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Nostalgia, Home and Be-longing
in Contemporary Postapartheid Fiction
by Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić

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Notes on Abbreviations

Following abbreviations are used to refer to the primary literature:

HR	<i>The Heart of Redness</i> , 2000
WC	<i>The Whale Caller</i> , 2005
RS	<i>The Restless Supermarket</i> , 2001
EV	<i>The Exploded View</i> , 2004

Appendix

Interview with Ivan Vladislavić, October 2008

Interview with Zakes Mda, April 2009

PART I

1 Introduction

In finding a place for the past in the present, part of the challenge might [...] be a self-conscious, critical kind of nostalgia, one that understands the limitations under which it operates, that is, the conditions that make our access to consoling histories so unequal. (Vladislavić in de Vries 2007, 2)

Some of us think that now that democracy has been attained, we should have collective amnesia, because memory does not contribute to reconciliation. We should not only forgive the past we should also forget it. (Mda in Kani 2002, viii–ix)

South Africa after Apartheid

The overthrow of apartheid, particularly the formation of new government institutions and objectives has affected all spheres of life in South Africa. The old order and structure has been dismantled and new ways of political, economic, cultural and social interaction still have to be found and defined. The euphoria about and hope for the political change expressed by the metaphor of the Rainbow Nation or expressed in the “new” South Africa” suggested a fresh beginning and the celebration of a diverse society.¹ However, after the excitement had died down, the difficulties of realising these visions and of building a new nation became evident. Despite the common assumption that, after sixteen years of democracy the transformative period has come to an end, the social, political and economic challenges in the country reveal that the processes of social transformation have barely started. The celebrated Rainbow Nation has adopted the motto of “unity in diversity” which presupposes a major and essential restructuring of White privileges and non-White (institutionalised) exclusions from political, economic, educational and cultural life.

The new democracy implemented a path of free trade and thereby paved the way for participating in global economic processes. Hence, following the bondage of apartheid and the opening of economic borders, South Africa has been nearly overrun by global free trade orthodoxy. Apart from the immense difficulty in overcoming mental and physical apartheid structures, this exposure to global capitalism has been another major unsettling

¹ Reference to postapartheid South Africa as the “new” South Africa signifies a conscious move away from the past by creating a forward, future-oriented narrative which breaks with and stands in opposition to the old. The danger, thereby, is, as variously criticised in the selected novels, to ignore past structures or deficiencies which continue to exist under a new guise in the present.

factor influencing ordinary, everyday life and has enforced existing ethnic schisms as well as prevailing conflicts between technocrats and traditionalists. Old and new rivalries have (re-)emerged as people and communities have sought to identify with and find a place in the new cultural and socio-political setup. Consequently, the question of home and belonging in the new nation has become a crucial concern in contemporary society.

While the colonial and apartheid era set up clear parameters of belonging to “us” or “them” based on race, people living in the postapartheid era are faced with the immense task of overcoming these racial borders and constructs which have created residual racial and social tensions. As the novels to be discussed will illustrate, even though race is formally no longer a defining factor, the structure of binary oppositions and the production of alterities, so forcefully indoctrinated during colonialism and apartheid, continue. South Africa, therefore, is a country of contradictions, which is not only endowed with a rich variety of cultures, customs, traditions and languages, but also challenged by political and economic dispute as well as by high levels of poverty and disease. Recent xenophobic outbursts in townships, as well as questions concerning land rights and controversies over affirmative action, are proof that the past cannot easily be overcome and that its deep structures linger on in the present. Consequently, and not surprisingly, ways of treating history and dealing with the past have been major concerns in South African society and culture in general and more specifically with regard to literature.

Remembering the Past in South Africa

After the demise of apartheid, South Africa established a discourse of revealing the truth publicly in order to dismantle and come to terms with past injustices and gross human rights violations. By listening to individual memories, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC),² under the chair of Bishop Desmond Tutu, contributed immensely to creating a multifaceted picture of the apartheid years from 1960 to 1993.³ Although the TRC “highlight[ed] the need to narrativize the past” (Jolly and Attridge 1998, 3) its foremost endeavour was to establish the truth about the apartheid years. South African

² The TRC, which held public hearings from 1996 to 1998, provided a platform for both perpetrators and witnesses of gross human rights violations to give statements about their experiences. Perpetrators could be granted amnesty if their crimes were politically motivated and if they provided full disclosure. For more information see the TRC report on <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/>.

³ However, the TRC has also been criticised, mainly for its controversial granting of amnesty, which was felt to ignore justice in favour of reconciliation, for silencing the institutional effects of apartheid, victimising black South Africans, and largely maintaining old privileges (de Kok 1998, 57–59; Holiday 1998, 49–50). Moreover, many stories remain untold, one reason being the limited time period from the 1960s to 1994 which the TRC covered.

critics Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee write in the introduction to their collection *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* that it remains to be seen “which memories and way of remembering will come to dominate in South Africa in the future” (2001, 1). The TRC encouraged a remembering of the heydays of apartheid by telling individual stories in a public forum – a form of remembering which seemed necessary at the time in order to provide a space to come to terms with personal and national trauma.⁴ However, it would be detrimental to think that the country was healed after the TRC hearings. Rather, it has been argued that the TRC report enabled amnesia by metaphorically closing the book upon the past.⁵

South African poet and politician Jeremy Cronin writes in his poem *Even the Dead*: “Art is the struggle to stay awake. Which makes amnesia the true target and proper subject of poetry” (1997, 40). The creative and reflective use of nostalgia, as one form of remembering and writing against the forgetting, forms a central focus of this thesis. While the TRC provided space for traumatic memories – memories which still need to be heard and to be healed – this doctoral thesis will take a different approach to looking at the narrativisation of the past by focusing on selective, positive memories ranging from precolonial to postapartheid times and from various cultural, social and “ethnic” positions within South African society. It is an angle that does not attempt to reveal facts and “the truth” about the past but one that aims to hear individual, emotional re-imaginings of past pleasantries which give meaning to identity. Burdened with a legacy of colonialism and apartheid, pleasant memories seem to trivialise the official narratives of atrocities and human rights violations. Despite also depicting nostalgia’s potentials in this study, this danger of seeing the past through rose-tinted glasses and thereby distorting it will always remain due to nostalgia’s tendency to uncritically romanticise and therefore falsify history.

⁴ Other ways of remembering the past beyond the apartheid era are represented by factual forms of archiving memory in museums, monuments and historiography as well as by imaginative forms of art and literature. As one form of remembering, however, nostalgia is either conspicuously absent from any major debates on history and dealing with the past in South Africa or condemned as falsifying history.

⁵ This was discussed with former chairs of the TRC hearing during the workshop “The Language of Remembering and Forgetting” held at UWC, 2001.

Narrativising the South African Past

Post-apartheid South African literature needs to address the silences that loom beyond the miracle of the transition, silences that were imposed by both, blacks and whites. (Knapp 2006, 25)

Several South African scholars have pointed to the role and potential of narrative fiction as a form of re-imagining and dealing with the past (Brink 1998a; Ndebele 1998; Attridge and Jolly 1998; Coetzee and Nuttall 2001). South African writer and scholar André Brink suggests re-imagining history and “explor[ing] the silences of the past” (1998a, 37–38) through the imaginative power of fiction in order to prevent a simple substitution of one master narrative for another. He emphasises “the role of the imagination in the dialectic between the past and the present, individual and society” (1998a, 37).⁶ Obviously, literature plays a crucial role in re-imagining and telling the past. Hence, various novels dealing with the colonial or apartheid past as well as an increasing number of memoirs and autobiographies trying to digest the traumas, wounds or feelings of guilt of the recent past have been published over recent years. These are, for instance, Rian Malan’s *My Traitor’s Heart* (1989), Antjie Krog’s *Country of my Skull* (1999) and *A Change of Tongue* (2003), Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit* (2001), Zoë Wicomb’s *David’s Story* (2001), Yvette Christiansë’s *Unconfessed* (2006), and others. As Dennis Walder points out, many of these novels deal with the uncertainty of the past and with the relation “between individual and collective memory, and between a nostalgic longing for things lost or devalued on the one hand, and a struggle to reconcile and reshape a whole society on the other” (2004, 6). Thereby, positive memories of the colonial or apartheid past speak against common sense which would condemn any positive memories of a traumatic past which has left South Africa with an immensely burdensome inheritance.

As academic and public debates on contemporary literature reveal, the past remains an ambiguous project for both literary production and reception (Brink 1998b, Walder 2004, Vladislavić 2008, M&G). Positively recalling South Africa’s colonial and apartheid past is seen as barbaric and as complicating the national strife to move forward; to leave the past behind. Understandably, nostalgic memories in South Africa cause unease for all conscious of and sensitive to South Africa’s traumatic past especially when

⁶ According to André Brink, it is less important that a story is historically “true” than the fact to be driven to stories and inventions (1998a, 41). Thus, to tell stories is probably the only way to get access to (unwritten) history, not as a fact, but as imaginings of history.

not put into perspective by the horrors of apartheid.⁷ However, positive memories of both the colonial and apartheid past can be heard from various positions within South Africa (Quinn 2002; Kynoch 2003; Robinson 2004). Instead of denying or ignoring these, at times uncomfortable or shocking memories, this thesis seeks to explore the dynamism behind nostalgic imaginings. Thus the question arises why people feel nostalgic if it is an emotion so persistently condemned – and what their reasons are for rejecting it. The narratives chosen for this study provide completely different answers to these questions.

Being aware of the controversy and difficulty to speak of positive memories in the South African context, this study takes a closer look at nostalgic narratives of Black⁸ and White characters, asking what these often neglected stories tell about the present struggles of be-longing and identifying with a place called home. Thereby, the dissatisfactory state of present-day South Africa, which has as yet failed to uplift the majority of poor South Africans and has instead implemented a largely corrupt Black elite, serves as the major trigger for the characters' nostalgia. The selected novels illustrate different ways of escaping the present and imagining a better history by illuminating different periods of the past. Thereby, the novels reflect contemporary positions informed by a history of colonialism and apartheid, as well as negotiate new identities, which critically reflect upon the past and the present and envision a common future.

Despite the preoccupation with the relationship between the past and the present and questions of identity in South Africa, nostalgia as a narrative mode of recalling bygone times remains a largely unstudied phenomenon. Jennifer Delisle significantly points out that, “there has been little room [in the analysis of the apartheid past] for positive memories, for memories that fall outside the official narrative of collective suffering” (2006, 385). Writers and critics are eager to defend their narratives as not being nostalgic but emphasising, instead, that their depiction of memories are serious endeavours to make sense of the past (du Plooy 2004 cited in Hein 2004; Su 2005). Contesting such views, this research project argues that nostalgic narratives might indeed be a valuable approach to dealing with the past as multifaceted experiences of a complex history which can provide a sense of continuity and coherence to a life of disruption. The

⁷ Understandably, nostalgic narratives in South Africa are accepted and comprehensible if articulated by the formerly oppressed who either long for precolonial times or for whom nostalgia becomes a survival strategy. Bulldozed townships like District Six and Sophiatown, for instance, continue to evoke nostalgia for the times of vibrant urban non-White as well as mixed life. However, they incite anger and disgust if uttered by the privileged of apartheid.

⁸ Except for *The Whale Caller*, all novels discussed here either feature Black or White characters or skin colour is not overtly mentioned. In *The Restless Supermarket*, Tearle generally disregards people of colour and therefore, the meaning of Black will encompass any racial group that is non-White.

inclusion of nostalgic narratives in general and in fiction contributes specifically to representing a polyphony of voices imagining different facets of the past “without the teleology that used to inform the older traditions of historiography” (Brink 1998a, 39).⁹

Nostalgia and the South African Nation

In his essay “The Republic of Letters after the Mandela Republic” (2002), Lewis Nkosi, a prominent South African writer and critic who left South Africa in the 1960s, argues that South Africans are incapable of nostalgia because they lack a shared national culture and identity. Nostalgia, however, as he argues, is a “special ingredient in the creation of nationalist subjectivities” (2002, 9). The lack of a unified national consciousness has resulted in a “richly heterogeneous but a monotonously rent and schizoid literature” (2002, 2).¹⁰ South African literature has not yet, so he argues, managed to transform the moment of loss into beautiful form. Ironically, this incapability seems to be unifying Black and White South Africans:

For very obvious reasons, from the artesian of black writers it is a rare production which comes to us not already scarred by the memory of tragic waste, cruelty and injustice. But for white writers too, nostalgia is a nearly empty category, without much content, even if one takes into account the idyllic constructs of the plaasroman (pastoral novel) which is now reworked, mocked or parodied by younger writers as a form of decadent pretence. (2002, 9)

While to a certain extent Nkosi’s argument dismantles the utopian vision of the Rainbow Nation, as exposing the country’s deep cracks and immense controversies and difficulties, he fails to account for the vibrant complexities of contemporary South African fiction and reproduces a static understanding of nation. In doing so he ignores the immense potential of multiple contemporary critically nostalgic voices which negotiate their way towards a South African nation consisting of different communities. As will be seen in the analysis of one Black writer, Zakes Mda, and one White writer, Ivan Vladislavić, nostalgia is all but an “empty category, without much content” (Nkosi 2002, 9). The selected novels suggest that nostalgic ways of looking back to multiple past scenarios cannot only transgress temporal but also ideological boundaries. Nation, therefore, is understood as a permanent process of negotiation. In Homi Bhabha’s words (1995), the nation is constantly narrated and therefore a dynamic (and difficult) discourse of individuals

⁹ Thereby, nostalgic narratives have the potential to challenge the dominance of official history recording.

¹⁰ The creation of a national identity poses immense difficulties to a settler colony like South Africa because of its linguistic, ethnic, religious and cultural heterogeneity. Officially already a union in 1910, South Africa looks back on a history of segregation which renders a static understanding of “nation” problematic.

imagining themselves as a community. The novels dismantle the myth of the Rainbow Nation, problematise and negotiate a shared future South Africa. By allowing positive memories, they reflect nostalgia as a way of expressing disappointments of the present and desires for the future – ingredients needed for a national consciousness. To only focus on nostalgia's potentials would, however, be to deny its dangerous consequences which lie mainly in distorting and reducing the past to positive moments and in nostalgia's tendency to pose as truth and origin.

1.1 The Focus of this Research Project – Nostalgia, Home and Be-longing

For the purpose of exploring the phenomenon of nostalgia, home and be-longing in contemporary South African narrative fiction, this research project scrutinises two texts by the writers Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić respectively. The phenomenon of nostalgia forms the leading idea of this study's analysis. While nostalgia in popular knowledge is often associated with a sentimental, distorted and romanticised memory of the past, an academic approach to the phenomenon involves a much more complex analysis. The ideas of home and be-longing form a central part of a deeper understanding of nostalgia, articulating where and what the desired place is and which dynamics feed into the act of longing. The hyphenated spelling of "be-longing" indicates not only the expression of longing to belong to a particular, usually vanished community but also the longing to be *somewhere* or *someone* else. What is important then is that the longed for is either irretrievably lost in time or has never existed. Instead of treating nostalgia as a mere sentimentality, this thesis takes a different approach by examining it as a complex and often neglected phenomenon which tells as much about the past as it does about the present and future.

The sentiment of nostalgia, its inherent components of home and longing, and the feeling of displacement bind the selected novels and characters and reveal a deep dissatisfaction with the present. The deficient present leads to a selective remembering of either lived, or imagined, idealised pleasures of the past. Nostalgia, as will be shown in the analysis of the novels, longs for alternative, better worlds in the past and thereby serves as a road to the future. Thus, the concept of nostalgia will be lifted from its solely negative connotation by showing its inherent complexity and ignored potentials: nostalgia can be progressive and reactionary, restorative and reflective, trivial and critical, and its object can be imaginary or real. Nostalgia can take on dangerous forms of escapism, denial and exclusion. Likewise, nostalgia can be supportive in the adjustment to new and

changing environments, in order to survive difficult times and it can significantly influence identity affirmation. Furthermore, by focusing on the pleasantries of the past, it can provide access to a difficult history. As will be argued, nostalgic journeys to (imagined) past times provide a way of finding access to and recuperating areas of the past (precolonial, colonial and apartheid) often neglected or even silenced by historiography.¹¹ By analysing the representation of nostalgic longing in certain individual characters, it will be illustrated that nostalgia is a way of addressing the past and the concepts of home and community in the present while at the same time envisioning a possible future. Moreover, this research project argues that nostalgia is a crucial, as of yet, neglected, phenomenon to be explored in the South African context because it poses uncomfortable questions about one's position in the past, present and future as well as one's sense of belonging.

The Selected Novels

The texts chosen for this study include the four postapartheid novels *The Heart of Redness* (2000) and *The Whale Caller* (2005) by Zakes Mda, *The Restless Supermarket* (2001) and *The Exploded View* (2004) by Ivan Vladislavić. These four texts offer different contemporary South African scenarios: *The Heart of Redness* depicts the parallel invasion of colonialism in the nineteenth century and the invasion of Western capitalism in the form of tourism in contemporary times. Mda thereby poses the question as to what degree of power the colonial past exerts over the present and future of South Africa and whether Western economic progress is indeed suitable to further local prospects. *The Whale Caller* transgresses the border between the human and the non-human world, foregrounding environmental concerns and the alienation of Black South Africans from the landscape; *The Restless Supermarket* satirically presents a White autodiegetic narrator who longs for the order of the apartheid state during the heydays of the transition, while *The Exploded View* explores individual reactions of alienation in response to widening social gaps by juxtaposing the increasing development of gated communities with the remaining misery of townships. Hence, the novels represent a plurality of situations which serve as a testing ground for this study's understanding of nostalgia, home and belonging.

¹¹ Nostalgic narratives thus present subaltern voices which seem to betray the struggle to/of moving forwards into a "new" South Africa. However, listening to nostalgic voices can help to recuperate local histories which have always been (mis)represented by others (Su 2005, 7).

The novels discussed in this thesis cover the transitory period of the early 1990s as well as the time after the formal transition. The novels' protagonists are all exiles of some kind struggling with the changes in their country and struggling to find their position in the new dispensation. In this way, all four texts reflect upon South African society during the transformative processes from apartheid to democracy. Thus, for instance, the need to combine modern democratic and traditional agendas in addition to the impact of globalisation and capitalism are significant factors which still advance, split and unsettle society. They are seen as the harbingers of technological advancement or are perceived as new forms of neo-imperialism. Moreover, the changing political parameters have led to redefinitions of the national socio-political framework as well as to the need to redefine one's home. In this time of unrest and socio-political upheaval, the selection of novels illustrate that nostalgic longing for a lost place and time serves multiple and at times opposing functions: as an escape or relief from the present, as a source of cultural affirmation, as the re-erection of old structures as well as the transgression of old boundaries. All four novels call for a dialogue between past and present. Thus, they work against a forgetting of a difficult past. Nostalgia, as will be argued, is one way to contribute to this dialogue, which is necessary in order to establish a shared home.

The Authors

For the purpose of exploring the multiple forms of nostalgia as both a subject in narrative fiction and as deliberately used to structure narrative the study compares the works of a Black and a White author. The authors' representations of nostalgia, home and be-longing are indicative of different positions taken within society and reflect the changed dynamics within the new South Africa. Accordingly, by choosing a Black and a White author, the study aims to explore key differences in narrative form and content which (inevitably) reflect different approaches and positions to the past and their effects on the formation of personal and national identity.

Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić demonstrate diverse advances to representing the nostalgic recalling of a past time and place. It will become obvious that remembering positive aspects of the past has different implications for the two authors. Both criticise, mock and explore similar developments of the "new" South Africa. What Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić share is not only their critical reflection upon the shortcomings and needs of ordinary people in the present but also the need to actively engage with the past in order to make sense of the present and move into the future. However, coming from different cultural, ethnic and literary backgrounds, they offer different perspectives and

narrative approaches to reflecting upon bygone times. Thus, the “pasts” which are longed for in the novels reveal different ideas of home and be-longing and, therefore, different sources for identification. (This is further complicated by the inherent complexities of the two main communities reflected in the novels, characterised by both hybridity and alterity, which makes it possible and, at the same time impossible, to write about two communities. Hence, employing the terms Black and White South Africans, the study is cautious that the respective communities themselves consist of different communities.) By exploring Mda’s and Vladislavić’s representations of characters, their writing will be compared where useful without aiming to stereotype them or to feed into the old racial categories of Black and White.¹²

1.2 The Project’s Approach

The research project is situated within the broader theoretical fields of Postcolonial Studies and South African Literary Studies. It is structured around two main sections: theory and analysis. The first part of the thesis forms the theoretical section, which will explain and offer workable definitions of concepts and terms used throughout the thesis. The theoretical focus lies on a deconstructive approach to nostalgia and its related concepts of home and be-longing, which are deeply interlinked with identity. The key analytical feature scrutinises ways in which the present world is defined in comparison to the past world and what that implies for the future. In order to grasp nostalgia in its complexity and to illustrate its inherent connection to the concepts of place/home, time and identity, Chapter 2.1 gives a historical overview of the origins and development of the phenomenon. The development of the concept of nostalgia will be traced chronologically from the first narratives of longing to its etymology in the seventeenth century up to contemporary nostalgia studies. The historical approach will give a glimpse into the various discourses within which nostalgia has been discussed and which are relevant for the use of the concept of nostalgia in this study. Chapter 2.2 explores contemporary theories of nostalgia which are central in this study’s understanding of nostalgia, home and be-longing. Thereby, different forms and mechanisms of nostalgia, the significant link between nostalgia and identity as well as the relationship between

¹² When using the categories Black, White, Coloured and Asian, the intention is not to reinforce the apartheid categorisations. Colonialism and apartheid have created social, racialised realities which are still working today. Thus, the racial constructs of Black, White, Coloured and Asian continue to reflect language and social realities in the postapartheid era. Therefore, this thesis capitalises these categories in order to draw attention to them as racial constructs. The legacy of the old order which is still so strongly anchored in contemporary society remains one of the most difficult issues to deconstruct and come to terms with.

nostalgia and tourism and nostalgia and environmentalism will play a key role. The theory part closes with a chapter (2.3) on the narrative possibilities of representing nostalgia in fiction. This will serve as a bridge to analysing the different ways of representing nostalgia in the four novels and will explicate narrative terms used in the analyses of the individual chapters.

In the second part, the thesis will turn to a close reading of the primary literature, applying the theoretical considerations developed in the first part. The analysis consists of four chapters, each of which is preceded by a synopsis of the respective novel. Each analysis of the novels has a tripartite structure introducing the theme of the segment, followed by an analysis of the novel and finally concluding the segment. The first section of each analysis will examine the site of dislocation. It will analyse the present home as an unsettling place which leads to nostalgic journeys to a better past world. Thereafter, the different nostalgic scenarios and multiple past worlds will be examined according to their different forms and shapes revealing complex and different narrative strategies.

