Glasgow with her. Her willingness to take over Nicky's care, and her decision to provide for him is a symbolically redemptive act, a way to make up for her neglect of her family, particularly of Jake. Therefore, I concur with the view shared by Eastley, who states that

[w]hat comes to the fore thematically in Wicomb's evocations of travel and homecomings is a common need to accept and adapt to one's unique but also not-so-unique multifarious situation and in so doing to accept one's responsibilities to other people—especially family. (2017: 159)

Mercia's renewed commitment towards her family is not uncommon among migrants who visit their childhood home. In her sociological study, Marschall also emphasises that "the trip home not only prompted a sense of reconnection and reunion, but also affirmed a desire to work hard and succeed in the host country, a commitment to contribute to the family and the home country" (2017: 144). Mercia's personal development, her new perspective of her Kliprand family, is reminiscent of what Bida would call a "qualitative and self-reflexive" perception of home (2018: 17). The profound events of Mercia's home visit — the revelation of the family secret, and her reconnection with nature through her relationship with Nicky — have altered her perspective on both her Kliprand and Glasgow homes. She no longer sees her original home as what Bida would refer to as an "emotionally empty living space" (2018: 28), but views it through a more affective lens, which is evident in her shifting attitude towards her family. During her home visit, she changes from wanting to "wash her hands of these people who are her own" (Wicomb 2014: 35), to accepting Sylvie and Nicky as "her responsibility, her inheritance" (243).

It should be mentioned, however, that despite her willingness to take on responsibility towards her family, Mercia encounters a challenge. When Mercia tells Sylvie of her decision to take Nicky to Scotland to live with her, Sylvie is enraged as she was not aware of Jake's request (that Mercia take the boy away):

How can you take him? Where to? she barks. Mercia is flustered, and before she manages to speak, Sylvie pounds her fists on the table, screams. Nicky is a Murray but he is also my child, my own child. He's all I have. I'm a nobody, so you think you have to take my child away? That I'm not good enough to bring him up? You can't take him away. I won't let anyone take him away. Tears of shame stream down Mercia's face. For a second she thinks of fudging, of rephrasing to cover up, but no, Sylvie deserves nothing but the truth. (269-270)

Mercia's belief that Sylvie would give up her child underlines her emotional distance from the people of her homeland, a difference of values that cannot be reversed. Mercia is aware of how she has misconstrued the situation and insulted Sylvie:

Mercia says please could they stop this conversation. She is sorry, deeply embarrassed. She should have known better. She would be very glad to help with Nicky's education, but first, would Sylvie forgive her. At

which point Nicky arrives, rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. Why are they shouting? he asks. And his mother says no, they are not. That everything is sorted out. Everything is fine. That one day he will visit Auntie Mercy in England. (270)

The novel ends on the above extract, on a bittersweet note. Although Mercia will perhaps be able to maintain her relationship with Nicky, her misunderstanding of the situation and subsequent emotional breakdown emphasises the fact that she — similar to the migrants of Marschall's study — “has been fundamentally affected and modified through the migration experience and the prolonged absence from home” (Marschall 2017: 147). Mercia's outlook and sense of self has changed as a result of her self-imposed exile, and has forever affected her ability to relate to the people of her former home.

Like Peter Jacobs of *Lost Ground*, Mercia remains a “foreigner in two countries” (Heyns 2011: 237). Despite the fact that she has resided in Scotland for over two decades, Mercia still feels alienated and very mindful of her emigrant status. Ironically, when Mercia returns to her home country, a place conventionally associated with belonging, she is equally estranged and dislocated, and is confronted by how much her time abroad has changed her. Although she is tempted to seek refuge in another country to get away from her terrible family history, her responsibility towards her family is ultimately renewed, and she is able to form a relationship with the new generation of her family.

In addition to Mercia's shifting sense of self and place, yet another facet of the home visit is the way in which she, as a visitor, experiences a different sense of time. As briefly illustrated in this section, the return home can blur boundaries between past and present, and induce a crisis of identity. Hence, the next section will explore Mercia's complex migrant positionality as being affected by her experience of time and nostalgia.