The first two chapters of the second part will begin with Zakes Mda and his novels *The Heart of Redness* (2000) and *The Whale Caller* (2005). Chapter 3 focuses on *The Heart of Redness* and will explore the multifaceted representation of nostalgia with respect to individual longing caused by the encounter of global capitalism with local culture and traditions. This analysis is subdivided into three main sections. First, the polyphonic representation of nostalgia and be-longing in individual characters will be examined and will reveal diverse perceptions of the past and different shortcomings in the present (Chapter 3.1). The second section (Chapter 3.2) will discuss different tourism proposals as presented by the fictional characters and will thereby highlight the link between nostalgia and tourism and nostalgia and environmentalism.

Chapter 4 scrutinises Mda's novel *The Whale Caller*. Mda further develops his ecological concern in *The Whale Caller*, which he has already presented in *The Heart of Redness*, and calls for alternative ways of dealing with globalisation. After examining the novel's chronotope (Chapter 4.1), the analysis will scrutinise the main protagonist's home as a site of displacement (Chapter 4.2). The following section will dissect the representation of the two human protagonists' nostalgic journeys. The various nostalgic narratives of the two protagonists represent surprisingly multifaceted perceptions of precolonial, colonial and cross-cultural pasts and traditions (Chapter 4.3). The protagonists' desires, imaginings and at times ailing longings uncover the deficiencies of their present realities of the "new" South Africa. The final section of Chapter 4.4 then

examines collective, nostalgic ways of commemorating the past. The conclusion of this chapter will draw together the ways in which nostalgia, environmentalism and history relate to each other and how nostalgia can be supportive in eliciting social and environmental critique.

The next two chapters of the analysis deal with Ivan Vladislavić and his novels *The Restless Supermarket* (2000) and *The Exploded View* (2004). Chapter 5 begins by analysing his acclaimed novel of the transition *The Restless Supermarket*. Before diving into the analysis, Chapter 5.1 will take a closer look at the implied author's strategies in creating sympathy for and distance to his autodiegetic protagonist. The following section (Chapter 5.2) will inspect how the protagonist Aubrey Tearle perceives the heydays of the transition, and how the socio-political changes affect his social and physical spaces. Chapters 5.2.1–5.2.4 will take a closer look at his changing urban landscape, the penetration of his White community by Black South Africans and foreigners, his fear of any forms of hybridity, and the commercialisation of the “revolution,” which will open a discussion of authenticity and history. After having analysed what unsettles the protagonist's sense of home and belonging Chapter 5.3 inspects his nostalgic escapes to his imagined past worlds. He increasingly drifts into the imagined reality of a painted city called Alibia which he later animates by writing “The Proofreader's Derby,” a narrative contest for proofreaders, which forms an embedded narrative of the overall narrative.

The final analysis chapter of the thesis dissects Vladislavić's novel *The Exploded View* in which many of the issues addressed in his previous novel return. The analysis will look at how the notions of nostalgia and home are expressed in this compilation of four short stories. The first section (Chapter 6.1) again looks at the site of dislocation which causes the individual characters to feel alienated and lost and which, at times, leads to nostalgia for a different home. With the characters the reader moves to different spaces that make up contemporary Johannesburg. Chapter 6.2 will explore how nostalgia contributes to the construction of an imaginary home and community by scrutinising the increasing development of gated communities with distinctly European surfaces. In addition to these forms of White nostalgia, the reconstruction of township styles represents a form of Black nostalgia (Chapter 6.3). These simulacric places do not only enforce forms of inclusion and exclusion but also contribute to a further fragmentation of social spaces and an escape from dealing with local realities.

Chapter 7 summarises the findings of the individual chapters and compares their complex usages and negotiations of nostalgia, home and be-longing illustrating

significant similarities and differences between the literary approaches undertaken by Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić. The appendix comprises transcripts of two interviews with Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić respectively.

Although the term postcolonial is an extremely controversial concept which faces many rightful accusations,¹³ it will be used in this study “with oven gloves,” in Dennis Walder’s (2004) words. To identify South Africa as postcolonial is particularly complicated as colonialism officially ended with South Africa’s union in 1910, however, full democracy and liberation from racial suppression was only gained in 1994 after the fall of apartheid. Moreover, South Africa is discussed as both former colony and settler culture.¹⁴ This thesis applies aspects of postcolonial theory to the South African context where useful, so as to keep in mind the problematic of defining South Africa as postcolonial. The postcolonial discourse is helpful in discussing matters of identity formation and Othering in the selected novels and provides narrative analytical tools and terminology.¹⁵

Finally, the following analysis can only glimpse into South African postapartheid literature and by implication ignores the vibrant, new, predominantly urban writing which has emerged over the last years. Therefore, it is important to note and to keep in mind that this thesis is not a survey of South African postapartheid narratives of nostalgia but a comparison of four novels by two authors who approach the controversial concept of nostalgia in different and complex ways.

¹³ The term has been under attack as it homogenises a number of different countries and situations under one term and as being an elitist, Eurocentric concept which has little to do with the condition and people for which postcolonial theorists write, among others.

¹⁴ The South African Communist Party called apartheid “colonialism of a special type” in their programme “The Road to South African Freedom” in 1962 pointing to similarities of colonialism and apartheid whereby the ruling centre, the metropolis, was situated within the colony (Popescu 2003).

¹⁵ This study embraces Walder’s, and for that matter Hall’s, understanding of postcolonial as “used to identify *processes* rather than conditions: processes that are narrated as neither simply local or national, here or there, then or now, but as multi-perspectival, stages in the ‘long-drawn out and differentiated affair, in which the recent post-war movements towards decolonisation figure as one, but only one, distinctive “moment”’ (qtd in Walder, 03, 420-1). This multiple, non-linear, and yet historically and politically informed perspective can throw light upon the representation of memory and experience in the radically divided world of today, in which new empires are taking over from the old, in technology as well as in territory” (Walder 2004).

1.3 Current State of Research

Before the traumatic memories of the apartheid years mere nostalgia seems to shrivel up. (Walder 2004)

There are, to date, surprisingly few critical works exploring the phenomenon of nostalgia in contemporary South African literature. Dennis Walder examines the connection between personal memory, nostalgia and cultural history in his 2004 Blackwell Lecture “Writing, Representation and Postcolonial Nostalgia” held at the University of Edinburgh and in his article “Remembering Rousseau: Nostalgia and the Responsibilities of the Self” (2005). Jennifer Delisle (2006) demonstrates convincingly how nostalgia functions as a significant method of surviving a traumatic past in her analysis of Sindiwe Magona’s *Have you seen Zandile?* The scarcity of critical work on nostalgia in contemporary South African fiction is surprising given the body of fiction representing nostalgic memories¹⁶ as already indicated in this introduction. Many of the writings in African languages bear a deep connection to the natural landscape which represents a form of nostalgia for nature (Mda 2009b, 8). Moreover, the South African subgenre of the *plaasroman* (Afrikaans for farm novel), predominantly an Afrikaans literary tradition, which experienced its heydays in the 1920s and 1930s, lives on nostalgic representations of idyllic landscapes and farm life (Hemer 2008, 8).¹⁷ The *plaasroman* or elements thereof also became prominent in English South African¹⁸ literature, most famously in Olive Schreiner’s *Story of an African Farm* (1883). However, the consideration of Black South African and Afrikaans literature goes beyond the scope of this study, which focuses exclusively on four texts belonging to contemporary South African fiction written in English.

Within the last decade, novels have emerged which distort the idyllic image of the White South African farm, most disturbingly Marlene van Niekerk’s *Agaat* (2004), Lisa Fugard’s *Skinner’s Drift* (2006) and to some extent JM Coetzee’s *Disgrace* (1999). Novels which nostalgically recall a White, stable childhood such as Mark Behr’s *The*

¹⁶ Having stated that, one needs to bear in mind that many contemporary novels which recall a positive past, often focusing on childhood past, juxtapose this with apartheid atrocities.

¹⁷ According to Viljoen and van der Merwe, “[t]he farm is an icon of Afrikaner identity symbolizing a heroic struggle against the wilderness. However, it is marked with ambivalence: on the one hand it is a safe place, home; on the other there is constant fear of loss, an anxiety about the land, a feeling of insecurity” (2004, 10). Was this fear directed towards the wilderness and “natives” in the nineteenth century, today, this anxiety related to space is persistently striking in the erection of fortified gated communities meant to arouse a feeling of seclusion and security. This will become obvious in the analysis of Vladislavić’s *The Exploded View*.

¹⁸ English South African refers to descendants from English colonisers, whereas Afrikaner refers to descendants from mainly Dutch, German and French colonisers. Afrikaner is not to be confused with Afrikaans speaking and writing people. In fact, most people who speak Afrikaans are not Afrikaners.

Smell of Apples (1993) and Jo-Anne Richards's *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* (1996) are (usually) juxtaposed with, disrupted or put into perspective by apartheid atrocities. Obviously, the awareness of colonial and apartheid history has made the majority of writers psychologically unable to write positively about the past. (As Dennis Walder's opening quote suggests, a positive return to South Africa's traumatic past seems barbaric.) Moreover, contemporary narratives set in a precolonial past hardly feature in English South African literature. As already argued, although the past and its commemoration is one of the most important issues addressed openly and publicly in South Africa (especially by the TRC), to express positive feelings about the apartheid or colonial era is an extremely controversial and sensitive topic due to, of course, the trauma and guilt associated with the colonial and apartheid history – often reduced to “the past.” Nostalgic narratives, it seems, bear the danger of trivialising or glorifying the past.¹⁹ The selected novels by Zakes Mda and Vladislavić allow and problematise positive memories of the past. They depict precolonial and colonial past(s) as well as vague childhood memories or a longing for a better, simulated past manifest in architecture. Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket* uniquely represents a White nostalgia for apartheid in a highly satirical way.

The recent publication of Jacob Dlamini's *Native Nostalgia* (2010), which gives value to positive memories during a Black South African childhood, might open a more complex discussion of nostalgia in South African literature. One work has just been published and could, therefore, not be considered: Dennis Walder's monograph *Writing, Representation and Postcolonial Nostalgia* (2010) deals with nostalgia in literary criticism. Finally, up to this date, no comparative study of Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić has been published. This thesis's contribution lies in an exploration of the positive affirmation of the past via nostalgic narratives. Reading the past as a narrative that re-evaluates the cultural and traditional richness of Black and White South Africans alike can be valuable for building a common national future in the present – always cautiously bearing in mind how easily the past can be misused in discourse favouring exclusion and in nationalist agendas.

¹⁹ Within the context of the brutality and injustices of the South African past, the question arises how and what one can be nostalgic for. Again, it is difficult to answer this question without falling into “ethnic” stereotypes. Nevertheless, different strands of reactions in contemporary society have become striking: from a (predominantly White) tendency to ignore the past, to a kind of tiredness with the past or to a (predominantly Black) turn to precolonial, traditional forms of Black and indigenous practises.

2 The Phenomenon of Nostalgia

2.1 The Evolution of Nostalgia Theory

The past is everywhere.

All around us lie features which, like ourselves and our thoughts, have more or less recognizable antecedents. Relics, histories, memories suffuse human experience. Each particular trace of the past ultimately perishes, but collectively they are immortal. Whether it is celebrated or rejected, attended to or ignored, the past is omnipresent. (Lowenthal 1985, xv)

The term nostalgia is a relatively young neologism.¹ Despite its Greek roots, the word was first used in 1688 by the Swiss medical student Johannes Hofer, who wrote his medical dissertation *De Nostalgia* about the condition of severe homesickness. The phenomenon which nostalgia describes, however, goes a long way back in history and was not a new discovery in the seventeenth century. The following chapter will trace the origins of nostalgia, introducing Odysseus as the prototypical nostalgist in recorded literature, and will then follow its development from a medical condition via a mental sickness to “merely” an emotion in contemporary times. The historical overview is significant for two reasons: First, it is crucial to trace nostalgia’s roots in order to understand its inherent components and complexities. It has travelled through several academic disciplines and accordingly has been applied to and discussed in different contexts. Thus, the diachronic overview will help to explain how nostalgia came to be such a controversial topic today. Second, the historical overview will serve to formulate a substantiated, eclectic definition of the term as used in this thesis. In addition, the section following this, on contemporary nostalgia, demonstrates that it is a multi-dimensional phenomenon which eschews solely negative connotations associated with (over-)romanticism. This will pave the way for discussing the various facets of nostalgia as represented in the primary literature discussed in the second part of this study.

¹ According to the Oxford English Dictionary the term nostalgia first appeared in the English language in 1700 referring to a ship crew that fell homesick: “The greatest part of them [sc. the ship’s company] were now pretty far gone with the longing for home which the Physicians have gone so far as to esteem a disease under the name of Nostalgia” (OED 2nd ed., s.v. “Nostalgia”).

2.1.1 Longing for Home – Early Narratives of a Human Condition

The earliest-known and probably most famous narrative of nostalgia, occurring long before the invention of the word, was the epic of a man who was away from home for over twenty years and whose desire to return never faded. The storyteller is Homer and the adventurous yet homesick character is none other than Odysseus (Sedikides et al. 2004, 200). Without being able to return home for twenty years, Odysseus's image of home and his sense of be-longing remained ever-present. Milan Kundera calls the *Odyssey* the founding epic of nostalgia in his novel *Ignorance* (2002) and accordingly describes Odysseus as “the greatest nostalgic of all times” (2002, 7). Similarly, the philosopher E. S. Casey identifies Odysseus as the “emblematic figure, the archetypal exemplar, of this inexorable return to the homeland” (1987, 362). Home and return become Odysseus's fixed ideas and despite his admiration for his immortal lover Calypso he yearned for his mortal wife Penelope so strongly that he finally decided to venture out again to find her and his home island, Ithaca (Casey 1987; Stewart 2001; Kundera 2002; Griffin 2004; Sedikides 2004).

The longing for home also plays a crucial role in the Old Testament as, for instance, it does for the Psalmists who lament their lost homeland, Zion. Moreover, in the Book of Genesis Lot's wife is turned into a pillar of salt for looking back toward her home (Boym 2001 xv) – holding onto the past is seen as an obstacle in the move forward. The threat of punishment for holding onto the past has characterised migrations ever since.²

In English literature, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) tells of the loss of Eden as emblematic of humankind's forever lost home. William Shakespeare's lyrical “T” in his Sonnet 30 also laments bygone times (see also Wildschut et al. 2008b, 21):

When to the sessions of sweet silent thought
I summon up remembrance of things past,
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,
And with old woes new wail my dear time's
waste [...]
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,
All losses are restor'd and sorrows end. ([1609] 2008, 62)

These are only a few examples of nostalgic feelings expressed in works before the term as such had been established. They support this study's view that nostalgia is a fundamental

² For many exiles, nostalgia either signifies an impossible dream of returning home or is seen as threatening the adjustment to new environments.

human condition which is as old as human nature. The obsession with home and return will lead a young medical student to study the phenomenon of homesickness more closely in the seventeenth century, 2400 years after the phenomenon was first recognised.³

2.1.2 The Invention of a Medical Term – Nostalgia as a Medical Condition

The seventeenth century saw the emergence of a new terminology to describe this emotional frame of mind: nostalgia.⁴ Having heard of a few cases of people suffering from homesickness so severely that their physical health was threatened, the medical student Johannes Hofer (1669–1752) set out to examine more closely the stories of young people who were afflicted with fever and the so-called “wasting disease” also known as the (Swiss-) German *Schweizerkrankheit*, *Heimweh* or the French *la Maladie du Pays*. Since no examination of homesickness under a medical mantle had been conducted before, Hofer set out to establish a new field within medical science (Hofer [1688] 1934). With hardly more than two cases,⁵ he established his theory of a pathological homesickness in his dissertation “Dissertatio medica De Nostalgia oder Heimwehe” (Basel 1688).⁶ According to his research, the phenomenon of homesickness was mainly identified among Swiss students and soldiers longing for their Helvetian home when sent abroad. In order to give the newly identified disease a name, Hofer introduced the Greek compound nostalgia, a word which had previously not existed as such⁷:

Nostalgias, Greek in origin and indeed composed of two sounds, the one of which is *Nostos*, return to the native land; the other, *Algos*, signifies suffering or grief; so that thus far it is possible from the force of the sound Nostalgia to define the sad mood originating from the desire for the return to one’s native land. ([1688] 1934, 380–381)

³ I rely on Jasper Griffin’s study of *The Odyssey* being aware of the difficulty of determining the exact date of Homer’s epic poem.

⁴ See Boym 2001; Ritivoi 2002; Davis 1979; Stewart 2001; Starobinski 1966; Turner 1987; Roth 1992; 1996.

⁵ In her historical overview of nostalgia, Andréaa Ritivoi is cynical about Hofer’s success and fame, which she thinks is not justified for someone who invented a catchy term for a well-known phenomenon. Furthermore, she is critical of Hofer’s methodology, as his dissertation merely relies on two case studies and references to others only (Ritivoi 2002, 15).

⁶ In some overviews (Ritivoi 2002; Rosen 1975) you can find the date 1678 as the publication date of Hofer’s dissertation and therefore of the first mention of the word nostalgia. This study, however, relies on Anspach’s translation of the dissertation in 1934, which shows a copy of the title page reporting 1688 as the publication year.

⁷ Ironically, Hofer gave the disease an ancient name, and thus also returned to “the ideal lost home of European culture” (Lyons 2006, 95) and to humanistic education. After all, Hofer’s invention of the term nostalgia was itself a product of nostalgia, expressing his own longing for ancient Greece (Boym 2001, 3; Lyon 2006, 95). In a rather postmodern way, “he was creating a new past by playing with the present” (Lyon 2006, 95).

Nostos, the spatial, and *algos*, the temporal component thus comprise the basic meaning of nostalgia. As will become evident, either place and home or time and longing have dominated the sentiment throughout time.

In his dissertation, Hofer draws the connection between the emotion of homesickness and the resulting physical symptoms. His account describes nostalgia as a disease of the imagination, an obsession with the native land and with one's home.⁸ The troubled mind is moved by the slightest external object which is reminiscent of the desired home and nothing is stronger than precisely this yearning for home. The diagnosed nostalgist is prone to a tendency towards emotional lability connected to physical reactions and forms of anorexia, palpitations of the heart, stupor, thirst, insomnia, fever and, in the worst case, it could lead to suicide. During Hofer's time, the disease of nostalgia could still be cured by such medication as herbs, oils, leeches, purges and emetics in order to soothe the symptoms and, as the only effective remedy, by the return to the homeland (Hofer [1688] 1934, 381-384)

In addition to the loss of home, Hofer describes external influences such as a changed environment and air, a different lifestyle and encounters with different habits as responsible for the ailing disease. When young people, mainly for educational reasons, are sent to "foreign lands with alien customs, [they] do not know how to accustom themselves to the manners of living nor to forget their mother's milk" (Hofer [1688] 1934, 383). The encounter with Otherness and non-familiarity trouble the individual and leave him or her in a state of resistance or passivity to adjust or accept the new environment, "allured only by the memory of the sweet fatherland" (Hofer [1688] 1934, 383) and mediating only on the return to their homeland.⁹ Thus, the imagination is not only troubled because of the absence of home but also because of the Otherness of a new place and the failure to adjust to new surroundings, a main concern also discussed in contemporary psychological studies on migration which will be touched upon in Chapter 2.2.5.

Thus, in its early interpretations, nostalgia is bound to *nostos* – the place and the sentiment of *Heimweh*. Following this, nostalgia can be analysed as a reaction to dislocation and migration – the pain and the sickness of being deprived of home. This

⁸ The main cause for nostalgia, according to Hofer, is the "continuous vibration of animal spirits through those fibres of the middle brain in which impressed traces of ideas of the Fatherland still cling" (Hofer [1688] 1934, 384).

⁹ The experience of Otherness is crucial in colonial studies when colonisers, confronted with Other environments and people, longed for their fatherland. This is not to be confused with imperialist nostalgia which will be looked at in more detail in Chapter 2.2.3.2.

component still holds true in contemporary times, as we shall see in later chapters. Hofer does not judge people suffering from a troubled imagination in a negative way. Rather, he sees in nostalgia an expression of true and faithful patriotism (Boym 2001, 4). The obsession with the fatherland¹⁰ and the scorning of all that is foreign is significant, especially for later definitions of nostalgia which mark the concept as deeply nationalistic, patriotic and conservative. Overall, with little scientific research, Hofer managed to create a term which would be highly discussed throughout the centuries, becoming part of popular language today.

What could have been the reasons for the increased awareness of a dreadful homesickness and the urge to define it as a medical disease in the seventeenth century? Two reasons seem particularly supportive of this development: first, the general spirit of the Enlightenment and second, increasing translocations such as the growing mobility of primarily rural people to the cities. The growing relocation of people in the cities as well as in foreign lands also meant that they increasingly left the familiarity of their home environments.¹¹ Aside from this, throughout Europe the seventeenth century was an age of upheaval, wars and great changes – it was the dawn of a new age characterised by revolution and restoration. The times were marked by the writings of Descartes (1596–1650), Hobbes (1588–1678) and Locke (1632–1704), and discussions over the contradictions of body and mind, reason and faith, worldliness and religion, rationalism and empiricism were plentiful. In the following centuries, as will be illustrated, the increasing changes of the times, particularly urbanisation, industrialism and colonialism, rendered the notion of home insecure and fragile.

2.1.3 Scientific Explanations for Nostalgia

Generally, the Enlightenment period was a time of systematic explanations in general and nosology, the systematising and classification of diseases, in particular. Therefore, nostalgia found its solid place among other medical diseases. And, indeed, it was seen as such a menacing disease that people disliked longer journeys for fear of catching the dreadful nostalgia disease (Davis 1977, 86). The scientific manner of the day was “more speculative than empiric” (Starobinski 1966, 88) and physical symptoms examined in relation to psychic disorders. Throughout the eighteenth century different explanations for

¹⁰ I use the term fatherland only with reference to Hofer; throughout the rest of the study the current term motherland will be used.

¹¹ Starobinski mentions the disease *calenture*, which was “the nautical variant of nostalgia” and “was caused by the combined effects of the tropical sun and homesickness” (1966, 86).

the nostalgia disease were discussed, and “in the end, two hypotheses were simultaneously accepted: a psychological influence on the physical and an influence of the body on the soul” (Starobinski 1966, 88).

While Hofer believed nostalgia to be caused by a troubled imagination, later doctors provided physiological reasons such as atmospheric pressure and high altitude.¹² These competed with sociological explanations seeing the isolation or fluidity of a community as responsible for nostalgia.¹³ Also associationist explanations were increasingly found. Thus, an object or external occurrence, such as a melody, as famously the Swiss folk song *Kühe-Reyen*, the sound of cowbells or a favourite soup, could evoke a nostalgic longing for one’s home.¹⁴ By the end of the eighteenth century, it was commonly accepted that nostalgia was a fatal disease which could affect not only the Swiss youth but all peoples and all social classes (Starobinski 1966, 95). From a social perspective, nostalgia came to be interpreted as either a strong expression of patriotism or cowardice (especially within the army) whereby the former prevailed. Ultimately, medical progress and the failure to locate nostalgia organically contributed to its disappearance from medical language in the first half of the nineteenth century as will be illustrated in the following.

2.1.4 Nostalgia as a Mental Illness – An Incurable Modern Condition

The end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century are significant times during which a “de-medicalisation” and “de-militarization” of nostalgia took place (Davis 1979, 4). Throughout that process nostalgia briefly gained significance within psychological discourses. In general, memory studies, and nostalgia as one type in particular, were increasingly discussed in early nineteenth century France. According to the historian Michael Roth, who published various studies on the *maladies de la memoire* such as nostalgia, hysteria and amnesia in the nineteenth century, psychiatrists,

¹² The Swiss physician and botanist, Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, for instance, explained in his “Naturgeschichte des Schweizerlandes” (1705–1707) that Swiss people migrating from the high regions in the Alps to the lowlands suffer from high blood pressure caused by the change of altitude and atmospheric pressure. The increased pressure compressed their brains and caused lethal brain infections (Starobinski 1966, 88; Davis 1977, 414–415; Ritivoi 2002, 40).

¹³ Thus, the German professor of medicine J.F. Blumenbach (1707–1787) argued that nostalgic outbreaks were dependent on the openness of a community. Experiences of trade and contact with foreign practises were often a protection against nostalgia whereas an isolated mountainous community, closely linked to their social and physical surroundings, would be prone to nostalgia when leaving their home for the first time (Rosen 1975, 346). As will be seen, Blumenbach’s sociological explanations for nostalgia would be accepted as the dominant reasons by the end of the nineteenth century.

¹⁴ This was documented by several doctors, most famously the Swiss doctor Theodor Zwinger and Doctor Albert von Haller (Boym 2001, 4; Davis 1977, 415; Starobinski 1966, 90–93).

neurologists and philosophers wanted to construct the image of “normal memory” through conceptualising “memory disorders such as amnesia, hyperamnesia, [and] split personality” (1992, 272). Therefore, it was necessary to examine the relationship between past and present since a proper balance between the two was already seen as crucial for a healthy mind. The seduction of nostalgia was its promise of providing a sense of coherence and continuity of past and present:

Much of the medical literature understands the illness as an excessive longing for return to a place in which *one could go on living*, a place where continuity was possible because the world one inhabited provided a sort of bridge between past and future. (Roth 1992, 279; emphasis in original)

While it was diagnosed as pathological at first, the condition of nostalgia had become expelled from medical discourse due to progress made in sciences such as pathological anatomy and bacteriology. The symptoms of nostalgia, the neurological place of the disease could not be located and without a plausible pathological explanation nostalgia no longer fitted into nosology (Ritivoi 2002, 24). Moreover, the breakdown of village isolation as well as increased mobility contributed immensely to reducing the threat of the once dreaded disease.¹⁵ “And the medical community concluded,” states Roth, “that we could be nostalgic without risk to our health because we now lived in a society that allowed us to remain ‘in touch’ with our pasts” (1992, 272). The return home was made possible. Modernity had provided a cure for nostalgia as society became more urban.

This assumption, however, reveals an apparent paradox of modern nostalgia: on the one hand, the final cure for nostalgia in the nineteenth century was seen in urbanisation and progress. Cosmopolitanism, writes Roth, was the prophylactic against nostalgia (1992, 278). On the other hand, however, these times of rapid progress and fast changes also inspired “nostalgia for nostalgia” (Roth 1992, 278): a longing for the values of home, family and belonging in fear of being attached to nothing any longer. Nostalgia, associated with the ability to feel connected to one’s family, home and tradition was seen as a human quality and as an essential part of humanity. Hence, the loss of nostalgic affection was interpreted as a loss of humanity. Intense longing for a connection to the past was seen as a way to stay alive. To be nostalgic had become a protest against progress. Likewise, progress also rejected nostalgia as a medical disease: “The disease of

¹⁵ As early as 1846 Louis Alexandre-Hippolyte Leroy-Dupré declared: “Cerebral nostalgia becomes more rare each day thanks to rapid communication which modern industry is beginning to establish among peoples who will soon be nothing more than one big family” (cited in Roth 1991, 15).

nostalgia was made a thing of the past by a narrative framed on progress in medicine and in civilization” (Roth 1992, 283).

The Shift from Homesickness to a Longing for Bygone Times

Already in the late eighteenth century a shift in the understanding of nostalgia from a spatial to a temporal emphasis could be detected. Doctors in the eighteenth century largely categorised nostalgia as synonymous with homesickness and thus focused on *nostos*, and the ultimate cure then was seen in the return home. Immanuel Kant is reported as one of the first to question whether a return home could be a cure and whether it would, in fact, bring one back to the place of desire (Starobinski 1966; Casey 1987; Turner 1987; Hutcheon 1998; Boym 2001). In his *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (1798), Kant writes about the disappointment one will necessarily experience when one returns to the homeplace. The place might have altered to such an extent that it is not as it was remembered. He shifts the emphasis of nostalgia from the desire for a particular place towards the temporal component and the longing for a past time by stressing that what is yearned for is not the place as locality but the place of a bygone time – the time of one’s youth. Accordingly, a returnee will never find the home of his or her memories. The passage of time will have altered the remembered place even though it might still look the same. Hence, the reason why a return home cannot be the ultimate cure is the realisation that time is irrecoverable.¹⁶ While the early medical descriptions of nostalgia associated nostalgia with an afflicted imagination related to home in a literal sense, the shifting emphasis on time and longing treated nostalgia as a mode of memory, which is crucial for the concept’s later development (Casey 1987, 367).

Along with the awareness of time as structuring place came another temporal awareness: the perception of the past as following different structures and rules than the present. Radical socio-political breaks such as the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution created a new consciousness of time.¹⁷ The present was seen as radically different from the past, famously expressed in L.P. Hartley’s opening line of his novel *The Go-Between*: “The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there” (Hartley

¹⁶ This is also discussed in Starobinski 1966; Casey 1987; Stewart 1993; Hutcheon 1998; Boym 2001. The awareness that time cannot be visited like place remains decisive in contemporary definitions of nostalgia pointedly highlighted by Linda Hutcheon when she writes: “Time, unlike space, cannot be returned to – ever, time is irreversible. And nostalgia becomes the reaction to that sad fact” (Hutcheon 1994).

¹⁷ Nineteenth century sociologists Tönnis, Weber and Durkheim all shared the view that “[c]ontemporary society was critically different from its predecessors and in that difference lay a loss” (Chase and Shaw 1989, 7). Modernisation, bureaucratisation, the compression of time and space, and the reduction of the individual to an anonymous part of society contributed to the yearning desire for a past wholeness. The past came to be seen as promising unity and values, whereas the present saw the destruction of these.

1953). According to David Lowenthal, there was a significant shift in the recognition of the diversity of the past:

Only in the late eighteenth century did Europeans begin to conceive the past as a different realm, not just another country but a congeries of foreign lands endowed with unique histories and personalities. This new past gradually ceased to provide comparative lessons, but came to be cherished as a heritage that validated and exalted the present. (1985, xvi)

Prior to that, the past was not differentiated from the present but served as an example for the present. Furthermore, “[a] past explained in terms similar to the present also suited views *why* things happened as they had” (Lowenthal 1985, xvi; emphasis in original). Only with the apprehension of the past as a different realm also came the awareness of historical change and hence the desire and need to restore the past in forms of monuments or relics and thus as “emblems of communal identity, continuity, and aspiration” (Lowenthal 1985, xvi). According to Paul Philippot, who sees the outburst of the Industrial Revolution as having triggered the development of a historical conscience and new historical distance, “[t]o bridge the gap that the historical conscience opened between the past and the present, a new kind of contact developed, based on the feeling that the past has indeed been lost, but continues to live through nostalgia” (1972, 268). The past came to be treasured as heritage which could be visited in museums, monuments and memorials.¹⁸ Moreover, the institutionalisation of the past was also a significant force in the rise of nationalism, which shifted an individual longing of poets and soldiers into a collective belonging. (The rise of nationalism and its mechanisms in creating a sense of belonging will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 2.2.1.1 and 2.3.1).

The changing perception of the past also affected the perception of nostalgia as a way of relating to the past. It came, as shown above, to be treated as a form of memory and an ailing emotion caused by either too much or too little remembering. The resulting dilemma for the human psyche results from the balancing between the two poles (Ritivoi 2002, 21). Hence, along with the awareness of the temporal dimension of nostalgia came another significant shift: from a curable disease to an incurable emotion (Boym 1994, 3). With the treatment of the human psyche in philosophy from the late eighteenth century onwards, “the impossible task of exploring nostalgia passed from doctors to poets and philosophers” (Boym 2001, 11) and the causes of nostalgia were reinterpreted as poetic

¹⁸ This recognition, according to Lowenthal, is not a homogenous process: “What the conscious past contains, why it is dwelt upon, how much and in what ways it is felt to be a realm apart – these matters vary from culture to culture, from person to person, and from day to day” (1985, 186).

elegies. As incurable sentimentality nostalgia became a famous emotion within the Romantic Movement.

2.1.5 Nostalgia as an Ailing Emotion – The Romantic Era

Nostalgia as an ailing longing for past times became a crucial expression of the emotional state among the Romantics. Their taste for subjectivity and inward reflection contributed decisively to an altered perception of nostalgia. As a turn away from the preceding century's dominance of reason and enlightenment the Romantics looked inward towards the soul, backwards to the ancient classics as well as to childhood – cherishing the child as holy and uncontaminated by civilisation – and towards nature as the ideal place for humankind's development, a place uncontaminated by civilisation.¹⁹ The Romantics focused on the temporal – *algos*, the painful longing – and emotional aspects inherent to nostalgia. Rather than an external disease, nostalgia was seen as imaginative enrichment. The romantic motto was, as Svetlana Boym points out in her reformulation of Descartes' *Cogito Ergo Sum*, "I long therefore I am" (2001, 13). Nostalgists no longer yearned for a return home while on the battlefield or away for studies; nostalgists yearned for the ancient times, for the Middle Ages, for ruins and pristine nature and cultures. If it was not possible to lament past times in existing reminders, such as ruins, "artificial ruins were built, almost half-destroyed with utmost precision" (Boym 2001, 11). The romance with the past was given structure by restoring a material image of the past thereby "commemorating the real and imaginary past of the new European nations" (Boym 2001, 11–12).²⁰ In general, nostalgia became a fashion especially among arty people, writers and musicians (Ritivoi 2002, 25). The ailment of longing, the focus on the individual and the turn inwards found expression in literary forms such as poetry, the sentimental and the Gothic novel as well as in the autobiographical novel, as will be briefly addressed in Chapter 2.3.1.

Further significant for the development of nostalgia was the conception of time in the Romantic period as composed of past, present and future. While the Romantics were looking back to the ruins of antiquity, they were also indulging in ideologies and utopias towards building a more equal society in the present and future. Looking back was not only a pleasant and passive indulgence, rather the past offered ideas for the present and

¹⁹ As Susan Stewart points out "the prevailing motif of nostalgia is the erasure between nature and culture" (1993, 23); not surprising is thus the deep entanglement between the yearning for nature and nostalgia.

²⁰ It is in these imitations of ruins, these simulacra of an idealised, imagined home, that we can already find forbearers of contemporary gated communities, of simulacra which simulate a different time and reality. This will be the focus of Chapter 6.

the future, ideas which were needed in such times of revolutionary spirit, increasing mechanisation and alienation. It was already then that the yearning for a past time was not necessarily a yearning for an experienced time. The Romantics conceived of place or home not as an existing materiality but as a metaphysical landscape: “Nostalgia is treated in a new genre, not as a tale of putative convalescences but as a romance with the past” (Boym 2001, 11). The Romantic Movement rediscovered *Heimweh* and nostalgia as an emotional state that captured their *zeitgeist*.

With the development of Freudian psychoanalysis and the focus on the psyche a full scientific paradigm shift took place. Nostalgia shifted from a medical-physical disease²¹ to a nervous disorder, grouped together with paranoia and melancholia.²² With the rise of technology, physiology and psychology at the end of the nineteenth century, nostalgia finally lost its credibility as a human pathology. This was the time that another *maladie de la memoire* gained significance and finally repressed nostalgia from the medical scene completely: hysteria.²³ In order to grasp the similarities and differences between the *maladies de la memoire* the following two subsections will briefly highlight the often confused connection between nostalgia and hysteria and nostalgia and melancholy.

Nostalgia and Hysteria

Physicians in the later half of the nineteenth century believed that hysteria was caused by events in one’s past such as conflict or trauma. It was interpreted as “a radical dysfunction of memory” (Roth 1996, 3) which was caused by “an event that disrupted subsequent memory” (Roth 1996, 4). Thus the connection between hysteria and nostalgia emphasised memory processes which are still significant today: while hysteria describes an ailment caused by the inability to remember the past, nostalgia is an ailment caused by the longing for the past. While both nostalgia and hysteria are seen as disturbed forms of disturbed memory, hysteria is caused by a traumatic event in the past which causes a kind of amnesia concerning certain parts of the past. Nostalgia on the contrary, is a selective

²¹ Even though Hofer and his followers had already diagnosed nostalgia as a disease of the imagination, they focused on its physical symptoms.

²² Nostalgia and paranoia had in common a penetrating idea focussed upon a single “object” (Boym 2001, 4).

²³ Although preoccupied with the past and the human’s subconscious mechanisms of regression and fixation, Freud never examined nostalgia, which had already been depathologised in his times. His focus, however, was on the related phenomenon of hysteria. The phenomenon of hysteria has its own complex fascinating history and can only be touched upon here. The term derives from the Greek *hysterikos* and was coined by Hippocrates. He believed hysteria to be an exclusively female illness called for by disturbances in the uterus and its functions, which resulted in madness (*OED* 2nd ed., s.v. “Hysteria”).

and at times imaginative remembering of the past's pleasantries, one that is, especially in the nineteenth century, bound to a remembering of one's place of familiarity. In short, while the hysteric remembered too little, the nostalgic remembered too much (Boym 2001, xvi).

Nostalgia and Melancholia

Another term that gained significance in the conceptualisation of the maladies of memory is melancholia.²⁴ In the beginning, when nostalgia was still treated as a lethal disease, melancholia was used to explain the intense feelings of people who had to leave their familiar surroundings.²⁵ Since the classification of nostalgia as a medical disease by Hofer, melancholia has been defined as a reaction or expression of the nostalgist. The *OED* defines nostalgia as “[a] form of melancholia caused by prolonged absence from one's home or country” (*OED* 2nd ed., s.v. “Nostalgia”), and the contemporary meaning of melancholia as “[a] functional mental disease, characterised by gloomy thoughtfulness, ill-grounded fears, and general depression of mind” (*OED* 2nd ed., s.v. “Melancholia”). Thus, some symptoms of melancholia, such as depression or bad mood, are common features of nostalgia. But melancholia is not bound to nostalgia exclusively and not all of melancholia's characteristics are prone to nostalgia.

Nostalgia dwells in joyous memories only whereas melancholia indulges in sadness and depression over things that are unreachable. The melancholic, unlike the nostalgic, suffers from boredom and lack of enthusiasm.²⁶ Svetlana Boym points to another important factor that distinguishes the two ailments: while melancholia is restricted to the individual consciousness, nostalgia is concerned with both individual and collective memory and precisely with the relationship between the two (Boym 2001, xvi). What nostalgia and melancholia share is their desire to escape the present. They also

²⁴ In medieval literature and astrology melancholy was symbolised by Saturn, who again was associated with intellectual activity, seclusion and a serious quest for knowledge. Despite some variations, melancholia had since been associated with depression, anxiety as well as creativity, and was thus often described as a disease of intellectuals.

²⁵ In the seventeenth century there was a cult of melancholia in England which is embodied in Robert Burton's publication of his *Anatomy of Melancholy* in 1621. England at that time was all but pleasant; it was “in a rotten state of decay” (Ritivoi 2002, 28). Melancholy came to be associated with the rotten state, whereas the utopian state became its antidote. Thus, Burton's melancholic is a utopian dreamer who wants to escape his present state.

²⁶ According to Ritivoi, the major difference between the two ailments is that they are informed by an opposing direction. The melancholics want to indulge in isolation; they want to escape familiarity, whereas the nostalgists long for familiarity. Thus, while the melancholic wants “to escape the tedium of the small town” (2002, 28), it is precisely this small town that the nostalgic longs to return to. “Melancholy sends one away, but nostalgia calls one back. The melancholic begs for change, while the nostalgic deplors it. While melancholy instigates to rebellion, nostalgia fears marginality” (2002, 28). Nostalgic longing for a past time and place might thus lead to a pathological apathy in the present.

share the symptoms of passivity and lassitude, fever and, in the worst case, death caused by the impossibility to escape the present permanently (Roth 1992, 281).

The distinction between the three concepts is also of importance in contemporary nostalgia theory. The nostalgist can fall into a melancholic state when, for example, the past determines the present, and he or she does not find a “healthy” balance between past and present. Although nostalgia only recalls positive and happy aspects of the past, it also induces sadness; the process of nostalgic remembering is bitter-sweet. The awareness of the unattainability of past events in the present and the imaginative forces of the remembered past can fill the nostalgist with immense grief.

2.1.6 The Decline of Nostalgia as a Mental Illness in the Twentieth Century

The twentieth century saw the final disappearance of nostalgia from the medical field. However, at the beginning of the century nostalgia was still researched in the discipline of psychiatry. In the middle of the previous century, some physicians already diagnosed nostalgia as a psychic defect that could lead to violence and criminality. In his dissertation on *Heimweh und Verbrechen* (1909) Karl Jaspers deals with psychiatric defects which homesickness could cause, especially among the female servants who suffered mentally from being away from home.²⁷ This mental suffering could, in his researched cases, lead to setting fire and in the worst case to murder or suicide. The women, according to Jaspers, “were too young to have learned to draw a boundary between their identity and the environment” (Ritivoi 2002, 17). Thus, the exposure to new surroundings and new demands leads the individual to an identity crisis.²⁸

Within psychiatry the emphasis of nostalgia shifted from a disease to a reaction and from a longing to return home to a failure of adaptation (Starobinski 1966, 101). Again, corresponding phenomena like paranoia, schizophrenia or psychosis gained more importance within the psychological discourse and overshadowed nostalgia as a phenomenon to be studied. According to Starobinski who published his article “The Idea of Nostalgia” in 1966, nostalgia had by then little by little acquired a pejorative implication: “the word implies the useless yearning for a world or for a way of life from which one has been irrevocably severed” (1966, 101). The growing disinterest in

²⁷ Another notable study is Ludwig Meyer’s study *Der Wahnsinn aus Heimweh* (1855) which describes five cases of female servants who suffered from mental disorders (Leuschner 1990/91).

²⁸ In order to explain the women’s behaviour, critic Andréaa Ritivoi draws a parallel between nostalgia and hysteria and explains the women’s behaviour as an inability to adjust to a new geography and cope with new demands and challenges: “[T]he unfamiliar surrounding refuses to make sense, and by contamination, a self transplanted to these surroundings is fundamentally alienated” (Ritivoi 2002, 18). Thereby, she takes up Hofer’s early interpretations of nostalgia. His nostalgists did not know how to adapt to “foreign lands with alien customs” (Hofer [1688] 1934, 383).

nostalgia coincided with a decline in local traditions, provincialism and social structures caused by external modernisation processes. By the mid-twentieth century, knowledge about nostalgia's medical and psychiatric origins had been lost to popular knowledge (Davis 1977, 415). Nostalgia has come to be seen as a "normal" emotion, lifted from its discourse of a medical or psychological disease and therefore also lifted from its conception as dreadful. According to Davis, nostalgia has become a desire²⁹:

So easily and "naturally" does the word come to our tongues nowadays that it is much more likely to be classed with such familiar emotions as love, jealousy, and fear than with such "conditions" as melancholia, obsessive compulsion, or claustrophobia. (1979, 5)

While nostalgia was still associated with homesickness until the mid-twentieth century, this connection was lost by the latter part of the century. Nostalgia was finally both de-medicalised and de-localised.

In order to discuss contemporary nostalgia theory, it is necessary to focus on the latter part of the twentieth century during which nostalgia saw its revival as retro or kitsch and came to be discussed as a cultural and literary mode. While this chapter has situated nostalgia historically, the following will scrutinise contemporary theories of nostalgia in order to come to a sound understanding of nostalgia, home and be-longing as applied to the analysis.

2.2 Contemporary Nostalgia Studies

Nostalgia is not what it used to be. (Signoret 1978)

Nostalgia is simply not what it used to be – it is *more than* what it used to be. (Robertson 1990, 56; emphasis in original)

When the real is no longer what it used to be nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a proliferation of myths and origin and signs of reality; of second-hand truth, objectivity and authenticity. (Baudrillard 1983, 12–13)

As the historical overview has illustrated, the phenomenon of nostalgia has undergone significant developments throughout the last three centuries. If it were once a curable disease of those forced to leave their homes, "[b]y the twenty-first century, the passing ailment turned into the incurable modern condition" (Boym 2001, xiv) – a yearning for a lost time and place. If it were viewed as a selective remembering, it is now condemned as

²⁹ The B. and E. Evans Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage defined nostalgia in 1957 as: "Now a vogue word, *nostalgia* has come to mean any vague yearning, especially for the past and especially ... when tinged with tenderness and sadness" (OED 2nd ed; 1989, s.v. "Nostalgia", ellipse in original).

a “selective forgetting” (Dames 2001) and a form of wilful amnesia (see also Chapter 2.3.1). Nostalgia has become an elusive term denoting either a mere emotion or a cultural mode as marketed in kitsch, retro styles as well as heritage and tourism practices. Thereby, nostalgia comprises its own logic: it takes pleasure in the painful longing for a past world and time precisely because it is beyond reach. Hence, it has been variously described as a bittersweet emotion. Nostalgia’s persistent transformation throughout the centuries as a physical or mental disease, as trivial emotion or fashion, lies in it being both a form of memory and an ongoing condition of human beings.