3.3. A SHIFTING SENSE OF TIME

In the previous two sections, I have discussed the spatial and social aspects of the home visit, exploring Mercia's ambivalence towards both her Kliprand and Glasgow homes. In this final section on *October*, I will discuss Mercia's sense of dislocation as linked to a migrant's experience of time and nostalgia. Therefore, in the following pages, I will explore Mercia's fragmented sense of time during her return-home visit, and discuss nostalgia as a major theme in the novel.

As detailed in *Chapter One*, in postcolonial literary studies, the concept of nostalgia has received reprieve from its older interpretation as mere wistfulness, being now accepted as a "source of understanding and creativity" (Walder 2011:3). When migrants visit home after a significant period of absence, they experience acute nostalgia, which emphasises their dislocation and helps them better understand their precarious position between two worlds. As Marschall has explained, the "return travel of migrants is about memory, nostalgia and longing for home as a specific localized place of belonging" (2017:215).

In addition to the spatial shifts between Kliprand and Glasgow, the narrative also alternates between different temporalities in order to explore Mercia's liminal state of mind. The temporal shifts underline the fractured manner in which Mercia's past affects her present. The non-chronological narrative offers what David Medalie would call "a canny or cognizant kind of nostalgia" (2010: 40). This type of nostalgia, Medalie has explained,

is imbedded at every level and in multiple ways in the texture of the narrative itself. It creates and in turn is created by the linguistic and metaphorical power of the text. [...] Nostalgia is used to engage critically with the past and to draw attention to the power but also the partiality of memory. (2010: 40)

Similar to the representation of Peter Jacobs's home visit in *Lost Ground*, Mercia's visit is fragmented by her memories of past experiences. Apart from a narrative technique that explores Mercia's memories, the temporal fragmentation of the narrative also highlights Mercia's psychological dislocation. According to Zygmunt Bauman's insights on geographical mobility (as discussed in 1.1.), migrants ('tourists'

in particular) often experience the “*fragmentation* of time into episodes, each one cut from its past and from its future, each one self-enclosed and self-contained” (1996: 10; original emphasis). Therefore, the temporally episodic form of Mercia’s narrative underlines her emotional fragmentation and sense of ‘double vision’, which then enables her to make nostalgic comparisons between her present state of ambivalence and alienation, and her fond memories of the past. As Walder said, it is during the return-home visit that nostalgia “open[s] up a negotiation between the present and the past, leading to a fuller understanding of the past and how it has shaped the present” (Walder 2011: 9).

Nostalgia features prominently in the protagonist’s ambiguous outlook on her home in both Kliprand and Glasgow, as well as in her relationships to people who inhabit these two locales. In the following sections, I explore Mercia’s experience of nostalgia in relation to her return-home visit.

Nostalgia: Loss, Longing, and Home

Nostalgia, according to Svetlana Boym, is a “sentiment of loss and displacement” and a “longing for a home that no longer exists” (2001: xiii). When migrants return to their old home they experience nostalgia in response to the changes they perceive in themselves and the home environment. Upon return, migrants’ intense nostalgic feelings are often catalysed by their present alienation as they yearn for the “ease of the past” (Boym 2001: xv). Migrants’ nostalgic longing is for the home they had prior to their journey abroad, when their ‘belonging’— being a part of the local community — was never in question.

When Mercia’s long-time partner, Craig, abruptly left her in Glasgow, she travelled back to Kliprand, hoping to heal emotionally by taking comfort in a familiar home environment. However, upon her return, she feels even more alienated and dislocated. As explained by Marschall, this is a common occurrence for many migrants who return home after a significant period of absence. They often feel estranged as they “discover how much life in their old country has changed, or how much they themselves have changed” (2017: 216). Many of Mercia’s memories that interrupt and fragment her

present narrative are a result of her physical and emotional dislocation, as well as her yearning for the past. As Rosie Roberts states,

returning to past homes may not be about returning to a fixed location (if a place can ever be 'fixed') but returning to an in-between place – between proximity and distance, self and other. While participants' subjectivities changed over time as a result of their experiences in new locations, their previous homes did not remain 'still' either. (30)

In response to the changes observed in themselves and within their childhood home place, migrants often experience nostalgia for their past.