In contemporary studies,³⁰ nostalgia has been widely defined as, for instance, a severe homesickness (OED), a longing for home, place and time (Boym 2001, Dames 2001, Hutcheon 1998, Stewart 1993, Su 2005), “an abdication of personal responsibility” (Boym 2001), “a disease of the modern time” (Boym 2001, 7), “an exile from the present” (Hutcheon 1998), “a search for a lost coherence” (Hutcheon 1998), or “a kind of useless act” (hooks cited in Su 2005, 2). Susan Stewart pathologises nostalgia as a “social disease” and “a sadness without an object” (1993, 23). Moreover, nostalgia is seen as a dangerous ingredient in fostering nationalism, in dangerously idealising a lost homeland and establishing a closed communal sense of belonging with strong excluding forces. Few academic studies have discussed nostalgia in its historical context and asked which dynamics feed into nostalgic experiences and the longing for a lost time and place. Only within recent years has nostalgia come to be discussed in different disciplines, particularly psychology, sociology, philosophy and literary studies, and viewed as a complex phenomenon highlighting its healing forces in processes of identity affirmation, nation-building and coming to terms with the past and the present. As Svetlana Boym writes, “[t]he study of nostalgia does not belong to any specific discipline: it frustrates psychologists, sociologists, literary theorists and philosophers, even computer scientists” (2001, xvii). Additionally, Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw (1989) suggest talking about nostalgia in the plural, i.e. nostalgias, because of the separate sectors of meaning within nostalgia.

In order to grasp the often unnoticed complexities inherent to the concept of nostalgia in contemporary discourses, the major overlapping components of nostalgia theory relevant to this study’s definition of the phenomenon will be highlighted in the following. In the first two chapters (2.2.1–2.2.2), I will take a closer look at the object and

³⁰ See Turner 1987; Stewart 1993; Hutcheon 1998; Boym 2001; Dames 2001; Sedikedis et al. 2004; Wagner 2004; Su 2005.

triggers of nostalgia before exploring different cultural and social forms of nostalgia in Chapter 2.2.3. Thereby, the commercialisation of nostalgia as well as the particular postcolonial context, in which the study is situated, will be the center of attention. As such colonial, imperialist, postcolonial and postmodern nostalgia, which have been discussed in various academic disciplines roughly throughout the last two decades of the twentieth century, will be considered. Thereafter, Chapter 2.2.4 will scrutinise the dangers and potentials of nostalgia; therefore, various nostalgia models will be introduced and discussed insofar as they are relevant to the analysis. Chapter 2.2.5 will focus in more detail on the psychology of nostalgic processes, i.e. in which ways nostalgia has an impact on identity and be-longing. Thereafter, the study will shift the focus onto the relationship between nostalgia and tourism and nostalgia and environmentalism (Chapter 2.2.6); these are crucial interactions particularly within the context of Zakes Mda's novels. Lastly, the study will examine ways in which nostalgia can be used in narrative fiction (Chapter 2.3), which finally leads to the second major part of this study, namely the analysis of the novels. Throughout the study it will become evident that not all forms and expressions of nostalgia can be considered within the given framework.

2.2.1 The Object of Nostalgia

The alluring object of nostalgia is notoriously elusive. (Boym 2001, xiv)

In order to describe nostalgia academically, several scholars from various disciplines have provided different models and categorisations. In all of them, nostalgia's defining components of place and time/longing, *nostos* and *algos*, play a key role. Therefore, the relationship between nostalgia and home/place and time will be considered in order to come to a sound definition of nostalgia, home and be-longing as used in the analysis of the selected novels. The following will briefly sketch relevant considerations and models about these intertwined concepts.

2.2.1.1 *Nostos* – Home

We are at home in [the past] because it *is* our home – the past is where we come from. (Lowenthal 1985, 4; emphasis in original)

Nostos and the identification with a place called home form a crucial part of nostalgia. In its early years, as the historical overview has shown, nostalgia was synonymous with homesickness, perceiving home as a stable and fixed place of familiarity. While the longing to return home was often bound to a specific place – the Swiss Alps for Hofer’s nostalgists, for instance – it was as much a longing for one’s family and friends located in a specific place.³¹ Through increasing mobility, globalisation and migration, a fixed notion of home as synonymous with a particular place – the place of one’s roots – has proven inadequate. Rather, the notion of home carries various meanings: it comprises not only a material locality but also functions as a metaphor for a place and time of security and familiarity and expresses a feeling of belonging and emotional attachment.

While Fred Davis announced in the 1970s that nostalgia is bound to a particular place as well as to an experienced time, the sociologists Chase and Shaw point out that “[t]he home we miss is no longer a geographically defined place but rather a state of mind” (1989, 2). Thus, place in its abstract form can be “unplaced or placeless” (Casey 1987, 363).³² Consequently, we can also be nostalgic for a place or a world that we have never experienced first-hand but that we know from stories, myths or historical accounts. According to philosopher Edward Casey, what we miss in being nostalgic is “a world as it was once established in a place” (1987, 363). The nostalgic world, which Casey calls a “world-under-nostalgement,” is an imaginative world which follows its own structures and time both because it is lost in the past and because the past is constructed as “a past that has never been a present” (Merleau-Ponty cited in Casey 1987, 364). Svetlana Boym accredits nostalgia as a more positive and creative mode of experience when she writes that it is “a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy” (2001, xiii). Again, “home” is not necessarily a physical, existing place but can also be an imaginary one; an ideal not lived in the present and thus projected into the past. Generally, the particular home which the nostalgist yearns for is a longing for what is

³¹ Recalling Odysseus once more, he is, while away from home, longing for his island Ithaca – however, he is not so much longing for the place as such as for his wife and son.

³² See Casey (1987, 365) for his argument of construing an idea of the past which has never been present.

absent in the present home. In the act of longing, the lost home and community is often idealised and becomes what Salman Rushdie (1991) famously calls an “imaginary homeland,” i.e. an image of home made up of subjective memories, dreams and fragments of the past (cf. Chapter 2.2.4.3).

Home – A Site of Inclusion and Exclusion

While in a growing, mobile and globalised world, a stable place of home becomes ever rarer, the “need to be ‘at home’ in the new and disorientating global space” (Morley and Robins 1993, 5) seems to become stronger. Creations and idealisations of a lost homeland express ways to compensate for the feeling of non-belonging and displacement which often goes hand in hand with forced migration and/or a loss of power.

Benedict Anderson coined the term “imagined community” (1983) to refer to the construction of nation states (cf. Chapter 2.3.1). The nationalist equally constructs an imagined community when he or she longs for the lost homeland. On a broader scale, the place of home comprises a diversity of people loosely connected by certain commonalities. Thus, home also constitutes the space of identification along trajectories of commonalities such as family, culture and language, often maintained, enforced and promoted by national symbols, myths and invented traditions (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm 1992; Wyschogrod 1996). By the same token, the imagined community also defines who does not belong to the community. When people who do not belong to that community try to enter, home – a metaphor for community and nation – can easily turn into a site of political dispute. Wyschogrod writes that,

[h]ome as community may be threatened when two or more groups, each with exclusionary internal bonds based on lineage, tribe, religion, or language, enter into conflict over a single territory. Rather than repatterning old territorial claims into new assemblages, the claimants invoke various modes of communal connection such as ethnicity and religion to reinforce them. (1996, 191)

Communities are always subject to accepting and rejecting newcomers. However, the imagination of a closed community or nation makes home a deliberate site of inclusion, exclusion and Othering. Community values as well as national myths and practices, thereby, tend to demarcate Otherness in ways which bolster belonging and non-belonging.

Particularly in predominantly national discourses, home is mystified as origin rooted in a lost past. The attempt or the aim to cling to and preserve the imagined secure home of the past is a form of what Svetlana Boyms calls “restorative nostalgia” (which will be elaborated upon in more detail in Chapter 2.2.4.1). It is the wish to rebuild the past

home as it was and thus entails rebuilding “cultural boundaries and boundedness” (Morely and Robins 1993, 8). Hence, a restorative longing for home, i.e. the rebuilding of home as the *patria* enforces the discourse of Othering. The shared home is felt to be under threat by outsiders – Others – entering the space of intimacy, as xenophobic attitudes and fundamental nationalism throughout the world confirm. Ideas of origin and “pure” communities or homelands survive as myths, ones that can be dangerously deployed in order to manipulate, especially in political discourses, fundamentalist and nationalist movements.³³

In John Su’s analysis of nostalgia in postcolonial areas of nation-building, in particular in Chinua Achebe’s and Wole Soyinka’s works, he points to the dangers of national nostalgia within many African countries following the achievement of independence. National nostalgia often spurred the idea “that a national homeland is the special provenance of a particular people” (Su 2005, 140). The Rwandan genocide serves as one of the most horrific examples of the fatal connection between nostalgia and fundamental nationalism. In these instances, “the past provides a source not of identification and guidance but of trauma” (2005, 140).

In South Africa, the attempt to create a pure homeland was testified not only by the colonial and apartheid mission to establish a White South Africa, but it also revealed its destructive forces in the Second South African War, also known as the Anglo-Boer War, which saw the first concentration camps set up by British colonialists attempting to eliminate the Afrikaners. In contemporary times, the post-1990 bloodshed in South African townships also exemplified the connection between nostalgia (for an ethnically pure home) and fundamental nationalism. It documented the old rivalry between the Xhosa and the Zulu, allegedly spurred on by “the third-force,” i.e. the old apartheid regime, aiming at disrupting Black communities.³⁴ The xenophobic outbreaks in 2008 attest to continuing tensions which are tied to claims to the homeland.³⁵

³³ Nazi-Germany and Hitler’s strife for a pure Aryan nation demonstrates the horrific and devastating power of such myths.

³⁴ See, for example, Greg Marinovich and Joao Silva’s accounts in *The Bang-Bang Club: Snapshots from a Hidden War* (2001).

³⁵ Debates about the role the past should play in the imagination of the postcolonial nation reflect discussions in a variety of postcolonial novels. This is added to by the experiences of globalisation and the different mindsets of a homogenising Westernisation and local traditions – one of the most prominent dilemmas reflected in postcolonial literature from Anglophone Africa.

Home as a Floating Notion

Instead of a static *patria*, seeing home as an abstract entity allows for a more flexible understanding of the concept which speaks more to contemporary realities of globalisation, migration and fluctuation in which home has become a rapidly changing construct. Following these various dis-locations and the increasing feeling of “homeness” in virtual homes, Edward Casey speaks of a “plenitude of places” through which nostalgia’s lost world arrays itself. This plenitude of homeplaces, or the placeless understanding of home, implies that one can have more than one home, an idea also highlighted by Zakes Mda. In an interview from his current home in Athens, Ohio he rhetorically asked:

I’m at home everywhere, [...] I’m a South African, I was born there, I’m a citizen of South Africa, I go to South Africa all the time, I work with South Africans. I’m an activist in South Africa. I work with communities in South Africa for community development. So, that’s home. But here’s also where I live, my wife is here, my children are here – it is home as well. Why should I only have one home? I can be anywhere in the world, I carry my South Africa with me, it’s inside me. (2009c, 362)

Place can thus be interpreted as a metaphor for a sense of belonging which can become placeless, and home, then, is better understood as a floating notion. As will be seen in *The Whale Caller*, home as symbolised in landscape and nature has become a salient metaphor in the environmental movement. Home, understood as either consisting of many places or as placeless, entails transformative potential as it admits its inability to create anything like a unified national master narrative about the *patria* but rather allows for imagining the personal as well as the national home as consisting of multiple localities and memories. Hence, an imagined lost homeland can offer alternatives to contemporary social systems and highlight what the present home lacks. Instead of trivialising or falsifying past social relationships, the mental constructions of desired homes can also function as a critique of present systems. Home in this thesis comprises two divergent forms: it is either represented as a fixed place which is claimed as an exclusive home for a chosen few as discussed above, or it is represented as a floating notion, one that defines home as “where the heart is.”³⁶ Chapters 2.2.4.2–2.2.4.4 will take up the potentials of nostalgia in more detail.

³⁶ The fifth entry of the *OED* defines home as “[a] place, region, or state to which one properly *belongs*, in which one’s *affections* centre, or where one finds *refuge, rest, or satisfaction*” (*OED* 2nd ed., s.v. “Home”; emphasis added).

Home in South Africa

Transferring the discussion of home, community, nation and belonging to the South African context, these notions raise crucial questions of identity, power and authority over place and space. South Africa looks back at a history of racial segregation, first under Dutch then under British colonialism, which was taken to the extreme by apartheid's racial ideology and categorisation into the perverse racial hierarchies of White, Asian/Indian, Coloured and Black. The White apartheid regime was always eager to define South Africa as a purely White nation, officially making Black South Africans citizens of one of the ten supposedly "ethnically" homogeneous and independent homelands. During apartheid, the majority of Black South Africans could not develop a sense of home that was truly their own because they were subjected to the will of apartheid authorities who could make arbitrary decisions concerning place and ownership. Thus, home as the symbol of a secure and familiar place – where one can return to – has been denied to the majority of Black South Africans. A history of disruption, demolition and relocation has severed the feeling for, or notion of "home" at the root (de Vries 2007).

The political change from apartheid to democracy has caused radical changes in all spheres of life, and home continues to be a fragile notion, as will become obvious in the analysis of the novels. The search for a place of intimacy and familiarity as well as the need to redefine home and community are crucial concerns of the different (fictional) protagonists. In the spirit of the first democratic elections in 1994 an inclusive society as symbolised in the Rainbow Nation seemed possible. Yet, with the progression of everyday life people have come to realise the difficulties of personal and national redefinitions. With the reclaiming of South Africa for all South Africans, a new framework for home – the nation – and one's place in it has to be negotiated. Hence the question of home becomes a question of nation-building.

The classic understanding of nation as a single, unified construct proves particularly useless in the South African context (as well as in many other postcolonial states). Hence, nostalgia for a national identity – often claimed to be nostalgia's provenance – is only possible and constructive when nation is understood as a permanent process of negotiating different identities, languages and cultures. Such an understanding accounts for the diversity within heterogeneous states and their attempt to imagine a common community on the premise of diversity. In *Nation and Narration* (1990), Homi Bhabha argues for a dynamic understanding of nation, an "ambivalent nation-space"

(1990, 4). The nation is thus not a fixed construct, neither “new” nor “historical” but a continuous discursive negotiating of differences and conflicts.³⁷ Even though Bhabha is likely to construct utopias rather than down-to-earth concepts of how to deal with plurality, his idea of nations as narratives is a constructive way of dealing with the fact that nation-states comprise heterogeneous, conflicting and transnational individuals. “Nations, like narratives,” writes Bhabha, “lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eye” (1990, 1). In South Africa, a country which is endowed with a vibrant and conflicting plurality of people and cultures, the vision of “many cultures, one nation” was Nelson Mandela’s message beginning the path towards a democratic South Africa. A dynamic understanding of nation as a discourse of constant negotiation, then, might also enable a future South Africa to be envisioned through nostalgic narratives – based on a fragmented, yet diverse past.³⁸

2.2.1.2 *Algos* – Time

Nostalgia not only reflects on home but also refers to a lost time, pain and longing. As Kant noticed centuries ago, even when a place can be revisited, it is no longer the same place because time has progressed and can never be recovered. Thus, the pain, *algos*, is caused by the impossibility of re-visiting time like space (Boym 2001, xv; Kant [1789] 1980, 82, cf. Chapter 2.1.4). Although humanity has found ways to manipulate our sense of time and place – for instance via internet and transport – a physical return to the place and time of memory is impossible. Time remains uncontrollable – it proceeds continuously, thereby changing and developing its surroundings. The longing for something that can never exist again reflects the limitations of human beings to rule over time and thereby strengthens the desire for lost time. Simultaneously, faced with the impossibility of return, nostalgia’s ability to evoke alternative worlds develops. The narratives which the imaginative mind constructs offer trajectories for imagining a better past. Nostalgia can be a way of making sense of the present, of disruptions of time and of experience of displacement and alienation. Yearning for the impossible ignites the power of imagination, Depending on the nostalgist’s ability to balance past and present,

³⁷ Fixed ideas of nation are neither useful in the “new” postcolonial states nor in the Western states which claim strong roots of nationhood and, as in the case of Germany, largely ignore their heterogeneous, multicultural reality.

³⁸ Nostalgia, as suggested here, is a crucial ingredient in nation-building – a process which many countries, after independence from colonial or apartheid domination, have been facing. According to John Su, “[t]he articulation of the nation as it could have been provides an image of loss that can be shared across tribal, ethnic, and religious lines even if the conflicting parties cannot agree entirely on what the image itself signifies. The nostalgic image of nation provides the basis for establishing some shared goals for the future” (2005, 19). While postcolonial studies articulate the need to revise the (often one-dimensionally represented) past, many theorists are aware of and tend to emphasise the dangers of idealising the homeland in the process of recovering it (Wagner 2004, 20).

imagination and reality, the longing can usher in creative powers as well as mental or physical sickness. Analysing nostalgia as a phenomenon of the present grants it greater immediacy and timely relevance. As will be illustrated, nostalgia reveals more about the present and desires for the future than about the past. The complexity of nostalgic times will be discussed as a key narrative feature in Chapter 2.3.3.

2.2.2 Triggers of Nostalgia – The Narrative of Modernisation and Progress

Nostalgia is a phenomenon which arises increasingly in unsettling times, accompanying the cyclic return of revolution and restoration. However differently the phenomenon has been described throughout time, theories of nostalgia largely agree that some sort of negative experiences in the present evoke a longing for bygone times which are uncritically perceived as better. The past is thus diametrically opposed to the present whereby the past's idealisation illuminates what the present lacks. The dialogue between the past and the present is, according to Davis, nostalgia's distinct rhetorical marker. It describes a "positively toned evocation of a lived past in the context of some negative feeling toward present or impending circumstance" (1979, 18). As the historical overview has shown, industrialisation, globalisation, urbanisation and modernisation have been crucial triggers for nostalgic sentiments throughout time. Hence, outbreaks of nostalgia often follow significant moments in time called for by socio-political, economic, cultural and environmental circumstances in the present such as war, revolutions, political transitions or natural catastrophes.³⁹ However, nostalgia does not necessarily need such grand narratives of change – it can also be triggered by personally unsettling events.

Different sociological models have attempted to classify the triggers of nostalgia (Davis 1979; Casey 1987; Chase and Shaw 1989; Turner 1987; Boym 2001). Of mention here are two such categorisations as they address important factors of the very nature of nostalgia. The sociologists Malcolm Chase and Christopher Shaw (1989) have singled out three preconditions for the emergence of nostalgia (though not limiting it to these). First, nostalgia requires a linear sense of time. Second, there needs to be an apprehension of the failings of the present and third, evidence of the past must be available in the present via objects, buildings and images, such as photographs or other kinds of memorabilia (1989, 4). Bryan Turner (1987) offers a different sociological model distinguishing four

³⁹ According to Chase and Shaw, "nostalgic waves can be called for by great historical moments such as the decline of history and the fall of once great empires: Ancient Rome, Spain and Britain, for example, have all experienced the adverse turns of history, a combination of economic and military problems with an erosion of confidence in their project. But this also applies to the lesser reverses of history: within a society, classes and strata can lose their previously privileged place and fall into obscurity" (1989, 3).

dimensions which highlight the personal felt loss in the present. The first dimension largely agrees with Chase and Shaws's sense of historical decline: in order to feel nostalgic, there needs to be the sense of loss involving a departure from a golden age of "homefulness." Accordingly, "[m]illennialism typically involves some sense of a lost space and lost time from which contemporary social systems can be measured and found wanting" (Turner 1987, 150). Such outer circumstances correspond to the second dimension, the sense of absence or loss of personal wholeness and moral certainty. This implies a break of human relations and a collapse of socially accepted values. The third dimension denotes the sense of loss of individual freedom and autonomy with the disappearance of genuine social relationships. This links to the fourth dimension of a lost simplicity, personal authenticity and emotional spontaneity. Overall, Turner stresses the sense of alienation from society as a result of modernisation as a major force in triggering nostalgia.⁴⁰

While these models accentuate some important factors – especially Turner's emphasis of alienation as a defining trigger for some of the literary characters' nostalgia(s) – they also show some significant deficits. First of all, interpreting nostalgia as bound to a linear sense of time is limited and limiting by a purely Western perspective and disregards the phenomenon's universality, as a "fundamental condition of human estrangement" (Turner 1987, 150). Human beings have memories as well as a sense of time passing, and both memory and time are reflected culturally. Memory can be a very personal and intimate way of relating to the past or a culturally initiated form of commemorating past events through various practises, monuments, traditions or rituals which are deeply connected to the specific culture and their national or political programme. Moreover, time can be understood differently from place to place and from culture to culture. Two major conceptions of time are the Western understanding of linear time and the non-Western circular time of myth (Cooper 2006, 32). However, whether it is linear or circular, human beings have memory and therefore also the ability to feel nostalgic. To deny some cultures a genuine human expression of memory does not only disregard nostalgia's complexity but also seems to be anchored in Eurocentric views. Several theorists have conducted studies on nostalgia in non-Western cultures, such as in African and Asian communities, substantiating nostalgia's capabilities within different

⁴⁰ As mentioned in the historical overview, nineteenth century sociologists already discussed the social effects of modernity and progress. Modernity, so they argue, caused increasing urbanisation and thereby uprooting from traditions and community. This led to an increasing alienation of the individual in a society dominated by technology. The subject became institutionalised.

cultural contexts.⁴¹ Similarly, this study will look at non-Western communities and support the thesis that nostalgia is a fundamental human condition. As such, nostalgia crosses any cultural, national or geographic borders. In disagreement with Chase and Shaw, cultures that do not follow a linear, Western perception of time can be nostalgic as well.⁴² One significant characteristic of nostalgic memory is that it does not follow a chronological order.⁴³ Travelling freely in time can, in fact, be seen as nostalgia's strength (cf. Chapter 2.3.3). Furthermore, while Chase and Shaw's as well as Turner's assumptions that present deficiencies trigger nostalgia are quite likely, the protagonist of *The Whale Caller* will exemplify a reversal of that logic, experiencing nostalgia in times of happiness. Moreover, while nostalgic outbreaks are likely to be caused by evidences of the past, to reduce them to that would disregard the imaginative power of the human mind. Memory is encouraged by material reminders in the present but not limited to them.

After all, nostalgia seems undeletable and ever-present – each time and epoch finds triggers which arouse nostalgic feelings for bygone times. Having examined the object and triggers of nostalgia, the following section will take a closer look at different contemporary forms and contexts in which nostalgia has been mobilised.

2.2.3 Cultural and Social Forms of Nostalgia

While the previous section scrutinised the integral components – place/home and time – and triggers of nostalgia from a contemporary perspective more closely, thus relating them to the South African context, this section will focus on particular cultural and social forms of nostalgia. The first subchapter will take a closer look at nostalgia's postmodern context and its mobilisation as a consumer product. The following subchapters of this section will discuss nostalgia in the specific (post)colonial context in which the selected novels and the respective fictional characters are situated.

⁴¹ There have been several essays on nostalgia in African countries, Japan and China which support the argument that nostalgia is not restricted to a linear time concept. See, for example: Bissell 2005; Robertson 1990; Steiner n.d. Robertson, for instance notes that the term nostalgia "(hsiang-ch'ou)" could be traced back in Chinese literature to the times of Confucius (1990, 47).

⁴²

⁴³ This is in addition to the fact that the events which are remembered are selected without regard to any veracity. This will be touched upon in Chapter 2.3.4.1.