Similar to Peter Jacobs in *Lost Ground*, Mercia is suspicious of her feelings of nostalgia, but is nevertheless affected by them: "in places like Kliprand, where the idea of home is overvalued, laden with sentimentality, the soul produces its own straitjacket" (Wicomb 2014: 28). Mercia's nostalgic reminiscences of her old home are often triggered by multi-sensory stimuli. Several critics have shown how sensory feelings are revealing of the migrant's subjective perspective of their home. John S. Allen states that the feeling of home "is built from sensory inputs (smell and vision), memory, and emotions that create in the mind a holistic sense of the self in a specific place" (2015:8). Similarly, Sara Ahmed asserts that home is "the lived experience of locality", explaining how "the locality intrudes into the senses: it defines what one smells, hears, touches, feels, remembers" (2000: 89). Moreover, the senses not only measure the experience of home in the present but also "trigger episodic memories, i.e. the recall of events and experiences in one's own life" (Marschall 2017: 217). Thus, as Mercia shifts from one place to the other, her sensory interpretations reveal her nostalgia for her childhood home. For example, shortly before returning to Kliprand, she states that

[a]lways in the period before going home, Mercia finds her nose twitching to various smells: onions sizzling in a pan, a patch of dug earth, or infuriatingly, something she cannot identify that nevertheless transports her to the Cape. From which she chooses to infer that the world is much the same all over, that we necessarily rely on nostalgia, the trace that connects us to the past. (Wicomb 2014: 28)

Another example of a scent-induced nostalgia is also evident when Mercia would cook in her Glasgow home:

Ek wil huistoe gaan; Ek wil huis toe gaan, she crooned along with David Kramer, ground her hips and dipped her shoulders hotnos style, waving her wooden spoon defiantly. Or hummed and shimmied along to a Klopse tune where Ibrahim's piano allowed, where the beat picked up, and the cuts deferred to Basil Coetzee's sax. Then, as the smell of fried cardamom rose, repeated its aroma and weaving through coriander and paprika revised its fragrance, she savored a bittersweet homesickness. (194)

As described in the above quote, the scent of fried spices reminds Mercia of her home and brings along 'bittersweet homesickness', which highlights what Samuelson calls a "recurrent olfactory stimulus for nostalgia in Mercia's story" (2017: 184). Nostalgia is also evident in Mercia's use of South African references (Afrikaans words) while in Glasgow. Indeed, Marschall has stated that

[migrants] feel 'homesick' and attempt to recreate elements of the remembered home environment in their country of settlement. Some literally take a piece of their home along in the form of furniture and home decorations, which acquire new meaning in the host country context; others engage in specific domestic homemaking practices. (2018: 8)

Hence, Mercia's singing along in Afrikaans, and her dancing in 'hotnos style' suggest her longing for her old Kliprand home. Moreover, the lyrics of the Afrikaans song she hums along to ('ek wil huis toe gaan', translated: 'I want to go home'), emphasise her yearning for her home country.

During her Kliprand home visit, Mercia reflects on all the places she has been travelling to since she had left South Africa, always searching for similarities with her home country. Her search for familiar landscapes illustrates her longing for her original home. For example, while in Macau, Mercia observes

the flora of Macau, which is everywhere on display. Gardens tumble out of rock faces, are exquisitely laid out on roofs, transform embankments, provide ornamental edging to the facades of stonework, are tucked between buildings, turning awkward spaces into lush displays. And so many of the flowers are those of the Cape. (262)

On another occasion, when Mercia went on holiday to Lanzarote with Craig, she felt that "[i]n some ways they might as well have gone home to the Cape. Mercia was

surprised by the familiarity of the island, the wide plains of dry earth and sparse growth” (232) and comments on how “the windswept malpaíses felt uncannily like home” (234).

Mercia’s comparisons of the natural landscapes can be understood as her longing for her old home; as Roberts has stated: “[s]ome individuals regularly travelled to familiar-looking landscapes in their migration country as a way of connecting back to past homes” (2018: 24).

Paradoxically, although Mercia compares various places abroad to the natural landscape of her homeland, upon her return to the Kliprand veld, she is struck by a great sense of alienation: at another time, she is moved to tears as “she is touched by her own difference, her distance from home” (50). The multi-sensory stimuli that, according to some critics¹⁷, are supposed to revive an emotional experience of home, only exacerbate her nostalgic longing for a home that no longer exists.

Reflecting on her precarious connection to her original home, Mercia is also aware of her shifting sense of self, and how she is unable to feel at home in Kliprand. She goes through a crisis of identity that is intensified by her discontentment with her life in general. For Mercia, the experience of nostalgia is twofold: as a migrant, she yearns for a conventional sense of home and belonging, and also begins to long for her childhood. This phenomenon is not uncommon, for, as Boym stresses: “[a]t first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams” (2001: xv).

As mentioned in 3.1., Mercia’s position as a migrant is linked to her new status as a single woman. Both situations — being a migrant and being a “woman of fifty-two years who has been left” (Wicomb 2014: 11) — causes her to pine for a different time. Mercia’s experience of nostalgia forms part of her mid-life crisis as, according to Rubenstein, “nostalgia, or homesickness, whose meaning remains so closely allied with it, is the *existential condition of adulthood*” (2001: 4; my emphasis).

¹⁷ (Ahmed 2000, Allen 2015, Marschall 2017)

Mercia's existential crisis is emphasised in the novel's title, *October*, which is a reference to the month of her Kliprand home visit (as mentioned in 3.1.). The title is also an intertextual reference to Dylan Thomas's 'Poem in October', an extract of which is also one of the novel's epigraphs, thus emphasising the novel's exploration of the past and nostalgia for childhood. Throughout the novel, Mercia grapples with her conflicted feelings for her past, which are particularly palpable when she finds herself immersed in her physical home environment, which is reminiscent of her childhood years. In fact, it is during Mercia's home visit that she is able to come to terms with her past in Kliprand.

The title, *October*, indicating the tenth month of the year, is a metaphor for Mercia's transformative experience. In South Africa, this month marks a transition season between spring and summer, which symbolises Mercia's life-altering, liminal experience during her visit. Similar to this seasonal transformation, during the October spent in her Kliprand home, Mercia comes to terms with her dissatisfaction regarding the trajectory of her life and her sense of 'homelessness'. Her discontentment is evident when she reflects on her travels:

[t]here was no point in saying that traveling had brought very little, that apart from the civility achieved through money and self-regard the northern world seemed much the same—there was only the business of growing older and necessarily inching this way and that, scratching about like a hen in the straw for a place in which to be comfortable. That is the payoff, the compensation for the loss of youth, of beauty, which is so wasted on the young, who do not know that they are beautiful. As long as it has nothing to do with *coming full circle* like a salmon, with the horrible notion of roundness and completion. (Wicomb 2014:147; my emphasis)

As shown in the above quotation, Mercia's nostalgic memories can be seen as her yearning for youth, which "is so wasted on the young" (Wicomb 2014:147). Her nostalgic feelings are also connected to the idea of 'coming full circle' in life: having left Kliprand as a young woman, Mercia now returns in her fifties, changed by her experience of life abroad. So, back in her original home place, she reflects on her experience of migration through a nostalgic lens.

Marschall explains that, for migrants, "[c]omparisons with and reflections on their life prior to the migration and their life in the host country bring the migration experience

to *full circle*" (Marschall 2017: 217; my emphasis). Therefore, Mercia's return home is a significant moment in her life because she can now have a broader perspective of her life's unfolding and of what 'home' means for her. Despite this perspective, however, when Mercia reviews her life, she feels 'unhomed', "scratching about like a hen in the straw for a place in which to be comfortable" (2014: 147). As the next subsection will illustrate, these nostalgic yearnings offer profound insights.