2.2.3.1 The Commercialisation of Nostalgia or “The Age of Pop Nostalgia”

The present costs as much as the past. (Boym 2001, 38)

In the Western world, nostalgia saw a revival as a consumer object, then and now often associated with kitsch, in the latter half of the twentieth century. This is probably the phenomenon's furthest move away from Hofer's medical description as a dreadful disease. Since then nostalgia has boomed in film, music, lifestyle, fashion, politics and the heritage industry. While nostalgia had been defined as either a physical or mental disease focusing on *nostos* or *algos*, at least since “the golden age of nostalgia” (Lowenthal 1989, 18) in the 1970s and the appropriation of the term by consumerism and the media, nostalgia seems to have lost its defining forces of time and space. Hence, the question arises as to what the meaning of nostalgia comprises today. If it has lost its defining components of space and time, can it still be called nostalgia? Unsurprisingly, the philosopher Edward Casey wonders:

Nostalgia without explicit, recollective memory! Nostalgia over a past which seems to be no past at all, so absolute and anterior is it! Indeed, nostalgia over a place that proves to be no particular place at all! Have we not lost all that is essential to nostalgia? (1987, 366)

In postmodern, consumerist discourses, nostalgic longing can be directed at, it seems, anything: places, pasts, persons, events and objects. The creation of a fake immediacy of the past – equally of heroic acts as of upper class or colonial lifestyle and past fashion – is made attractive in the present. Nothing, it seems, sells better than the past. History is being recycled with almost no time span; even the last minute can become a site of nostalgia:

Yearning for former times and circumstances had expanded to embrace a generalised and often unspecified past. Traits once idealised as explicitly medieval or classical now attached to any past or to all pasts together: nostalgia even embraced the new. (Lowenthal 1989, 18–19)

Posing as fashion and retro-style nostalgia suggests that you miss something you have never lost (Boym 2001, 38; Hutcheon 1998, 7). This is what Arjun Appadurai calls “ersatz nostalgia”: “nostalgia without lived experience or collective historical memory” (cited in Boym 2001, 38). Nostalgia has been used by consumer society to create an image, a representation of the past which uncritically imitates a style or fashion that thrives on ideas of the past.

The resurrection of inauthentic forms dressed as authentic is a distinctly postmodern phenomenon. Paradoxically, postmodernism both rejects and celebrates nostalgia: it rejects nostalgia for its inherent conservatism and supposedly trivial sentimentality, and yet it celebrates nostalgia as heritage and kitsch, predominantly in consumer objects such as souvenirs and memorabilia (Hutcheon 1998; Scanlan 2004).⁴⁴

Nostalgia as the Simulacrum of the Past

One of the most prominent critics of both nostalgia and postmodernism, Fredrik Jameson, criticises postmodern approaches to the past for its focus on stylistic connotations and marketing values and nostalgia for its pathos. The one evil, postmodernism, encourages the other evil, nostalgia, at the cost of a sense of history. Nostalgia and the postmodern move of uncritically commercialising the past is an “insensible colonization of the present” (Jameson 1991, 20), and he famously argues that “a history lesson is the best cure for nostalgic pathos” (1991, 156). Jameson, thereby, fails to see nostalgia historically and in its full complexity, degrading it to a mere cultural mode. Thus, he too hastily condemns a valid human emotion. In fact, Linda Hutcheon⁴⁵ reveals Jameson’s own nostalgia for “genuine historicity” (1998, 6) and lost authenticity in the face of postmodernism.

According to Jameson, nostalgia has become synonymous with a form of history recording which accesses the past only through the representation of it in the present. This ties into Jean Baudrillard’s concept of the simulacrum which Jameson consequently takes up, describing the late twentieth century understanding of nostalgia as simulacra of the past:

The appetite for images of the past, in the form of what might be called simulacra, the increasing production of such images of all kinds, in particular in that peculiar postmodern genre, the nostalgic film, with its glossy evocation of the past as sheer consumerable fashion and image – all of this seems to me something of a return of the repressed, an unconscious loss of the past, which this appetite for images seeks desperately to overcome. (1988, 104)

⁴⁴ The postmodern recalling of the past was first seen in architecture as an often ironic return to history which resulted from modern architecture’s complete rejection of the past (Hutcheon 1998).

⁴⁵ While Linda Hutcheon was also suspicious of nostalgia at first, she later revised her judgment by pointing to a structural parallel between postmodern irony and nostalgia. In her re-evaluation of nostalgia, she acknowledges that the aesthetics of nostalgia should be analysed rather as a complex projection than a simple, sentimental and conservative memory. She sees the coupling of irony and nostalgia as a distinctive aspect of the postmodern most prominent in architecture and literature when “the act of ironizing (while still implicitly invoking) nostalgia undermines modernist assertions of originality, authenticity, and the burden of the past, even as it acknowledges their continuing (but not paralyzing) validity as aesthetic concerns” (Hutcheon 1998).

Indeed, the past has become fashionable in various genres and in various academic disciplines. Consumer culture uses nostalgia by replicating selective objects – souvenirs, fashions and lifestyles of the past which becomes all too evident in such areas as music, fashion, design and architecture. Thus, today, each of the past decades has its own nostalgic tinge, be it the recent eighties revival, or last century's Empire or Victorian Age.

The simulation of a desired past in the present also reveals a misguided attempt to make sense of one's surroundings:

Attachment to a lost object usually connects a person to the world because that attachment is the kernel of the desire to *re*find the object. One weaves connections with the world because it offers so many imitations of the desired object. In the case of the nostalgic, however, attachment led the sufferer to renounce the world as an illusory place made up of mere simulacra of the objects desired. (Roth 1992, 274; emphasis in original)

The psyche escapes to the dream worlds of simulacra: in a world that is falling apart, the world of signs and symbols becomes more attractive than the real world as will become most obvious in the characters of *The Exploded View*. Popular culture, as Lowenthal points out, has turned the former disease into a widespread cult: "Ancestor-hunters in search of roots throng archives; insatiable multitudes inundate historic houses and museums; antiques engross everyday as well as elite collectors; mementoes find inexhaustible markets" (1989, 21). Mass culture and media are obsessed with the past and its "capital value" (1989, 23). With the commercialisation of the past, however, nostalgia has been deprived of its significance as a memory practise. The past seems to be closed off from the present so that it can no longer be lamented but only be resurrected as consumer objects and simulacra. Thereby, the simulacrum poses as original and authentic past. Nostalgia, as a commodity, is no longer a way of relating to the past or "a quest for another temporality" (Boym 2001, 30).

2.2.3.2 Imperialist Nostalgia

Shifting the perspective from nostalgia discussed within Western discourses to the "peripheries," and especially to the former colonised countries, the phenomenon also flourishes in a variety of colours, even though, as will become obvious, academia's focus remains on former colonials, i.e. on a distinctly White, Western expression of nostalgia. The dynamics feeding into nostalgia within the colonial and postcolonial contexts take different forms, depending on the nostalgic agents, the past that is yearned for and the mechanisms of power and domination involved in a nostalgic recalling of a colonial past.

Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between two main perspectives – the former colonials and the former colonised.

As Bryan Turner notes, White settler cultures are reported to be particularly prone to a nostalgic longing for the “motherland.” In its absence, the motherland becomes idealised as a home “located in a lost place in a lost time and thereby assumes a Utopian dimension, since that home is free from the conflicts of multiculturalism, political pluralism and ethnic conflict” (Turner 1987, 154). In that case, nostalgia dichotomises a degrading, chaotic decolonised culture with order and values in the mother country.

While Turner refers to former colonials, the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo broadens the scope by depicting not only colonials but also by describing a more general Western attitude towards other cultures. He established the idea of “imperialist nostalgia” describing the mood of nostalgia for colonial and “indigenous” cultures in narrative representations of writing and film.⁴⁶ Thereby, Rosaldo focuses in particular on anthropologists and ethnologists, who he reveals to be complicit in imperialism: “Both attempt to use a seemingly harmless mood as a mask of innocence in order to cover their involvement with processes of domination” (1989, 120). Rosaldo analyses this form of nostalgia as an “innocent yearning” (1989, 108) concealing its complicity with often brutal forms of domination. His key argument is that imperialist nostalgia revolves around a paradox:

[A] person kills somebody and then mourns his or her victim. In a more attenuated form, someone deliberately alters a form of life and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to his or her intervention. (1989, 108)

Consequently, agents of colonialism yearn for a precolonial culture – that which they have often most persistently and brutally destroyed, suppressed and humiliated. Hence, imperialist nostalgia occurs alongside colonial and postcolonial justifications of “the White man’s burden to civilise” and to bring progress and modernisation to the “underprivileged, uncivilised colonies.” Apparently innocent behaviour, attitudes and actions support a sentimental discourse about vanishing traditional cultures. The ideological pattern of imperialism evoked via nostalgia is reproduced in literature, ethnography and personal accounts such as letters home which are, according to Rosaldo, the exemplary genre of nostalgic discourse (1989, 117). The romantic and often

⁴⁶ Analysing the phenomenon along similar patterns but pointing out different facets, anthropologist W.C. Bissell talks of “imperial nostalgia” being reproduced as a cultural mode in mass culture and media. As part of Thatcher’s political programme (and an expression of loss of power and influence) the colonial past was re-evaluated in films, décor, designs and dress reviving the former imperial centre and the British national identity as continuing glory.

patronising view of traditional cultures thereby re-enforces the myth of the “noble savage”; the stereotypical representation of the Other which expresses a form of positive racism. Rosaldo, who became aware of his own nostalgic inclination in his ethnographic writing, argues for a critical embracing of imperial nostalgia instead of rejecting such sentiments because “to surrender to such memories and the recognition of our complicity will enable us, not to detour around, but to move through, and hopefully beyond, imperialist nostalgia” (1989, 119). Thus, critical reflection of one’s memories could help to dismantle such hidden subtexts of (racial) domination.

Besides letters home and literature from “Karen Blixen to Karel Schoeman, expressing nostalgia for a mythic homeland of order, hierarchy and happy peasantry” (Walder 2004), a popular expression of imperialist nostalgia became prominent in the genre of nostalgia films which emerged in the early 1980s. In imperialist fashion, nostalgia films such as *The Gods Must be Crazy* (1980), *A Passage to India* (1984) or *Out of Africa* (1985) romanticise the colonisers and represent the relationship between the coloniser and the colonised as one of friendship – generally creating a version of “gentle colonialism.” Even though “the native” is also often romanticised and his or her “racial purity” glorified, he or she remains in the background. Pointedly, Salman Rushdie commented on British productions such as *A Passage to India* and *Ghandi* (both released in 1984) as “the phantom twitchings of an amputated limb” (1991, 92). While the postcolonial era releases films “which creatively confront the past, ponder the present” (Columpar 2009) and gives voice to the Other perspectives such as *The Battle of Algiers* (1966) or *Once We Were Warriors* (1994), imperialist nostalgia films keep their White heroes who connect with the colonised culture on friendly terms, idealising them as less corrupted and closer to nature than the modern, White “civilised” man. Nostalgia in this context is the often paradoxical yearning for more simple and stable worlds by those who believe in progress and innovation (Hutcheon 1998, 5).⁴⁷

Pro-empire sentiments or the mourning of imperial power are also expressed and academically spread by historian Niall Ferguson in his documentary and accompanying book *Empire: How Britain Made the Modern World* (2003) which should not be left unmentioned in this context. In this work, Ferguson expresses his contemporary attitude of continuing confidence in the goodness of colonialism, trying to lure the reader into his

⁴⁷ Referring to the rise of nostalgia film, Linda Hutcheon points to the invocation of past times, never personally experienced, as “armchair nostalgia” (Hutcheon 1998). As indicated in the previous chapter, Fredrik Jameson attacks what he terms postmodern nostalgia film referring, it seems, to any films that appropriate the past and turn it into glossy images. For more on postmodern nostalgia film see Jameson’s critical essay “Nostalgia for the Present” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 88.2, 1989.

neo-colonial view that Britain gave the world civilisation. He writes:

As I travelled around that Empire's remains in 2002, I was constantly struck by its ubiquitous creativity. To imagine the world without the Empire would be to expunge from the map the elegant boulevards of Williamsburg and old Philadelphia; to sweep into the sea the squat battlements of Port Royal, Jamaica; to return to the bush the glorious skyline of Sydney; to level the steamy seaside slum that is Freetown, Sierra Leone; to fill in the Big Hole at Kimberley; to demolish the mission at Kuruman; to send the town of Livingstone hurtling over the Victoria Falls, which would of course revert to their original name of Mosioatunya. Without the British Empire, there would be no Calcutta; no Bombay; no Madras. Indians may rename them as many times as they like, but they remain cities founded and built by the British. (Ferguson 2003, xxi)

Forms of imperialist nostalgia, as defined by Renato Rosaldo, are also frequently reproduced by the heritage and tourism industry as shall be further exemplified in Chapters 2.2.6 and 3.3.5.

2.2.3.3 Colonial Nostalgia

Anthropologist W.C. Bissell makes a significant distinction between imperialist and colonial nostalgia, the former being a White, (former) imperial or coloniser, the latter a former colonised attitude. While pro-empire attitudes such as those voiced by Ferguson – either as consumer products and fashion or as expressed by White settler cultures – seem, if irritating and repulsive, comprehensible, a longing for the times of colonial domination by former colonised groups opens up another set of questions. Hence, Bissell asks:

But what does it mean when Africans voice similar views, seemingly harkening back to colonialism as a better age? How exactly do we come to terms with expressions of colonial nostalgia by the descendents of those who struggled long and hard to overcome the effects of European domination and exploitation? (2005, 217)

Africans voicing their nostalgia for the colonial age and the equation of independence with suffering raise perplexing and uncomfortable feelings. It seems to be a betrayal of the independence movements of the many colonised African countries. However, as Bissell further suggests, instead of confronting colonial nostalgia with distaste and rejection, it is more important to question why Africans long for the times of colonial rule: "What social and political desires are postcolonial Africans giving voice to when they speak well of the colonial past?" (2005, 217) This question reveals the dissatisfaction with the postcolonial present. Again, nostalgia works as a barometer contrasting a supposedly better run country in the past with a present situation that is marked by a lack of progress, poor infrastructure and an economy largely mis-managed by the new ruling

elites who, all too often, follow their colonial masters in terms of exploitation and self-enrichment.⁴⁸ Thus, in order to discuss colonial nostalgia it seems crucial to analyse the present postcolonial realities in order to understand this particular longing for colonialism.

2.2.3.4 Apartheid Nostalgia

A similar form of colonial nostalgia is voiced in contemporary longing of Black South Africans for the times of apartheid. This form of Black apartheid nostalgia seems extremely disturbing given that South Africa has, after forty-six years of suffering legalised racial subjugation, finally achieved independence. In contrast to many African countries which fell under dictatorship and exploitation by their new leaders – such as Congo, Uganda and Zimbabwe – South Africa has been praised as a country which has embarked on a path of negotiating a common future for all South Africans on the premise of universal principals of freedom, human rights, and democracy. However, in the face of increasing crime, corruption and unemployment, a significant number of both Black and White South Africans are reported to believe that the country was better run under apartheid (Quinn 2002; Kynoch 2003, Robinson 2004) According to the findings of the “Afrobarometer,” a series of public opinion surveys:

Overall, the polls showed that about 60 percent of South Africans felt the country was better run under apartheid, with both blacks and whites rating the current government less trustworthy, more corrupt, less able to enforce the law and less able to deliver government services than its white predecessors. (Quinn 2002)

This does not suggest that Black South Africans want to return to apartheid rule, according to these research findings, but it does emphasise the deficiencies of the present, as “people tend to positively emphasise the things that they do not see under the present system and de-emphasise the more harsh aspect” (cited in Quinn 2002). As Jacob Dlamini suggests, “[t]o be nostalgic for a life lived under apartheid [...] is to yearn [...] for order in an uncertain world” (2009, 14).

White South Africans still show the highest levels of nostalgia for White-only rule. As will be seen in Vladislavić’s *The Restless Supermarket*, the autodiegetic narrator⁴⁹ Aubrey Tearle is the only character of all the selected novels who is openly

⁴⁸ Cf., for instance, the recently published article by Kole Omotoso, 2010. “Betraying the Revolution.”

⁴⁹ This term was first introduced by Gerard Genette to refer to first person narration. For more see: Genette, Gérard. 1988 [1983]. *Narrative Discourse Revisited*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Ithaca: Cornell UP.

nostalgic for the authorial apparatus of control and order which ran the apartheid state. Apartheid nostalgia, as will be illustrated, mourns the loss of clear racial borders and contrasts a supposed ordered and well run past with a chaotic, degenerating present.

One cannot stress enough how extremely complicated both colonial and apartheid forms of nostalgia are. Even though they usually express a valid critique of present socio-economic circumstances, the equation of independence or the postcolonial situation with suffering disregards the often traumatic sufferings under colonialism, especially for those active in the struggle against colonial domination and arbitrary rule.⁵⁰

2.2.3.5 Postcolonial Nostalgia

Another form of nostalgia, voiced by former colonised or colonials, is captured by the notion of postcolonial nostalgia. Generally, one might define postcolonial nostalgia as a search for roots, identity and what Hutcheon calls “a lost coherence” (1998). Facing a past of disruption, cultural suppression and dislocation, this search for a cultural as well as a personal identity becomes a way of creating a narrative of unity and continuity. Hence, not surprisingly, postcolonial narratives of nostalgia often investigate the link between the past and the present, the significance and re-evaluation of customs and traditions.⁵¹ This, in turn, clashes with the struggle to find an identity that incorporates the roots and traditions of the past *and* the challenges and demands of the present.

As will become obvious in Zakes Mda’s novels, many of his characters re-imagine the past in order to recuperate lost or devalued cultural knowledge or ways of life. Thereby, Mda stresses the importance of historical memory as giving meaning to present, personal and cultural identity:

I believe that human beings whoever they are, will from time to time long for what they used to know whether they knew it personally or whether it’s something that is part of *historical memory*. [...] That is why sometimes a people they have nostalgia for a period in which they themselves personally never lived. Some period and place, which is part of what you will call *historical memory*. (Mda 2009c, 358; emphasis added)

One interpretation of nostalgia in his novels exposes its positive value which helps to revitalise historical memory and create a link between past and present. Nostalgia – as a search for unity, origin and as a narrative of nationalism – has become a frequent motif in modern African cultural and literary studies, in particular during times of decolonisation

⁵⁰ Similar forms of nostalgia can also be found in Soviet nostalgia or GDR nostalgia, called “Ostalgie.”

⁵¹ In literature, postcolonial nostalgia predominantly manifests itself in narratives of exile, displacement and return.

in the twentieth century such as the *négritude* movement⁵² and the cultural nationalism movement of Anglophone East Africa (Hutcheon 1998; Matzke 2006). The precolonial past became the site of the often restorative nostalgic longing of an idealised African identity. The dangers of national movements such as *négritude* are complex. While these movements were important in bolstering an African identity and pride, they also shaped essentialist discourses not that different in structure from the coloniser's. Illuminating the former European colonials' position, Dennis Walder points to the ironic parallel between postcolonial and imperialist nostalgia, as both are driven by the desire for a stable, coherent identity and a mythic homeland.

Shifting the perspective once more to former colonials, what does the past offer to those who are, unlike imperialist nostalgists, aware of the cracks and fissures, of the discontinuities in history, and who do not bathe in the delusion of (neo-)colonial innocence? Having made the UK his permanent home many years ago, Dennis Walder refers to his own upbringing in South Africa by reflecting on Henri Rousseau's picture *The Sleeping Gypsy* which, in a nutshell, represents his ambiguous and complicated postcolonial longing as a former colonial. To him, the painting reflects a romantic image of the Cape with its long beaches and spectacular mountainous scenery, bringing up memories of the land of his childhood. Ironically, while the picture represents peculiar images of the southern tip of Africa, it also inspired in him a yearning for a world not visible in the painting – the world beyond the mountains. This dream world of belonging created, according to Walder, “a yearning produced by my ancestry and upbringing, all of which created a confused sense of who I was, and who I was meant to become” (2004). His question, “what does home mean for former colonials?” is complicated by a concept one might call “inner exile” – being African in terms of place, but growing up with a yearning to be European in terms of cultural identification – and by the realisation that the colonial home always implies the disruption of the colonised homes.

The difficulty to identify with the place called home and one's position in it – as a White South African and former colonial – is also addressed by Ivan Vladislavić. According to him, “[t]he question of nostalgia is complicated in South Africa because the question of home is so complicated” (2008, 339). As he significantly points out, idealisations of the past need to be seen in perspective. Hence an individual case of nostalgia – for a White South African childhood as well as for a Black South African

⁵² The iconic representative of the *négritude* movement, Aimé Césaire, titled one of his poetic texts *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (Notebook of a Return to My Native Land) (cited in Matzke 2006, 70), thus already expressing nostalgia.

worker who was better off during the apartheid period – ignores the context under which such a life was made possible in the first place. In an interview, Vladislavić reflects upon his own perception of nostalgia as follows:

Being in any way a conscious, politically or socially, conscious person is an uncomfortable thing, and I think that's why the question has become more and more interesting to me because it creates uncomfortable feelings and it raises uncomfortable issues about one's identification with the place. I also think that as a white South African this looking back to the past is a necessary process because it keeps the particular nature of your own history in your mind. I feel that if I engage in a nostalgic flight about my own past I'm required to confront these difficult questions about what the meaning of my own life is. (2008, 340)

Apartheid South Africa functioned according to clear racial hierarchies which made it possible for the majority of White South Africans to lead a comfortable, privileged life, to receive a good education, employment, a spacious home and leisure luxuries. For the majority of Black South Africans the apartheid past meant Bantu education,⁵³ unemployment or mine work, poverty, pass laws and an overall fragile home. Hence, “if nostalgia is going to make any sense really, if it's not going to be simply an excuse for not dealing with reality” (Vladislavić 2008, 341) one needs to examine the broader context within which one past is remembered as an idyllic place at the expense of others.

Following from the above, postcolonial nostalgia is a complex and reflective turn to the past since it comprises the search for roots, identity and coherence as voiced by both the former colonisers and the former colonised. Postcolonial nostalgia thus comprises different feelings toward home and nostalgia ranging from identity-boosting and the recuperation of historical memory to critical self-questioning – aspects which will be addressed again in the discussion of the reflective potential of nostalgia and in the discussion of the psychology at work in nostalgia. These three aspects of nostalgia – postcolonial, reflective/critical and psychological – overlap greatly; even so they will be discussed individually under their specific foci.

⁵³ The Bantu Education Act from 1953 created a curriculum that only educated Black South Africans in terms of what they would need for working in mines, households and their homelands. It was an Education Act meant to keep Blacks in lower positions and to serve the White man.

2.2.4 The Dangers and Potentials of Nostalgia

While the last section discussed different forms of nostalgia which took shape in response to specific socio-political and economic circumstances in the second half of the twentieth century, this section will scrutinise the mechanisms of nostalgia. Thereby, and contrary to its commercialisation and loss of meaning, nostalgia's defining components of place and time/longing *nostos* and *algos* play a key role.

As already indicated, in recent years several scholars (Davis 1979; Boym 2001; Ritivoi 2002; Wildschut et al. 2004, 2006, 2008a,b) have re-evaluated nostalgia within their work by lifting the negative connotations and the description as a pathology or a kitsch object and moving the concept towards a mode of experience. Thus, Svetlana Boym has pointed to the dual tendencies of nostalgia. According to her, nostalgia is informed by a fundamental ambivalence: it repeats the unrepeatable and materialises the immaterial. She provides the visual example of a cinematic image of nostalgia which 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). Based on its duality – *nostos* and *algos* – she offers a typology which distinguishes between restorative and reflective nostalgia in order to “illuminate some of nostalgia's mechanisms of seduction and manipulation” (2001, xviii).⁵⁴ These apparently inherent dualities emphasise nostalgia's negative *and* positive aspects – two differing poles which she defines as follows:

Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. Reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. (2001, xviii)

While her distinction of the shapes that nostalgia tends to take contributes immensely to the re-evaluation of a generally negatively connoted phenomenon,⁵⁵ her typology, as argued below, is also limited – despite her claims – by a binarising view of restorative *versus* reflective nostalgia. This chapter will take a closer look at the different facets of

⁵⁴ Her typology shows certain striking similarities to Fred Davis's ascending orders of nostalgia which he established in *Yearning for Yesterday* (1979), although she claims that she was not aware of Davis's categorisation at the time of writing *The Future of Nostalgia*.

⁵⁵ Referring to Boym's typology, Jennifer Ladino (2004) has developed similar categories of official and counter-nostalgia pointing to the relation of nostalgia to dominant histories; Jennifer Delisle (2006) focuses on personal and collective memories or cultural myths in her distinction of experiential and cultural nostalgia; taking up Boym's concept of reflective nostalgia and Rosaldo's imperialist nostalgia, Jennifer Wenzel introduces her concept of anti-imperial nostalgia. Since all of them are based on Boym's typology, this study will only refer to some of these tonalities where adequate.

nostalgia and introduce Svetlana Boym's typology of nostalgia (2001) which, despite its limitations, offers workable tools to grasp the complex and ambiguous nature of nostalgia.

2.2.4.1 Restorative Nostalgia

Nostalgia's greatest danger is most likely when it poses as truth. The past that the restorative nostalgist longs for is a pure and perfected past; it pretends to be a true copy of the "original past" without realising or wilfully ignoring the progression of time. Restorative nostalgia creates a single, seemingly coherent and continuous plot of the past. Through this, it is "at the core of recent national and religious revivals" as it signifies "a return to the original stasis, to the prelapsarian moment" (Boym, 2001, 49). This type of nostalgia stresses "*nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home" (xviii). Thereby, the restored past (or the myth of a restored truth) bears no signs of decay, no signs of passing time. Rather, it narrates a story of perfection and eternal validity.

Moreover, restorative nostalgia thrives on collective symbols, signs and myths of the homeland. The creation of origin myths which give the idea of a stable past become most striking in traditions and heritage.⁵⁶ The invention of common, national traditions serves to bind the community and to enhance nationalist feelings. As such, nostalgia becomes complicit with fundamentalism and nationalism, bearing in mind that with the rise of nationalism in the nineteenth century *nostos*, the homeland, came to be increasingly identified with the nation (Hutcheon 1998). Nostalgic desires to restore an idealised and "nationalised" homeland tend to engage in a simple premodern, Manichean conception of good and evil, "us" versus "them" suspecting one group – "them" – to plot against "us" – the homeland.⁵⁷ History is thus viewed as one-dimensional and the restored homeland becomes subject to inclusion and exclusion (as discussed in Chapter 2.2.1.1).⁵⁸

⁵⁶ These invented traditions often tend to be extremely conservative and need to be distinguished from age-old customs (Boym 2001, 42). Boym points to two paradoxes about invented customs: "First, the more rapid and sweeping the pace and scale of modernization, the more conservative and unchangeable the new traditions tend to be. Second, the stronger the rhetoric of continuity with the historical past and emphasis on traditional values, the more selectively the past is represented" (2001, 42).

⁵⁷ Boym writes: "Restorative nostalgia knows two main narrative plots – the restoration of origins and the conspiracy theory, characteristic of the most extreme cases of contemporary nationalism fed on right-wing popular culture" (2001, 43). To Boym's examples of Nazi, Soviet and Cold War terror, Dennis Walder adds apartheid as constructing conspiracy theories of the Black masses threatening the imagined White homeland of South Africa.

⁵⁸ The murder of Eugene Terre' Blanche, the leader of the far right-wing Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB), allegedly by two Black workers has recently given rise to fundamentalist sentiments. As a reaction to the murder, the nationalist movement AWB revived nationalist myths of their pure and God-given Afrikaner homeland, using insignia resembling a Nazi swastika (Giliomee 2009). Before the first democratic elections, Terre' Blanche's message had resounded a fanatical, restorative nostalgia calling for the nationalist myth that the Afrikaners were a pure and chosen people: "Our main task is to be there when this government sells out the country, to restore law and order when it vanishes, to ensure our women and children are not maimed and raped by ANC murderers" (Giliomee 2009).

Restorative nostalgia constructs its own master narratives of belonging and non-belonging. Hence, restorative tendencies of nostalgia are counter-productive in the process of community or nation-building as they try to restore the past as it was – as it is wished to be in the present – without making it fruitful or accessible for the present and the future. Accordingly, it contributes to the maintenance of old and the erection of new borders as time progresses. Nostalgia can thus easily be manipulated by politics propagating nationalism and fascism. These collective forms of nostalgia, which are likely in traditions and national forms of commemoration, can partake in both tendencies: it can be inclusive, enforcing group identity, but it can also bolster exclusion and xenophobia – dangerous tendencies which are also reflected in the selected novels.

2.2.4.2 Reflective Nostalgia

Nostalgia is not only reactionary or nationalistic; it also has progressive potential. According to Boym, nostalgia can be interpreted as a conscious choice to reject the logic of late modernity and to look sideways from the “tunnel vision” of progressive ideologies or master narratives. Reflective nostalgia focuses on *algos* – on longing and loss – and the irreversibility of time. “*Re-flection*,” argues Boym, suggests new flexibility, as it does not focus on recovering an original or absolute truth but instead appreciates the fragments of the past and the mediation of history (2001, 49).⁵⁹ This kind of nostalgia “dwells on the ambivalence of human longing and belonging” (2001, xviii). The reflective nostalgic knows that his or her memories are filled with imagination and longing. Reflective nostalgia is aware of human finitude and the irrecoverability of time. It, therefore, does not celebrate grand narratives by “reconstructing emblems and rituals of home and homeland” (2001, 49), but resides instead on the ruins of time and “cherishes shattered fragments of memory and temporalizes space” (2001, 49). While restorative nostalgia evokes national memory and creates a singular plot of national identity, reflective nostalgia evokes social memory allowing for collective recollections which do not define or limit individual memory (2001, 49).

Contrary to restorative tendencies of nostalgia, “reflective” nostalgia implies creativity. This kind of nostalgia can be constructive and supportive in the negotiation processes of past and present, tradition and modernisation, and can thus essentially help to

Less right-wing but reproducing similar nostalgic feelings for a pure Afrikaner Volksstaat has been realised in Orania, a town in the Northern Province of South Africa preserved for Afrikaaners only.

⁵⁹ Instead of believing in essentialist discourses and origin stories, reflective nostalgia accepts the past’s imperfections and irrecoverability, which provides for a flexible evaluation and interpretation of the past made accessible to the present.

negotiate borders. While longing for an ideal time and place is a tendency of human nature, only a reflection upon the longing and a deliberate questioning of the past – and whether it really was all that good – can make the past a productive force in the present. As will be demonstrated, Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić both engage in a reflective nostalgia in their selected novels in which they creatively deal with the complex and complicated relationship between past and present, and for that matter also future.

Comparing restorative and reflective nostalgia, it becomes apparent that they are two sides of the same sword – one and the same entity or cultural phenomenon can evoke both forms of nostalgia at the same time, which makes Boym’s typology not only more elusive but also testifies to nostalgia’s complexity.⁶⁰ Overall, Boym’s typology in particular offers an important means of grasping the ambiguities of nostalgia which is “both a social disease and a creative emotion, a poison and a cure” (2001, 354–355). However, in Boym’s model, restorative nostalgia is condemned as opening the doors to fundamentalism and nationalism while she advocates reflective nostalgia. This binary distinction seems too simplified, especially when considering nostalgic sentiments in identity processes discussed in the following section. As will be shown, restorative nostalgia can, despite its dangers, offer positive relief in certain situations (Steiner 2008). Thus, while this study takes Boym’s typology as useful analytical tools to explore the diversity and ambiguities of nostalgia in the novels discussed in the second part of this study, it will also illuminate restorative nostalgia’s – though limited – potential.

Boym’s idea of reflective nostalgia has also been voiced in similar ways, as argued here, by Salman Rushdie and Ivan Vladislavić. For reasons of illustration, the following section will briefly highlight their reflections upon remembering the past as they provide key insights into reflective nostalgia, and these will be taken up again in the analysis. Salman Rushdie, while ironically rejecting nostalgia as a mere sentimentality, talks about the fragments of the past, thereby in effect describing a reflective form of nostalgia; Ivan Vladislavić emphasises the potential of nostalgia when critically reflected upon.

⁶⁰ This is also expressed by John Su: “Nostalgia [...] encourages an imaginative exploration of how present systems of social relations fail to address human needs, and the specific objects of nostalgia – lost or imagined homelands – represent efforts to articulate alternatives” (2005, 5).

2.2.4.3 The Fragments of the Past

Referring to his own experiences of exile, Salman Rushdie in his essay “Imaginary Homelands” (1991) writes about the awareness that memories are always fragmentary and that reconstructing the past, in his case via writing about his lost homeland, will always be an imaginary process. In order to describe the value of the fragments of the past, Rushdie uses two key metaphors. First, he refers to his memories as a broken mirror, arguing that remembering is always fragmentary and can never restore the past time and place, i.e. his India, as it was. Second, in order to explain the value of these fragments, Rushdie provides the visual metaphor of broken pots of antiquity, which, once reconstructed, might look more exciting than flawless pots. In their very destruction of a perfect image, the broken mirror as well as the broken pots of antiquity – that is, the fragments of memory – gain value as the “fragmentation ma[kes] trivial things seem like symbols, and the mundane acquire[s] numinous qualities” (1991, 12). Rushdie points to the constructive and creative use of fragments of the past in the present and emphasises that, “[t]he broken glass is not merely a mirror of nostalgia. It is also, I believe, a useful tool with which to work in the present” (1991, 12; emphasis added). Thereby, however, he dismisses nostalgia as trivial sentimentality instead of seeing nostalgia’s potential as a form of memory through which longing is inspired, precisely by the ruins of the past. It is such fragments of the past which Boym’s reflective form of nostalgia thrives on, thus making them fruitful for the present and future. The reflective nostalgist is, after all, aware of the fact that the past is not as ideal as he or she imagines it to be, that the memories of the past are but fragments.

2.2.4.4 Critical Nostalgia

Ivan Vladislavić introduces another crucial nuance of nostalgia which ties into the mechanism of reflective nostalgia. In an interview, he explains his understanding of a “critical nostalgia” which is worth quoting at length:

I don’t know whether it’s possible, but I imagined a kind of ‘critical nostalgia’. It sounds like a contradiction. On the one hand [...] nostalgia is a conservative impulse, and might be seen as a resistance to change, an inability to live in the present. On the other hand, it may be an inclination that attaches one to a place, that attaches one to one’s own story, and that’s a necessary thing if people are going to develop a sense of belonging somewhere, of feeling at home there. Without an attachment to your own story and an understanding of how it’s connected to the place in which it happened, it’s difficult to feel connected to and responsible for that place in the present. There is quite a strong tendency in South Africa to not want to

deal with the past. [...] it's not unique to South Africa, this need to turn away from an unpleasant history. (2008, 340)

Vladislavić's notion of a critical nostalgia substantiates his thoughts on home and nostalgia as already outlined in the discussion of postcolonial nostalgia (Chapter 2.2.3.5). A critical nostalgia pesters the present self to deal with one's history within broader national and historical contexts and can contribute to a broader understanding of one's history.

The three overlapping ideas of restorative and reflective or critical nostalgia, inspired by the fragments of the past, will be used as key analytical tools within this study. The distinction of the many tendencies which nostalgia can take is helpful in the discussion of the novels because it shows the potential of nostalgia to be critical of the present: "It reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one form of compassion, judgement or critical reflection" (Boym 2001, 49–50).

Reflective as well as restorative mechanisms also play a key role in identity and community formation. In order to investigate this further, the following section will take a closer look at the psychology of contemporary nostalgia and how it is crucial in identity and community affirmation.

2.2.5 The Psychological Side of Nostalgia – Nostalgia and Identity

Although nostalgia has a notorious tendency to simplify and romanticise the past, sociologist Fred Davis argued as early as the late 1970s that the act of remembering the pleasantries of past events helps to deal with current discontinuity and displacement. According to him, "nostalgia thrives on transition, on the subjective discontinuities that engender our yearning for continuity" (1979, 49). As an important part of identity formation, nostalgia connects our present to our past (and future) self and thereby establishes a feeling of continuity (cf. Chapter 2.2.3.5). This is also confirmed by more recent studies in psychology – a discipline in which the phenomenon of nostalgia is still under-researched.

The psychologists and Constantine Sedikides and Tim Wildschut together with Denise Baden, Clay Routledge and Jamie Arndt conducted several interview studies on nostalgia and, within the last five years, have published their findings, which point out key functions of the phenomenon (Sedikides et al. 2004, 2006, 2008). Nostalgia, they stress, might bolster social ties, increase self-esteem and generate positive effects in general. They argue that:

Continuity of identity across time is fostered through both a more appreciative attitude toward past selves and an improved understanding of how one fits into the cultural jigsaw, of how culture has shaped one's personality and value system. (2004, 207)

By imagining positive aspects and events of the past, the present self can find strength and meaning in his or her present life, and “putting together pieces of past lives through nostalgia” (Sedikides et al. 2004, 206) can contribute to create a sense of a unified, stronger self. The reliving of imagined or selectively remembered past events can assist to strengthen self-esteem if the self manages to step out of the imaginative world into the reality of the present. Taking the positive aspects experienced in the past (even when “only” imaginatively experienced) into the present can thus help one deal with present challenges. However, Sedikides et al. also acknowledge that this is only possible if the nostalgist accepts his or her life in the present and is not fixed to the better days of the past (2008, 306).

Moreover, along with Fred Davis and Andréaa Ritivoi (2002), they point to the connection between nostalgia and the search for one's roots which is also crucial for the formation of community and nationhood: “Nostalgia is an existential exercise in the search for identity and meaning, a weapon in internal confrontations with existential dilemmas, and a mechanism for reconnecting with important others” (Sedikides et al. 2004, 202–203). The establishing of coherence, as Hutcheon (1998), Boym (2001) and Ritivoi (2002) point out, is particularly immediate to emigrants who are forced to leave their homes.

Keeping this in mind, let us, for a moment, reconsider the prototypical nostalgist Odysseus. Upon his return to Ithaca after twenty years, the island is not the same any longer. Yet, as the narrative goes on, Odysseus manages to adjust to the changed realities, to rejoin with Penelope and to rule over Ithaca as its king again. According to Andréaa Ritivoi (2002), Odysseus is the cured nostalgist because he manages to adjust to the new surroundings. Ritivoi's counter-example is Robinson Crusoe who does not manage to reinvent himself in order to adjust to the changes but, on the contrary, changes his environment to make himself feel at home.⁶¹ While a certain resistance to assimilation can secure one's cultural identity, it can also lead to isolation from the new community one has entered (or has been forced to enter). Not surprisingly, settler communities and colonials (such as Robinson Crusoe) usually transported and imposed their own culture

⁶¹ For a more detailed discussion on Odysseus and Crusoe as nostalgists see Ritivoi, 2002. *Yesterday's Self. Nostalgia and the Immigrant Experience*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

onto the new lands and their inhabitants. Thereby, colonial and neo-colonial processes testify more to an unwillingness than to an inability to adjust to new environments. In addition, these processes have been informed by demonstrating power and superiority, following Robinson Crusoe's blueprint of how to colonise and make oneself at home in a new environment.

Within psychological, psychoanalytical and literary studies dealing with immigrant identity studies, nostalgia has become a metaphor for the immigrant figure and thus for the problematic processes (dis)assimilation and acculturation involve (Akhtar 1999; Friedman 2004; Ritivoi 2002). Adjustment and the refusal to assimilate (often coupled with inclusion and exclusion) to the new social and cultural environment are key reactions of the immigrant experience as much as they are for those experiencing radical changes within their society. (These reactions will also be demonstrated in the analysis of the novels.) From an interdisciplinary perspective, Andréaa Ritivoi in her monograph *Yesterday's Self*⁶² examines how immigrants develop a sense of self by creating narratives about themselves and their environment. Nostalgia can thereby "both facilitate and hamper the transition to a new environment, depending on how it can be integrated with a specific view on personal identity" (Ritivoi 2002, 4).

Furthermore, the return to an idealised past can also work as a kind of safety valve. In order to survive difficult, even traumatic times, nostalgia can be a source of gaining strength through the memories of a coherent past which can provide hope for a coherent time to come. Sedikides et al. emphasise the therapeutic importance of nostalgia in confirming a sense of a cultural self:

In instances of felt loneliness, separateness, and alienation, resorting to nostalgic engagement can be therapeutic. Nostalgia alleviates these existential fears by reinforcing the value of cultural traditions and rituals of which one was once a part. [...] Through such practices, one increases his or her sense of cultural belongingness, while restoring direction and the belief that one is living a purposeful life in a meaningful cultural context. (2004, 207)

Past, present and future are thus perceived as floating and connecting the present with the past – this becomes particularly crucial for people and cultures who are forcefully disconnected or alienated from their cultural identity. Escapes to the past – via mental constructions of home in a time when it resembled security – can take a major supporting

⁶² Ritivoi investigates the relation between nostalgia, the immigrant experience adjustment and identity, drawing on philosophical, historical, literary and psychoanalytical studies. In order to investigate how adjustment to new environments works and how individuals negotiate past and present selves, she adapts Ricour's conceptualisation of *idem* and *ipse*, providing several literary examples and two case studies (2002, 4).

force in the adjustment to changes. Hence, nostalgia can be a way to escape the insecurities of the present and to take relief in the positive memories of the past. In that way, as argued above, even a restorative nostalgia can be crucial in maintaining a stable identity and surviving difficult times. However, the border between psychological help and escapism is thin and mental visits to the past can also enforce alienation from and denial of the present.

Broadening Ritivoi's focus on the immigrant within the context of this study's focus, individuals confronted with revolutionary, socio-political changes occupy a position in-between the old and the new home and are confronted with the difficult task of balancing a maintenance of the cultural identity on the one hand and the adjustment to the new cultural and socio-political environment on the other. In such times affecting and disrupting not only the fabric of the society but also, in turn, the very fabric of one's personal life, nostalgia brings back normality and "offers a zone of stability and normativity in the current of change that characterizes modern life" (Boym 2001, 53). In negotiating present and past self, nostalgia can be a decisive ingredient in giving meaning to the present identity and in dealing with the changes. Additionally, nostalgia can assist in keeping in touch with one's history, culture and tradition, as has already been indicated in the context of postcolonial nostalgia.

2.3 Nostalgia in South Africa

2.3.1 The Psychological Impact of Nostalgia in South Africa

The times of apartheid have meant times of anxiety and displacement for many South Africans. The political transition and the first democratic elections ignited the utopian vision of a Rainbow Nation. Especially poor and disadvantaged people hoped for an immediate amelioration of their situation. However, as history has repeatedly taught,⁶³ while revolutionary changes might be brought about overnight, transforming a whole society remains a long and difficult process accompanied by many disappointments and disillusionments. As the selected novels and other literary works, newspaper articles and comments as well as personal discussions confirm, the majority of South Africans still feel socially displaced and find themselves in the process of identity and (national) community formation.

⁶³ Writing from a German perspective, the almost simultaneous peaceful revolution and reintegration of the GDR into a unified Germany has also caused disappointments, anger and calls to rebuild the wall after the first euphoria of unification.

With respect to these socio-political changes, nostalgia gains a certain importance for identity formation within the South African context. It can provide a way to make looking back to one's past possible despite either traumatic experiences or feelings of guilt and shame. As Vladislavić reflects, “[i]f nostalgia provides a way back to recover the past and deal with it, I think it can be a positive value” (2008, 340). Looking back to the past is a necessary part of understanding one's identity – one's autobiographical continuity – and one's sense of belonging. Thereby, nostalgia and the process of filtered remembering are significant for identity formation (Delisle 2006, 392).⁶⁴ Jennifer Delisle convincingly demonstrates in her analyses of Ccina Mhlope's play *Have you seen Zandile?* (1986) how nostalgia helped in surviving traumatic times during apartheid. Highlighting positive aspects of an overall traumatic past can help dealing with that period and envisaging a future:

[N]ostalgia makes positive memories possible in South Africa as a means of commemorating the complexity of the past, not forgetting it, and as a means of looking toward the future. Nostalgia, then, as an articulation of the ordinary and of positive memory, is an essential aspect of the 'community-building' process. (2006, 398)

Instead of seeing nostalgia as a “selective forgetting” (Boym 2001, 58), Delisle contends that

“[n]ostalgia has the potential to enable South Africans to celebrate their love, dreams and innocence as a means of subverting pervasive violence. It can enable them to deal with trauma, but refuses to let trauma define their lives. It can allow them to give voice to their identities as individuals, and as part of a community with hope for a diverse but cohesive future.” (2006, 401)

Hence, nostalgia can be crucial in the healing process of traumatic times and experiences thereby countering its definition of a “social disease” (Stewart 1993, 23). However, as much as nostalgia might function as a strategy for surviving traumatic times and maintaining the self, one should be wary of its other faces. While nostalgia can function as a filter, a selective remembering also always entails selective forgetting and thus a shying away from the past and consequently one's responsibility for it. Besides, as a form of escapism, nostalgia works hand in hand with regression, as it idealises certain (imagined) aspects of the past and thereby denies others. *Nostos*, the imagined homeland,

⁶⁴ As a form of memory nostalgia selectively remembers the past time and place by filtering out all the unpleasantness (Davis 1979, 37). Herein, however, also lies one of nostalgia's key dangers: the past is not remembered “authentically” but distorted by the view through rose-tinted spectacles.

can turn into an obsession hindering the adaptation to new environments. In this obsession the home is often idealised, romanticised and becomes a projection for all that is disliked or difficult in the present of the new “home.”