"Nostalgia begins in desire, and may well end in truth"

Although Mercia's nostalgic memories have led to a broader perspective on her personal history, they also reveal the 'unhomeliness' of her present. The kind of nostalgia that helps Mercia reconnect to the past also leads her to the truth about her relationships and her Kliprand home. Mercia's return to South Africa is fuelled by her desire for the comfort of the old home. She had been restless in Glasgow and had hoped that her visit to Kliprand would provide her with a comfortable sense of belonging and emotional fulfilment. Upon arrival, however, she is overwhelmed by her experience of alienation in her childhood home. She struggles to relate to her sister-in-law, Sylvie, while the strong bond she once shared with her brother, Jake, has deteriorated. The home she returns to is not the one that she once emigrated from: in the present, she feels alienated by what has become of this home.

During her time in Kliprand, Mercia works on her memoir titled "Home", in which she reflects on her childhood. The memoir, which blends into the narrative present, highlights Mercia's temporal dislocation, the manner in which she is torn between the memories of her childhood home and the alienating experience of this place in the present. Mercia's pursuit of memories emphasises her desire to return to the home of the past, to the home of her childhood.

For Mercia, childhood was not without its complications (she grew up during the apartheid regime, with a strict, abusive father). However, in the face of her psychological dislocation of the present, she begins to yearn for the days of her youth, and her effortless relationship with Jake. She reflects on the time of their childhood when they were children "huddled together in a mealie field, [...] the satin edge of a familiar blanket in which they wrapped up together, protected from the world of adults"

(103). She also reminisces on their moments of joy as young adults, when Jake would make her laugh and feel truly 'at home' in their childhood home (103). These memories are in sharp contrast to Jake's avoidance of her in the present.

Mercia also longs for the innocence of childhood, especially with regard to her complex, in-between migrant position in both Kliprand and Glasgow. Mercia feels out of place even in nature, whereas, as a child, she was able to find a measure of comfort in the surrounding veld (86). In the present narrative, she feels disconnected from that landscape and has decided that "there could be no return to the *pays natal* [native country] where the same old dabikwa trees lean to the west and ghanna bush turns gray and crumbles in midsummer" (Wicomb 2014: 25).

Although Mercia's nostalgic reminiscences are of her Kliprand childhood, they have great bearing on her present visit. As Medalie explains, nostalgia "deals with present realities" (2010: 39): of displacement and 'unhomeliness' in the present. Reflecting on the dislocation of migrants, Salman Rushdie explained that they are "obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost" (1991: 11). Mercia's 'fragments' of memory lead her to insights about her relationship to her original home:

[h]ome, no more than a word, its meaning hollowed out by the termites of time, a shell carrying only a dull ache for the substance of the past. But living in another country, in a crazy era, Mercia is not yet ready for its collapse. (Wicomb 2014: 27)

During her home visit, Mercia realises that the decades spent abroad have weakened her relationship to her erstwhile Kliprand home, and that her only real connection to it is through her past memories. Mercia also realises the importance of preserving such a connection, and of 'coming full circle'. The home visit is, therefore, an existential event that can yield profound understandings.

Based on the above insights, Mercia comes to the conclusion that, despite her desires, she cannot return to the home she emigrated from. Walder has stated that "[n]ostalgia begins in desire, and may well end in truth" (2011:3): Mercia returns to Kliprand, desiring a safe, traditional home associated with emotional fulfilment, a "place where

a heart could heal” (Wicomb 2014: 23). However, the events of her home visit, and her profound feelings of dislocation and nostalgia, have made Mercia realise the impossibility of return. Return, Mercia reflects, “has always been a tricky notion, teeming with thorns” (165), as she cannot regain the familiarity she once had with her original home, and cannot recover from the years she spent away from it. Indeed, as Boym has stated, the “alluring object of nostalgia is notoriously elusive” (2001: xiv), and so Mercia cannot have what she desires most: a fulfilling reconnection with the home of her childhood, the home of her past.