The analytical part will shed more light on different psychological layers which inform the characters’ nostalgias. While the reasons and circumstances of Black and White South African characters travelling back to a supposedly better past differ entirely, it will become obvious that they share a similar desire for continuity and meaning, which in the case of Aubrey Tearle in *The Restless Supermarket* results in a continuing racist ideology. It will further be suggested that the two (implied) authors’ approach to nostalgia is reflective of their own dealing with the past and the present.

While the previous sections dealt with the objects and mechanisms as well as with the psychological and therapeutic complexities of nostalgia, the following will shift the focus and elaborate on one particular area, tourism, which often makes use of nostalgic sentiment and takes decisive impact on the individual and national South African identity/ies.

2.3.2 Nostalgia and Tourism in the South African Context

The appropriation of nostalgia by the tourist industry plays a crucial role in the analysis of the selected novels. The marketing of the past, in the form of heritage, tradition and culture – and the positive recreation of the native as childlike and in union with nature – proves to be of economic profit in the postapartheid present. Such forms of tourism stir up a general human longing for a return to the idyll of pristine life before the disruption of modernity – a return to nature and the innocence of childhood.⁶⁵ Often, however, local people and their surroundings do not see much of the profits for displaying their culture and local environment. Besides, creating the image of authentic pre-modern culture and nature as still lived in contemporary times – for instance in nature reserves and cultural villages – is a nostalgic attempt to freeze people and culture in time. Tourist projects which work with such restorative nostalgic images contribute to the continuation of the stigmatisation and Othering of “the native” and of “the traditional culture.” As the entanglement of nostalgia and tourism and the commercialisation of the past plays a crucial part in Mda’s and to a certain extent also in Vladislavić’s novels, the following

⁶⁵ The dispersal from the Garden Eden has made human beings permanent travellers in search for their paradise – a world that will never be again. John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667) poetically represents the fall of man and the birth of nostalgia (Healy 2008).

will sketch how naïve – and supposedly innocent – forms of nostalgic tourism satisfy voyeuristic desires for Otherness.

2.3.2.1 Nostalgia Tourism – The Cultural Village

Nostalgia for a lost authenticity is a paralyzing structure of historical reflection. (Frow 1991, 135)

Globalisation and the vast changing world, the porosity of political and local borders, the breakdown of old certainties, structures and orders has, among other things, given rise to nostalgia tourism⁶⁶ and the heritage industry (Telfer and Sharpley 2008, 61). Specifically nature and cultural tourism can be interpreted as fundamentally nostalgic. Increasingly alienated from nature and cultural traditions, modern human beings tend to long for the past's supposed simplicities, social relationships beyond the workplace and for an ancient union with nature. According to Graham Dann, "[n]ostalgia tourism that provides an alternative to the present does so by recourse to an imagined past, a version of reality which people carry around in their heads" (2005, 47). Accordingly, nostalgic tourist places usually consist of pleasantries only and ignore the present realities of poverty and human rights violations. These images do not fit into the picture of the longed for and idealised past.⁶⁷ What nature and culture tourists often long for, in fact, is the idea of a "pure life" unspoiled by the forces of modernisation and capitalism. This desire is based on the assumption that "the alienating circumstances of today [...] can be alleviated by returning to the presumed warmer relationships of yesteryear" (Dann 2005, 33).

The significant link between nostalgia and tourism is psychological: tourism as well as nostalgia, in general, provides a temporary escape from present reality. Nostalgia tourism inspires a longing for "the Other of modernity" (Frow 1991, 129), giving rise to the construction of the "exotic" Other. As Frow observes, "[t]he otherness of traditional or exotic cultures has to do with their having escaped the contamination of this fallen world" (1991, 130). The simulation of premodern or precolonial culture as tourist attractions allows the tourist both to find relief from the present and to see alternative ways of life for the present. This illuminates nostalgia's positive side: the past can

⁶⁶ The tourist's nostalgia for an idealised past culture and nature shall be referred to as nostalgia tourism in this study.

⁶⁷ As Nicolson notes, "nostalgia is our private version of pastoral, the place in which perfection can at least be imagined. We are all Adam and Eve expelled from Eden making our solitary way in a postlapsarian world" (cited in Dann 2005, 35). Thus, nostalgia for nature, purity and simplicity reflects a longing for the return to the Garden Eden. The *topos* of the garden as an enclosed world entirely unto itself is, as will be argued, also represented in the enclaved space of a cultural village, game or nature reserve. Isolated and demarcated from the rest of the world, these spaces inspire the garden myth.

become a potential resource for social change or environmental awareness in the present (cf. MacCannell 1999, 77). Even though this might, at first, seem a precious value of nostalgia, it is usually only positive for the tourist. After all, the simulation of local culture as living in a premodern vacuum is a dangerous, discriminatory distortion of local culture.

Nostalgia Tourism and Authenticity

As mentioned, following South Africa's entry into the global market and the re-evaluation of its multiple cultural heritages, the experience of nature and "indigenous" cultures has become a hugely successful tourist product.⁶⁸ A frequent framework for cultural tourism in South Africa (as elsewhere) includes forms of staged culture. Thereby, local cultures are usually displayed or they display themselves within the borders of what David Bunn calls a "bounded space" (1996, 44) – a space in which time runs differently and a certain reality is simulated. In general, authenticity plays a crucial role in the attraction of staged "indigenous" exhibitions and, to a certain extent, of gated communities (Chapter 6). According to Dean MacCannell, the tourist's search for authenticity – for a state of originality, for a place of belonging, for a lost community – is satisfied by nostalgic simulacra, i.e. the representation of inauthentic life staged as authentic.⁶⁹ MacCannell further observes that

every nicely motivated effort to preserve nature, primitives and the past, and to represent them authentically, contributes to an opposite tendency – the present is made more unified against its past, more in control of nature, less a product of history. (1999, 83)

The act of preservation is thus anti-historical and un-natural because "[n]ature and the past are made a part of the present, not in forms of [an] unreflected inner spirit, a mysterious soul, but rather as revealed objects, as tourist attractions" (MacCannell 1999, 84). For the tourist or observer, the imagined past becomes accessible and gains an apparent authenticity. Moreover, the fake display of cultural authenticity is dangerous, as it fixes a stereotypical image of any particular culture for purposes of economic profit and often displays culture as primitive and fixed to the past, and without a present culture.

⁶⁸ According to the Comaroffs, the emergence of and interest in cultural villages and indigenous cultures as exotic commodities is a general phenomenon apparent throughout the new postcolonies. For more on that see Jean and John Comaroff. 2001. "Naturing the Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse and the Postcolonial State" *Journal of Southern African Studies* 27 (3): 627 – 651.

⁶⁹ Here lies a paradox inherent to tourism, as one can argue that tourism is always an inauthentic activity (see Frow 1991, 127). Culler points to the inherent paradox of authenticity: "The paradox, the dilemma of authenticity, is that to be experienced as authentic it must be marked as authentic, but when it is marked as authentic it is mediated, a sign of itself and hence not authentic in the sense of unspoiled" (cited in Frow 1991, 130).

Cultural villages, specifically, staging an authentic past-present culture simplify and essentialise individuals as representatives of that culture as sharing a certain set of cultural habits.⁷⁰

The display of culture is an act of performance including actors and a stage. In a cultural village, the whole village turns into a stage with an obvious “front region” and a concealed “back region” (see Erving Goffman cited in MacCannell 1999, 93).⁷¹ The tourist does not want to look behind the curtains of a bounded village, because that would destroy the desired authentic image of primitive culture. Precisely the blurring of front and back region enforces the simulation, the feeling of taking part in authentic life. As MacCannell observes, “[t]ouristic consciousness is motivated by its desire for authentic experiences, and the tourist may believe that he is moving in this direction, but often it is very difficult to know for sure if the experience is in fact authentic” (1999, 101). Indigenous people must act as natives and pretend to be living a pre-modern life. At the same time, the tourist industry must make sure that the experience of the exotic and the Other maintains a secure distance and that the image remains an image. Thus, the actors become characters in the romantic series of “ethnic” life. Likewise, they become characters in the dramatic distortion of their cultural identity. By exhibiting a past culture as authentically lived today, these people are denied a modern life.⁷² After all, the actors in a cultural village are not perceived as actors but as natives living their everyday lives. The inauthentic images are perceived as authentic and at the same time, the authentic and real “are postulated historically (and nostalgically) as lost domains of experience and referentiality” (Frow 1991, 128).

However, what such ethnographic display really portrays is a set of images and desires which people from the modernised world want to indulge in. The staged cultural performances of traditional life are invented both, one might argue, for the tourist searching for authentic cultural expressions as for the sake of heritage preservation, the attempt to preserve vanishing traditions and cultures. This attempt at conserving culture can cause, just as tourism can, diverging outcomes. It can keep a cultural memory alive for those growing up in a technological world detached from traditions. It can, however,

⁷⁰ This reflects colonial practices. According to Marie-Louise Pratt, the colonial intrusion in the nineteenth century stigmatised the African as the “ethnic” Other who was often described according to his or her typical manners and customs, enumerating traits, differences and peculiarities (Pratt 1986, 139).

⁷¹ A transfer of Goffman’s distinction between front and back regions from dramaturgical studies of modern life to the staging of the ethnic Other proves to be helpful.

⁷² As Fredrik Elg remarked in his research for the documentary *The Kruipers*, no one would expect them to put on their Western, modern clothes, get into the car and drive home after a day’s work.

also lead to an essentialising view of particular cultures which are continuously exoticised as “native” or “indigenous.” Keeping people and culture in a vacuum by preserving them in a precolonial quality is to deny them the ability to move forward with the times as well as to repudiate them as mature and responsible citizens.

Nostalgia Tourism and Power Relations

Nostalgia tourism as outlined above resembles a form of restorative nostalgia which ignores the irreversibility of time. It poses immense dangers because it relies on fixed stereotypes and enforces the construction of “us” as superior and “them” as primitives tainted in a romance with the past. As Jennifer Ladino (2004, 4) points out, origin stories tend to be problematic because they assume coherence (essence), continuity (linear structure) and an almost divine passivity. Moreover, nostalgia tourism does not partake in equal communication with the culture: it displays but uses the local culture for economic reasons.⁷³ A cultural village which stages “natives” in a timeless present reaffirms hegemonic cultural power structures. In other words, the hegemony of the dominant culture over the dominated one is enforced through the representation of a timeless primitivism that essentialises the native as a pre-modern tribal community. Finally, a cultural village does not only pretend to be leading a precolonial life but it also suggests a cultural purity. Contesting this, *The Heart of Redness* demonstrates on various levels that the notion of purity is untenable and even ridiculous since cultures are living entities integrated within the realities of “contact zones”.⁷⁴ The novel scrutinises different versions of “exotic” and eco-tourism projects, showing alternatives to both restorative cultural villages and mass tourism, which do not benefit the local community at all.⁷⁵

⁷³ In order to judge such a nostalgic tourist site, one needs to ask who profits and makes decisions in the business of a cultural village. The basic categories present themselves to be threefold: those who run a cultural village on their own terms and profits, those in cooperation with a hotel, game reserve or another tourist place and those dominated by outside people – the actors then do not have a say in their staging and their salary is usually poor.

⁷⁴ “Contact zone” is a term coined by Mary Louise Pratt: “I use this term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (1991, 34).

⁷⁵ Countering forms of mass and exotic tourism, eco-tourism, as one of the sub-sectors of alternative tourism, speaks to those tourists who desire to treat nature and culture with respect and to be conscious of the potential harm tourism can cause. According to Hawkins and Kahn (Gould 2004) eco-tourism entails an important dual awareness of nature and culture. Nature tourism denotes the desire to experience nature for a certain amount of time such as in nature reserves, game parks or on hiking tours. Cultural tourism refers to the encounter of different, usually exotic, cultures and ethnicities. This thesis thus posits eco-tourism as the more generic term and both nature and cultural tourism as part of eco-tourism. These basic distinctions, which are used in the analysis of tourist practices in *The Heart of Redness’s* rural locality, Qolorha-by-Sea, do not suggest that eco-tourism does not also “use” nature or culture. However, the economic and ideological premises diverge. While eco-tourism generally wants to live *with* nature and culture, mass tourism lives *on* nature and culture.

2.3.2.2 Early Forms of Nostalgia Tourism in South Africa – Nature Reserves and the Black Alienation from Nature

Natural landscapes were deemed to be primitive spaces. (Mda 2009b, 8)

In the South African context, early forms of nostalgia tourism can be found in the establishment of nature reserves.⁷⁶ The widespread equation of nature with indigenous culture or “the black man” enforced the colonial and later apartheid ideology of different, hierarchically structured “races.”⁷⁷ In one of his non-fiction articles,⁷⁸ Mda points to this strong and yet hardly researched connection between nature and racism in South Africa, which he also illuminates in his fictional works discussed in Chapter 3 and 4.

According to Mda, a certain sense of Black South African alienation from the rural space has its source in the history of racism. He writes: “From my vantage point the sense of alienation from the rural space and from what is often referred to as the wilderness has its source in the history of racism that *predates apartheid*” (Mda 2009b, 8; emphasis added). Mda refers to the civilising mission that divided the indigenous people into “school” and “red people,” the very distinction that his novel *The Heart of Redness* is based upon.

With the advent of what the colonial structures referred to as “civilization” the new black intelligentsia that emerged from missionary education – the *amaqgobhoka* as they were called in the Eastern Cape – were taught to despise the land, while the *amaqaba*, or the “backward ones”, were people of the land. (2009b, 8)

Hence, one of the “achievements” of colonialism was that wilderness in South Africa came to be associated with backwardness by Black South Africans themselves. The colonists, so he writes, “lionized the wilderness and delineated it into conserved domains” (2009b, 9). The “tamed” nature or game reserves became the space of White maleness to practise power and domination:

⁷⁶ Similar to contemporary tourist marketing strategies and slogans, nature reserves, such as the Kruger Park (1926) were advertised as a renewing encounter with archaic time. During the 1920s and 1930s when the first game reserves in South Africa were established, the idea to conserve the natural landscape in the course of modernity and development was highly debated. Nature was seen as much more valuable than local cultures (Bunn 1996, 39).

⁷⁷ According to Mda (2009b), this racism had not only been deeply anchored within South African society in general but also led to a growing urban-rural divide within Black communities.

⁷⁸ This particular argument Mda presented in his keynote address “The Pink Mountain: Landscapes and the Conception of a Literature of Public Action” at the African Literature Association Conference in Burlington Vermont (2009).

The black people's antagonistic stance towards rural space was reinforced by the fact that at the expense of community development whites focussed on the preservation of the wilderness and treated black populations as part of that wilderness: to be viewed. (2009b, 9)

Thus, Black people became part of the natural and animal world and hence objects to gaze at and to dominate. Until today, nostalgia for nature as well as environmental concerns is still largely, and especially in urban areas, associated with White elitism and Black backwardness.

The identification of "the African" as belonging to the wilderness and the establishment of game reserves in the early twentieth century played a decisive and vicious role in the creation of the Black (South) African psyche (Mda 2009b, 9). On the racist premise that "the African" belongs to nature, White South Africans could easily morally justify their exclusion of Africans in the formation of a new national identity.⁷⁹ The idea of conserved domains was formalised and enforced by apartheid legislation of race and space. The creation of bantustans, Black supposedly autonomous homelands, "deported" Black South Africans back to the wilderness, to the rural areas which were generally unfit for industrialisation and agriculture.⁸⁰ Not surprisingly, many Black South Africans wanted to move to and work in the cities which were much more lucrative. Consequently, nature and the rural areas became a synonym for backwardness for many Black South Africans: "For a politically conscious black South African acknowledging natural landscapes was tantamount to identifying with tribal domains, and therefore with supporting the divide and rule strategies of the system" (Mda 2009b, 9). Staying in the rural areas was seen as counterproductive in the fight against the apartheid system – more importantly, it was seen as playing into the oppressor's hands.⁸¹

⁷⁹ According to David Bunn, nature as a public symbol was significant in the formation of a new national identity and racial solidarity between English and Afrikaans speakers (1996, 38). Hence, "[t]hese conserved natural domains attained a symbolic status in the evolution of the varied South African identities" (Mda 2009b, 9).

⁸⁰ One of the paradoxes of the homeland policy was that while the majority of Black and Coloured people were already restricted to rural areas they were also limited within these areas. If areas proved to be fit for farming or nature reserve Blacks had to go, which often caused a spiritual violation and break with their ancestors apart from and even worse than the geographical dislocation (Mda 2009b, 10). Some Blacks could, of course, stay within these game lodges – as workers.)

⁸¹ In his article "Game Reserves and Leisure Colonialists" (1998) Njabulo Ndebele suggests that game lodges represent the "'leisureing' of colonial history" (C4, 1). It is the simulation of the colonial conquest as in the bounded space of a reserve that functions according to its own times and rules. Similarly, a cultural village displaying inauthentic past culture is in danger of simulating colonial conquest. The workers, or performers, live outside the staged simulation of a precolonial, historical life and just come in to perform an inauthentic Africanness set in a timeless present. This nostalgia for the "primitive" might then function as a self-affirmation of the White man's superiority and domination over "those" primitives who are positively or negatively exoticised as the Other. Thereby, the structure of the colonial/apartheid binary distance remains uncontested.

2.3.2.3 Landscape as a Storing Place for Memories

Within the Black South African literature-written-in-English scene, Zakes Mda offers a rather unique kind of literature that departs from the “cultural” urban focus portraying nature as its antagonist.⁸² Black South African writing in English has a predominantly urban tradition emerging from mission schools and the field of journalism. The 1950s and 1960s saw the *Drum* era centred in the vibrant and culturally mixed township of Sophiatown before its gradual destruction in 1955. The urban became the sphere of culture, political activism and resistance and “[w]riters of the Sophiatown Renaissance [...] prided themselves as being ‘detribalized Africans’” (Mda 2009b, 8). The rural, on the contrary, was seen as primitive and passive in the struggle against apartheid – a binary opposition which seems to continue to prevail in contemporary times.⁸³ Zakes Mda, however, sees beauty and magic in the rural areas. He is a writer who enters these marginalised spheres with his fiction “because they retain that magic, whereas the urban areas have lost it to Westernization” (Lloyd 2001, 34). As early on as in his plays and theatre-for-development projects, Mda focused on life in the rural areas and pointed to their marginalised status. Giving the disadvantaged a voice has always been part of his intention.

Unsurprisingly, the conflation of identity and landscape are crucial forces for Mda’s own writing. He highlights Tim Weed’s concept of the *domaine perdu* as the driving force in his creative process of writing and his rehabilitation of “lost worlds”:

The fact that landscapes are storing places of memory is related closely to notions of *domaine perdu* – that deep myth that often compels the artist to return to the lost domains of childhood, to a world of sensory beauty and visual pleasures. [...] I have found that the *domaine perdu* is an important source of emotional power in my storytelling, particularly in my historical

⁸² Mda writes: “It should not come as a surprise that natural landscapes play such a crucial role in the literatures composed in the indigenous southern African languages when they feature only minimally in the black South African literature composed in English. The cradle of Sesotho literature is in Lesotho and the northeastern Free State province in South Africa. isiXhosa literature is rooted in the Eastern Cape. In these regions, and in others that continue to produce literatures in the indigenous languages, writers have not yet been alienated from natural environments and landscapes” (2009b, 8).

⁸³ Anthony Vital points to the significant legacy of colonialism that shapes contemporary perceptions of ecology as still being an ideology of the affluent classes deploying ecology according to their economic interests. Likewise, Mda criticises the Black urban elite for their indifference towards the ecological crises which can be felt most destructively by poor people. Especially the rural areas are directly affected by the consequences of pollution. This, however, is not made explicit to the people: “The problem, therefore, is not that black South Africans do not care about the environment, but that the discourse on environmental justice is not framed in a manner that relates directly to their lives” (Mda 2009b, 12). Even though, in the rural areas, people live with nature and care for their environment when it harmonises with their often still traditional way of life, the majority of Black people see nature, landscape and a traditional lifestyle as backward and as nurturing poverty while technology and globalisation are associated with progress and (potential) affluence.□ Through his fiction, as will become apparent in the analysis, Mda points to the political significance of environmentalism for the marginalised and poor and shifts the discourse of landscape to the realm of the people.

fiction, which by its nature thrives on *recreating lost worlds*. (Mda 2009b, 6; emphasis added)

The *domaine perdu* denotes, according to Tim Weed, the novel's setting with all its emotional attachment. Weed describes the *domaine perdu* as the Eden myth which captivates both reader and writer with the beautiful descriptions of landscapes (Weed 2008). For Mda, the *domaine perdu* is a transient, universal concept which inspires both personal and collective memories and sees nature as a spiritual force within each individual:

The *domaine perdu* does not apply only to those landscapes that one has experienced personally as a child. It also refers to the landscapes that are buried within us, through which we are able to experience that magical sensory completeness even when we encounter foreign settings. (Mda 2009b, 6)

His own description of the *domaine perdu* shares with nostalgia a sentimental longing for an imaginative return to and fictional revival of “the lost domains of childhood.” The stimulus for the recuperation of the past and for individual and collective memories is the landscape itself. Mda acknowledges the significance of landscape as keeper of memories in his own writing as it brings about his artistic composition: “I see the trees and the rocks and the grass and the hills and the rivers as storing places of memory” (2009b, 1). Hence, his writing as well as his characters' agency is inspired by nostalgia – and it thus takes a decisive part in identity formation. According to Mda, “[t]he landscape is paramount among the environmental factors that are decisive in the emotional and spiritual development that ultimately determines my characters' sense of identity” (2009b, 1). The recuperation of a spiritual link to nature as a decisive part in identity formation is coupled with a recuperation of the past cultural identity. With his writing, which I argue, is informed by nostalgia for rural areas, Mda rehabilitates the often distorted relationship between Black South Africans and their natural landscape. He thereby pays tribute to the natural landscape and shows its significance in an increasingly globalised world. Considering Mda's application of the *domaine perdu* and Vladislavić's thoughts on a critical nostalgia, it already becomes obvious that nostalgia, the positive turn to the past, bears different feelings and driving forces for the two authors discussed here. Before turning to the analysis of their novels, the final section of the theory chapter will shift its focus from the phenomenon of nostalgia as discussed in historical, sociological, psychological or environmental discourses to nostalgia as represented in narrative fiction, providing helpful narrative tools for the analysis of the novels.