October is a profound fictional reflection of the migrant’s home visit. Similar to Wicomb’s earlier works, the novel illustrates the writer’s ‘translocal’ perspective, and her focus on the dual setting of Kliprand and Glasgow. In this narrative, the protagonist’s ambiguous relationship to both places is expressed during the home visit, an event which destabilises conventional ideas of home, and emphasises the migrant’s precarious positionality.

Mercia’s experiences of dislocation and nostalgia in her original home point to her ‘double perspective’. In terms of ‘place’, she compares her old home with the one she has made for herself in Glasgow; and in terms of ‘time’, she parallels her deteriorated childhood home place of the present to how it was in the distant past, prior to her emigration. Mercia’s unique perspective provokes in her a profound crisis of identity.

During her visit, Mercia has many profound experiences that speak to the nature of ‘home’, resonating with Marschall’s insights into how “the journey back home can induce self-reflexivity and lead to deeply significant insights about identity and a shifting sense of self” (2017: 214). Mercia, thus, comes to understand her ambivalent view of her home: her simultaneous need for, and rejection of, a stable sense of home (Wicomb 2014: 28). Mercia’s equivocal relationship with her Kliprand home and her nostalgic memories of it help her understand the ‘impossibility of return’: the fact that she cannot simply return to the home she left, and that she can neither recover relationships lost as a result of her migration.

Such profound insights foreground the epiphanic nature of Mercia's home visit. She understands that she cannot regain her conventional relationship with her childhood home, or recover her connection with her brother, Jake. Along with these insights, the visit also provides Mercia with symbolic 'redemption': the opportunity to bond with her nephew, Nicky, and to provide for his upbringing, as a tribute to her brother, Jake. Moreover, Mercia is reminded of her grounding affinity with nature, taking solace in its symbolic references¹⁸, which helps her find a measure of acceptance for her current identity.

¹⁸ As discussed in section 3.2., nature — in particular the salmon, tortoise, and turtle — symbolically reflects Mercia's ambivalent migrant positionality.

CONCLUSIONARY REMARKS

My dissertation has explored the fictional representation of the migrant's return-home visit in Michiel Heyns's *Lost Ground* and Zoë Wicomb's *October*. Engaging with these contemporary South African novels, my study has investigated postcolonial concepts of 'home', 'dislocation', and 'nostalgia' through the event/trope of the migrant's home visit. Both Heyns's and Wicomb's narratives focus on migrant protagonists who return to their original home in South Africa after a significant time abroad. This return turns out to be a cathartic event, during which migrants experience alienation and dislocation in their erstwhile homes, leading to a crisis of identity and destabilising conventional understandings of home.

In *Chapter One*, I offered a theoretical framework drawing on concepts of home and migration. From a broader perspective, this study illustrates the inter-disciplinary nature of postcolonial literary studies, as many of the theoretical perspectives originate in different sociological fields (e.g. tourism and mobility studies). Another macro insight of this investigation is the value of the recent affective shift or 'emotional softening' of postcolonial literary studies, as the exploration of the emotional and psychological states of both migrant protagonists has revealed the intricacies of the migrant condition. In addition to exploring certain recent trends in this field, I have surveyed theories that emphasise the manner in which the mobility of migrants undermine old notions of home and belonging. In particular, I have investigated how insights into home and migrant identity are brought to the fore during the migrant's return-home visit: an event that embodies the sense of psychological dislocation associated with migration.

In this first chapter, I also provided a literature review of each primary text's critical reception against the author's bio-literary background. I found that while Heyns's *oeuvre* is thematically diverse, his novels have consistently explored marginal figures: in the case of *Lost Ground*, it is migrant protagonist Peter Jacobs, who is revealed as a "foreigner in two countries" (Heyns 2011: 237). My second primary text, *October*, echoes the postcolonial concerns of Zoë Wicomb's earlier works: home, identity, and transnationalism. The novel also reflects Wicomb's continued interest in the dual settings of Scotland and South Africa. Hence, *October* focuses on Mercia Murray's

ambivalence towards her homes in Kliprand and Glasgow through a ‘translocal’ lens that is reminiscent of Wicomb’s earlier novels.

As emphasised in my first chapter, the main focus of this study is the significance of the migrant’s home visit as both a catalytic event and a literary trope that deserves increased critical attention, as it explores the manner in which conventional ideas of home are destabilised by contemporary experiences of migration. As I have mentioned throughout my study, the migrant’s return-home visit, according to Sabine Marschall, is an event “in time and space that consists of both emotional and cognitive reactions [...] involving complex interactions between individual and place” (2017: 142). Bearing in mind Marschall’s insight, I have organised my study of the home visit in each novel through analysing the protagonist’s journey in terms of place, self, and time. Through the structural similarities identified between the two novels, I wished to emphasise the profound impact of the home visit on the emigrants’ conception of place and ‘home’, their sense of self, and their fragmented experience of time and nostalgia.

In *Chapter Two*, I offered a close-text analysis of Michiel Heyns’s *Lost Ground*. The home visit in this novel is explored in the form of a diary, a narrative that subverts the traditional detective novel: Peter, in the role of a detective, returns home to investigate his cousin’s murder, but instead gains profound insight into his own life. Overwhelmed by his new insights into psychological dislocation, he misreads the people of his home-town and causes chaos, while — in terms of genre — there is a subversion of the detective figure. In this chapter, I analysed the fictional representation of the home visit through themes of place, self, and time.

Exploring his home-town after many years, Peter is represented as unable to reconnect with feelings of belonging and emotional fulfilment in relation to his childhood home. His displacement, both psychological and geographical, is illustrated in the text by the juxtaposition of Alfredville and his adopted city, London. The narrative present is interrupted by email exchanges between Peter and his British ex-partner, a correspondence which displays the cosmopolitan sensibility that Peter had acquired abroad. As a result of his global outlook, Peter is socially alienated, for he is unable to relate to the people of Alfredville, while feeling hyper-conscious of his altered sense of self. Therefore, in addition to his shifting sense of place, Peter experiences a crisis of

identity and spends his visit reconnecting with aspects of himself that he had suppressed during his self-imposed exile. Peter's interaction with Alfredville provokes in him powerful nostalgic reminiscences which only emphasise his emotional distance from his original home. Thus, the return-home visit in *Lost Ground* is represented as a form of catharsis for its protagonist, with Peter being transformed by revelations around his past. He realises that it is impossible to recover 'lost ground', and that the effect of his absence on his relationship to people and places is irreversible. This narrative illustrates the changing nature of home and the migrant's fractured identity.

In *Chapter Three*, my discussion shifts to Zoë Wicomb's novel, *October*. Analysing these two novels in conjunction with each other has provided multiple insights into a migrant's psychology, as both novels represent the migrant's return through different literary techniques. In contrast to the first-person, mostly chronological narrative of *Lost Ground*, the home visit in *October* is represented through a third-person narrator in a non-chronological manner, juxtaposing different temporalities and spaces to express Mercia's psychological dislocation.

Mercia's return to her childhood home is marked by ambivalence, as it is constantly juxtaposed with her Glasgow experiences. Upon return to Kliprand, she experiences severe feelings of social alienation. The cosmopolitan attitude that she had acquired during her time in Glasgow creates distance between her and her Kliprand family. Due to her shifting sense of place and self, fuelled by nostalgic reminiscences, Mercia is represented as suffering a crisis of identity. Her sense of dislocation is also exacerbated when a shameful family secret is revealed. Her home visit thus becomes a life-changing event in which she has to face up to the fact that she cannot return to the home that she had left behind, thus learning to accept her ambiguous relationship to both homes, Kliprand and Glasgow.

During her home visit, she forms a strong bond with her brother's son and is able to rekindle her affinity with nature. Mercia's ability to find solace in the natural landscape has a symbolically redemptive and healing effect on her. At the end of the novel — in contrast to Peter Jacobs who had severed his connection with his original home — Mercia is able to reinvent her sense of belonging; she finds redemptive alternatives for the aspects of home she had lost during her self-imposed exile.

My analysis of these two novels has illustrated, I hope, the importance of the home visit as a catalytic event that reveals the precarity of conventional ideas of home in the contemporary era of globalisation and mass migration. For the protagonists in both novels, the notion of home is represented as problematic, as they come to realise the extent of their emotional distance from their younger selves. They are both in a uniquely liminal position during the visit: away from the foreignness of the elected host country, but not exactly 'at home' in their original home place.

Insights into the representations of the migrant's experience in their adopted country aptly echo the actual experience of migrants who return after a significant amount of time abroad. Returnees tend to see their old country with 'new eyes', and as affected by their experience of disorientation. They struggle to connect with people and places that were once important to them, and experience social alienation as a result of their precarious migrant positionality.

Overdetermined by the pressure of conventional notions of home, many migrants have intense feelings of alienation and dislocation as they realise how much their old home place has changed in their absence, and how much their experience of migration has altered their sense of self. As represented by both Heyns's and Wicomb's novels, the home visit becomes a life-changing event, provoking migrants to reflect deeply on their lives and reconnect with aspects of themselves that they had neglected during their self-imposed exile. However, these reflections are distorted by their feelings of nostalgia. Depicted through flashbacks in both novels, the emigrants' nostalgic memories are shown to underline the alienation and dislocation of the present, as well as their yearning for a time prior to their emigration. It is through the contrast offered by these nostalgic reminiscences that emigrants realise the impossibility of return.

A major insight reinforced by this study is the complexity of home in contemporary times: 'home' is revealed to be a highly unreliable and ambiguous concept, when challenged by the migrant's liminal experiences of psychological dislocation. In both narratives, the protagonists are legal migrants, but ironically, for all their political and economic freedom, they cannot find a place to call home. My exploration of these two

novels echoes Jopi Nyman's statement that, for migrants, home is "not necessarily a stable issue or a merely positive and empowering site" (2009: 24). In *Lost Ground*, Peter Jacobs is unable to recover from his emotionally catastrophic home visit, while in *October*, Mercia Murray is morally strengthened by her return home, as she manages to come to terms with the truth about her past and is able to form an authentic relationship with the new generation of her family.

Despite this difference, a common denominator emerges after analysing these two narratives together: for both protagonists, the return home is a profoundly life-altering event. Both migrants return to their original home after a break-up with a significant other in the host country (Scotland and England, respectively). During the visit, both emigrant protagonists are able to perceive the impact of emigration on their sense of belonging in their homeland: having taken the connection to their home country for granted, they return to find that this link has deteriorated. The visit is spatially distant from their adopted country, while at the same time temporally distant from the home country that they had left behind, thus providing the emigrants with a liminal space in which to reflect with clarity on their personal histories, particularly on their individual understanding of 'home'. Indeed, both narratives end with the protagonist in the midst of an emotional identity crisis, a reflection of the catalytic nature of a home visit after a significant time abroad.

The far-reaching consequences of migration on the returnee's psyche have become apparent, I hope, in my analysis of these two novels. The journey across borders not only impacts the migrant, but also the family and friends left behind. In fact, the people left behind — Peter's best friend, Bennie; as well as Mercia's brother, Jake — seem to suffer from the separation more painfully than the migrants themselves. For both Mercia and Peter, the home visit provides clarity about their relationships in home and adoptive countries, as well as on their own migrant identity, and the awareness about the impossibility of return.

Overall, the main finding of this study is the importance of the 'home visit' trope as a literary representation of the instability of any 'home' and of the inevitable psychological dislocation related to the migrant condition. While most critical studies tend to focus on the migrant's life experiences in the adoptive country, I have argued

that focusing on the migrant's return to the home country can offer further insights into 'identity' and 'belonging'. The trope of the home visit, therefore, deserves increased critical attention beyond *Lost Ground* and *October*, as a multitude of literary texts invite exploration.

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