2.4 Narrative Representations of Nostalgia

2.4.1 Introduction – A Brief Outline of Nostalgia in the British Novel

The texts discussed in this thesis, can broadly be analysed as postcolonial novels written in English. Thereby, they follow and appropriate the tradition of the British novel. Moreover, as the previous sections have shown, the theorisation of nostalgia – though a genuine human condition – is also imbedded in Western tradition. In order to discuss in which ways nostalgia shapes and is shaped by narrative fiction, and in particular how nostalgia features in the postcolonial Anglophone novel, the following will first take a closer look at the maturation of the British novel in the eighteenth and nineteenth century – a time span during which nostalgia saw both its highpoint and decline. During this era, the concept of nostalgia, as has been illustrated in the historical overview, turned from a disease to an emotional expression of subjectivity, and then to a mental aberration before it ceased to be of interest. According to Tamara Wagner,

[n]ostalgia formed an important cultural force in the formation of fiction, while the novel at once reflected and influenced the changing definition of nostalgia. Both were significant for a new understanding of personal feeling, individuality, and private ways of remembering. (2004, 23)

Nostalgia, the emphasis on sentiment and the value of looking back, took a decisive part in the development of the British novel from roughly the middle of the eighteenth century with what has become known as the cult of feeling. Along with this focus on sentiment, nostalgia was embraced as a positive affect and individualism and retrospection became important aspects of the novel of sensibility (Rogers 1987; Metzler 1999; Wagner 2004). As Wagner notes, “[t]he invention of nostalgia as an emotion and a form of memory was part and parcel of this affective revolution, and the British novel a vital document of its influence and development” (2004, 14).

Narrative representations of nostalgia took their course in the following Romantic era, as nostalgia was a prominent sentiment giving expression to individual suffering from loss, the longing for pre-industrial society, for nature, childhood and medieval times mainly in poetry (as already noted in Chapter 2.1.5). Generally, literary expressions of the time, such as Gothic romances and poetry, were full of nostalgia for ruins, the medieval, the sublime in nature and the Rousseauian ideal of uncorrupted childhood. However, the excessiveness of the sentimentality – ridiculed most famously by Jane Austen’s *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) – came increasingly under critical scrutiny (Rogers 1987). While

sentimentality in milder forms remained a significant feature throughout the nineteenth century, its changing perception also affected and changed the emotion of nostalgia.

In the Victorian subgenre of the domestic novel, which partly developed from the novel of sensibility, nostalgia became domesticated and gave shape to the idea of privacy (Wagner 2004, Rogers 1987). According to Wagner, “[n]ostalgia’s privatization, as it were, in bourgeois homes appeared to render it innocuous” (2004, 13).⁸⁴ Reading became one of the greatest pleasures of the time and was often associated with women. The petit-bourgeois ideals emphasised the virtues of “home sweet home,” the morally upright and disciplined woman, who reflected the values of domestic life.

According to Nicholas Dames, the nineteenth century novel is characteristic of the formalisation of memory. While the novel of whatever era is an act of remembrance, the Victorian novel, so Dames, becomes the trajectory of comfortable selective forgetting.⁸⁵ Nostalgia was turned into a psychological need to remember only that which is useful for the present in order to construct coherent autobiographical narratives. These newly constructed narratives were all the more urgent due to radical dislocations caused by the industrial revolution, rising capitalism and urbanisation.

Scientific discoveries of the brain and nerves towards the end of the nineteenth century led to a growing restlessness and melancholic reaction to the new meaningless of life. While nostalgia also saw some novelistic mentions in later periods,⁸⁶ it ceased to be of interest as an emotion in the novel as well as in other disciplines, especially the medical, psychological and sociological (cf. Chapter 2.1.6).⁸⁷ Although generally losing its reputation, the human sentiment persisted and saw several fictional revivals in later periods. Before closing the very basic outline of nostalgia in the formative decades of the

⁸⁴ However, as she also points out, emotional attachment and nostalgia for the authenticity of childhood and nature could not fully be tamed. Generally, however, the Victorian cult of the childhood differed tremendously from the Romantic idealisation of the child. Towards the second half of the century, the child, similarly in fact to the expressions of emotions, was “tamed” and domesticated to represent the ideals of the bourgeois middle class. One might however, argue, that the rise of children’s literature reveals a nostalgic yearning for the unrestricted, Romantic ideal of childhood by which Lewis Carroll’s looking glass becomes the gateway to freedom for both children and adults.

⁸⁵ In *Amnesiac Selves* (2001) he analyses novels written between 1810 to 1870 arguing that the nineteenth century novel invented modern nostalgia. He analyses various texts in light of contemporary psychological and phrenological theories in order to show the narratives’ streamlining and “dememorialising” of the past to trace the amnesiac selves of the mid-Victorian mindset.

⁸⁶ As, for instance, in modernist literature such as E.M. Forster’s idealisations of nineteenth century country Englishness or T.S. Eliot’s longing for ancient civilisation (Dames 2001; Wagner 2004 ; Su 2001).

⁸⁷ Moreover, towards the end of the nineteenth century more and more novels travelled in time to the future such as H.G. Wells’s *The Time Machine* (1895). Thus, in addition to looking backward, looking forward became increasingly important. A novel such as William Morris’s *News from Nowhere* (1890) reflects the cultural spirit, which approached the fin de siècle, by creating a utopian world resembling pre-industrial, rural England. The creation of utopian worlds, as will be seen in Chapters 5 and 6, is a significant condition for nostalgic experiences.

novel, the following will take a look at the interlinked concepts of nostalgia, the novel and nationalism, which will lead to contemporary postcolonial novels of “writing back.”⁸⁸

The Trinity – Nostalgia, the Novel and Nationalism

The nineteenth century also gave rise to nationalism – and both nostalgia and the novel played a decisive part in it. With the rise of the print media and in particular the novel, the awareness of nationalism gained immense significance. According to Benedict Anderson, “these forms provided the technical means for ‘re-presenting’ the kind of imagined community that is the nation” (2006, 25). Nostalgia, thereby, was a suitable sentiment to foster the myth of an origin and a common past that would frame one’s national community as genuine with roots in old traditions.

The fact that nations, however, did not emerge from the mists of time as intact communities but that they are modern constructs, has been convincingly argued since the 1980s, most famously by Benedict Anderson (1983), Ernest Gellner (1983) and later Homi Bhabha (1990). Anderson writes: “If nation-states are widely conceded to be ‘new’ and ‘historical,’ the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, into a limitless future” (2006, 11–12). Moreover, as Homi Bhabha so aptly phrased it, nations are narrativised and thereby constructed at a certain point in time; in fact, nations are as modern as the form of the novel as we know it today. In other words, the novel has provided a genre in which to spread ideas of national ethos and national identities supported by nostalgic constructions of the homeland and the idea of the *Volk* (still a debated topic in contemporary fictions). Borrowing from Anderson, Brennan writes that,

it was especially the novel as a composite but clearly bordered work of art that was crucial in defining the nation as an ‘imagined community’. [...] Nations, then, are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions in which imaginative literature plays a decisive role. And the rise of European nationalism coincides especially with one form of literature – the novel. (2006, 129–130)

Thereby, the novel’s dual interests in shaping an imagined community and in exploring the individual’s personal feelings (as discussed above) are not necessarily contradictory. Rather, according to Wagner, these interests are complementary and inform each other.

⁸⁸ While this chapter only gives a brief glimpse into nostalgia and the British novel in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, particularly Nicholas Dames (2001) and Tamara Wagner (2004) provide in-depth analyses of the subject matter, while Jon Su (2005) scrutinises nostalgia in the postcolonial Anglophone novel.

The Colonial Novel and Postcolonial Criticism

Nationalism also became a decisive concept in fostering the formation of the colonial state. The conflation, thereby, of the novel, nationalism and colonialism, was first analysed by Edward Said (1978). As he demonstrated in his literary analysis of nineteenth century British fiction, the novel justified and supported the formation of the British nation as superior to others, and in particular to its colonised countries. In *Culture and Imperialism* Said writes:

Since my exclusive focus here is on the modern Western empires of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, I have looked here especially at cultural forms as the novel, which I believe were immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references, and experiences. I do not mean that only the novel is important, but that I consider it *the* aesthetic object whose connection to the expanding societies of Britain and France is particularly interesting to study. The prototypical modern realistic novel is *Robinson Crusoe*, and certainly not accidentally it is about a European who creates a chiefdom for himself on a distant, non-European island. (1993, xii–xiii)

Stories about the regions of the colonies, represented as strange and Other, thereby lie at the heart of using narrative as a tool for exercising power and claiming one's own (that is the colonial) identity as superior by representing the Other in terms of negatives, deficits and lacks. By such representations of colonised lands, whose indigenous peoples the British colonisers desired to "civilise," the nineteenth century novel as well as Victorian travel literature contributed to the ideological expansion of the colonial mission.

Of course, not all literary fiction was colonial, and contradictory strands marked the Victorian times. The cult of Victorian domesticity led to a shift from the exotic and faraway to domestic concerns. The colonies ceased to be the focus of attention and, instead, were sidelined and became the mere background for the growing wealth and prosperity of life in the centre and at home.⁸⁹ As Wagner notes, "[w]orking in tropical or arid places abroad became linked to the acquisition of embowered estates at home, thereby creating a cultural myth which the novel helped to form" (2004, 26). In Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1973) he points to the idealisation of home by colonisers and explorers in faraway countries, which turned England into an ideal. As will be seen in the analysis of *The Exploded View*, idealisations of an imagined home also

⁸⁹ Jane Austen's texts are early novels in which the Empire is hiding under the surface. Slavery and colonial expansion are not overtly mentioned but unquestioned facts. A character like Fanny in *Mansfield Park* (1814) testifies to a cultural ignorance of the mechanisms behind the imperial and colonial mission.

informed the architecture and homemaking of colonisers in colonised countries who established European miniature worlds in the conquered lands.

Postcolonial studies, and this leads back to the entry point of this chapter, have begun to dismantle the creation of myths and idealisations of homelands and the Other. In postcolonial discourse the concept of “writing back” has been path breaking in the study of new English literatures. Thereby, writers from the (former) colonies appropriate the medium of the novel so as to tell their own story and to move out of the periphery and into the centre. In the South African context, since the overthrow of apartheid – which in one way might be seen as a “special kind of colonialism” as illustrated in the introduction – the country has been struggling to identify itself as a nation. Again, the medium of the novel serves as a narrative testing ground for imagining a new South Africa into being.⁹⁰ It is such novels of the postapartheid era dealing with past, present and the imagining of a future South Africa which form the core of this study. The following section will introduce the narrative tools with which this thesis aims to analyse and dissect the four chosen texts.

2.4.2 Nostalgia as a Narrative Device in Postcolonial Fiction

As has been illustrated so far, nostalgia is a multiple and flexible concept, which provides especially interesting – and surprisingly poorly researched – potential for literary criticism in general and for fiction in specific. While the previous chapters described the multiplicity of nostalgia and the aspects used in the analyses of the novels, this chapter will define key narrative devices used for the application of the concept of nostalgia to the body of selected texts. This study focuses on four novels by two authors, each of which serve as a testing ground for defining to which extent nostalgia theory, as outlined in this part of the study, can be applied. The following will illustrate nostalgia’s narrative dynamics by illustrating how nostalgia acts in and as narrative (Dames 2001; Ladino 2004). By choosing a Black and a White author, the study aims at reflecting issues important to their respective backgrounds; it is not intended to compare them in an essentialist way. Rather, the analysis will investigate how the different struggles in

⁹⁰ As already alluded to in the introduction, the question of nationalism is a highly controversial one in South Africa, which consists of a myriad of distinct cultural groups and ethnicities on the one hand and has at least since the Union of South Africa in 1910 always claimed to be a white nation on the other hand. Archbishop Desmond Tutu’s ideal of a Rainbow Nation, one that includes all the different communities within South Africa, has become subject to mockery due to the difficulty of imagining oneself as a nation when one looks back at a history of exclusion and separate developments. South Africa is a nation that actively tries to imagine and narrate itself into being. Hence, the invention of new traditions – the symbol of the Rainbow Nation, the new national anthem, the new national flag and the New South Africa – are mocked and criticised in all the novels discussed in the analyses section.

dealing with the past – as caused or explained by their Black-or Whiteness – are reflected in different narrative forms. While nostalgia has frequently been analysed as a motif on the story level of narrative fiction, it has hardly been considered as a means for structuring narratives and giving meaning to them.

In order to analyse nostalgia's narrative potential it is crucial to distinguish between different narrative levels.⁹¹ Nostalgia can be represented as an emotion or mode of experience on the story level; it can also be employed on the discourse level for the organisation of time, focalisation and voice; and it can be strategically employed by the implied author on the extratextual level of communication between implied author and implied reader.⁹² Thus, one needs to distinguish the implied author's motivation in including nostalgic elements in his or her novel from the narrator's and protagonist's motivation for or expressions of nostalgic longing. (The terms "implied author" and "implied reader" will be considered in more detail in Chapter 2.3.4.3.) Jennifer Ladino pointedly observes that nostalgia's promise lies in it being both a narrative – "a way for authors to manipulate language, drive plot, develop characters, and influence readers" (2004) – and an emotion – "felt by readers, shared by groups, perpetuated by institutions, and instilled by both narrative and lived experience" (2004). Hence, the implementation of nostalgic elements into narrative fiction provides a range of stylistic possibilities.

For the purpose of this study, the genre of the novel, and in particular the postcolonial novel, will be dealt with exclusively. As the interconnection between *nostos* and *algos*, space and time, is crucial for nostalgic as well as for postcolonial narratives, Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope will be employed in order to illustrate the similarities between these two kinds of narratives. In other words, focusing on postcolonial fiction, this chapter will provide a framework for analysing the organisation of nostalgia's spatial and temporal dimension, on the story level – as in characters, setting and entities – and on the discourse level – in its time structures, unreliability and monologic and dialogic presentations. After a brief overview of nostalgia's formative years in the British novel in

⁹¹ A common distinction is made between the *what* and the *how* of a narrative for which different terminologies have been introduced. According to Monika Fludernik, "[w]e can distinguish two layers in every narrative: the level of the world represented in the story and the level at which this representation takes place. In the novel, the latter level is that of the narrative discourse (level of narrative mediation)" (2009, 21). Story and discourse are terms introduced by Seymour Chatman. According to Abbott, "story should not be confused with narrative discourse, which is the telling or presenting of a story. A story is bound by the laws of time; it goes in one direction [...] Narrative discourse does not have to go that direction" (2002, 195; underlining in original). Since the temporal structuring is discussed under narrative discourse this thesis refrains from using the confusing term "plot."

⁹² Abbott, with reference to Wayne Booth, defines the implied author as "that sensibility (that combination of feeling, intelligence, knowledge, and opinion) that 'accounts for' the narrative" (2002, 77) and the implied reader as "an inferred recipient of the narrative" (2002, 191).

Chapter 2.3.1, the following Chapter will focus on nostalgia as a narrative device in postcolonial fiction. Thereafter, chapter 2.3.3 will first investigate the chronotope of postcolonial novels of nostalgia before having a closer look at the complex and extra-dynamic timescapes of nostalgic narratives. The next three subchapters (2.3.4.1–2.3.4.3) deal with narrative strategies of challenging authoritative narration, such as unreliable, monologic and dialogic narration as well as with the application of the implied author. Finally, the last subchapter (2.3.5) takes a look at the representation of nostalgia on the story level.

2.4.3 Time-Space-Relations

The Chronotope

A crucial question for the analysis of nostalgia in narrative fiction concerns the ways in which the concept is organised. Simply put, nostalgic narratives are narratives of retrospection – they look back yearningly at a lost time and place and by doing so create a new, subjective and idealised past. Thereby, nostalgic narratives imaginatively rework time and place (Bissell 2005, 225). These two central components, which make up the world of nostalgia, provide a helpful starting point from which to approach its narrative dynamics. In order to analyse the time-space organisation in the novel, Mikhail Bakhtin introduced the concept of the chronotope. According to him, the chronotope defines “[a] unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented” (1990, 425–426). Bakhtin emphasises the inherent connectedness of time and space in the novel expressing “the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring” (1990, 425–426).

Nicholas Dames summarises the chronotope in nostalgic narratives “as the set of sites and temporal processes that reflect, and manage, dislocation – experiences of dissonance, disconnection, separation from past spaces and certainties” (2001, 12). Taking this as a starting point, the following section will examine postcolonial and nostalgic narratives, and illustrate that both kinds of narratives have a number of key features in common. Being aware of the difficulty in defining South Africa as postcolonial, as already mentioned in the introduction, this study uses the term postcolonial insofar as it provides key terms and strategies in narrative fiction, useful for analysing the selected novels.

Displacement and Transgression

Place and time in postcolonial fiction are sites of disruption and conflict dealing with the times of precolonialism, the colonial encounter and postcolonialism as well as the struggle to identify with a place called home. Displacement, as Ashcroft et al. point out, is a key feature of the postcolonial experience and of postcolonial literatures. “It is here,” they write, “that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place” (2003, 8). Not surprisingly, nostalgia is likely to appear in postcolonial narratives of exile, migration and return.

Moreover, postcolonial as well as nostalgic narratives are narratives of movement and of transgressing borders – spatial, temporal and ideological.⁹³ The related consequences of displacement, transgression and uncertainty, which are characteristic of the postcolonial condition, easily lead to a longing and imagination of idealised times and places in the past and thus as already lived and proven better. In other words, narratives of nostalgia share chronotopes with postcolonial fiction, and the conflicts prominent in postcolonial fiction provide trajectories for nostalgia. In postcolonial narratives the lost time that is longed for usually designates the time before the colonial intrusion and the lost place the homeland before it was colonised or before people were dispersed to other localities.⁹⁴ The colonial past as well as the postcolonial present are, thereby, represented as places and times of struggle and redefinition; they are contact zones, which are characterised by the challenges of “ethnic” pluralism, hybrid identities and multiculturalism.⁹⁵

Having identified the “general” chronotope of postcolonial nostalgic narratives, the following section will analyse the complex time structures used to express nostalgia in narrative discourse.

⁹³ Frequently used metaphors in postcolonial fiction circle around time – the precolonial, the colonial, the postcolonial – and place, in particular the contact zone, sites of struggle and places in transition.

⁹⁴ This, of course, is different from postcolonial narratives written by decedents of colonisers, i.e. White South Africans, which will be examined in the analysis of the novels.

⁹⁵ One of the major continuing conflicts of the (post)colonial condition deals with land and the contested home. Therefore, spatial metaphors such as the binary constructs of centre/margin, urban/rural, civilisation/nature, static/dynamic spaces, and open/closed spaces make up the core of postcolonial fiction.

Nostalgia as Time-Travelling Concept

“The past and the future are dangerous countries [...].”

(Damon Galgut. *The Good Doctor* 2003, 117)

Past and future are alike inaccessible. But, though beyond physical reach, they are integral to our imaginations. Reminiscence and expectation suffuse every present moment. (Lowenthal 1985, 3)

One way to express nostalgia in narrative is via its temporal ordering. As narratives of retrospection, nostalgic narratives have an analeptic structure.⁹⁶ However, the timescapes of nostalgic narratives are by far more complex and complicated than a simple backward glance.

This study defines nostalgia as a concept of floating timescapes which emphasises the interplay between past, present and future. This is crucial for understanding nostalgia’s potential as offering future models in desired past worlds. Nostalgia comprises its chronotope off the track from “real” time and space and thereby creates its own structure and logic. Countering popular assumptions, nostalgia tells more about the present than about the past and is directed towards the future. As already mentioned in Chapter 2.2.4, various contemporary studies of nostalgia emphasise its general dual structure.⁹⁷ Moving away from this emphasis on a dual time structure, this study defines nostalgia as a time-travelling concept that belongs to the past, the present and the future. Nostalgia belongs to the past because it dwells in the pleasantries of the past and laments their loss in the present. It belongs to the present because through the selected remembrances of the pleasant only, nostalgic longing reveals the dissatisfaction with the present. It belongs to the future and has a utopian dimension as it helps to envisage a future through imagining a past as it could have been.

⁹⁶ Gerard Genette (1983) introduced the terms analepsis (flashback) and prolepsis (foreshadowing) in order to refer to the deviation from the chronological order of a story. Analepsis is thus the events, happenings, material which happen prior to the narrative present, often in forms of memories or in order to provide background information and explain earlier events. Often analepsis is marked by a tense shift to the past perfect (Abbott 2002, 157; Fludernik 2009, 34).

⁹⁷ With respect to time structures, Svetlana Boym describes nostalgia as Janus-faced as it looks to the past and to the future. Similarly, Linda Hutcheon emphasises nostalgia’s “structural doubling-up of two different times, an inadequate present and an idealized past” (1998) as its source of power thereby focusing on two temporal levels.

Nostalgia – A Blueprint for the Future?

According to Svetlana Boym, “[o]ne is nostalgic not for the past the way it was, but for the past the way it could have been. It is this past perfect [and perfect past] that one strives to realize in the future” (2001, 351). Thus, nostalgic longing does not necessarily need to be a longing for an existing or remembered home or time but can also be an imaginative one. Mikhail Bakhtin has called the process “historical inversion” (Bakhtin 1981) whereby the ideal that is or cannot be lived in the present is projected into the past. Bakhtin writes:

The essence of this inversion is found in the fact that mythological and artistic thinking locates such categories as purpose, ideal, justice, perfection, the harmonious condition of man and society and the like in the *past*. Myths about paradise, a Golden Age, a heroic age, and ancient truth, as well as the later concepts of a “state of nature”, of natural, innate rights and so on, are all expressions of this historical inversion. To put in somewhat simplified terms, we might say that a thing that could and in fact must only be realized exclusively in the *future* is here portrayed as something out of the *past*, a thing that is in no sense part of the past’s reality, but a thing that is in its essence a purpose, an obligation. (1990, 147; emphasis in original)

Such inversion can be a crucial safety valve in the present by projecting desires for the future into a past that has already imaginatively realised these desires. The importance of this for identity formation has already been discussed in Chapter 2.2.5. In the process of longing, an imaginary home is constructed which becomes a desired model for the future, and reveals what the present lacks. Hence, nostalgia has a utopian dimension. (Hutcheon 1998; Boym 2001; Su 2001).⁹⁸

Nostalgia in this study is understood as criticising present shortcomings by either critically reflecting the fragments of the past or by rebuilding or returning to an imagined home:

Nostalgia [...] encourages an imaginative exploration of how present systems of social relations fail to address human needs, and the specific objects of nostalgia – lost or imagined homelands – represent efforts to articulate alternatives. (Su 2005, 5)

Thus, nostalgic narratives are not only analeptic in structure, they are also bound to the present and (can) anticipate alternative worlds in the future. As also Nicholas Dames

⁹⁸ Susan Stewart’s claim that nostalgia’s “distinctly utopian face” shows a “lack of lived experience” (1993, 23) fails to see that nostalgia thrives on present experiences – that it creates alternative present realities which are informed by experiences of past and present life. Therefore, nostalgia has the potential to exceed turning to a past “which has *only* ideological reality” (Stewart 1993, 23; emphasis added). After all, ideology and utopias are driving forces for changes in the present.

points out, “looking-backward is [...] necessarily a looking-forward - a dilution and disconnection of the past in the service of an encroaching future” (2001, 236). Hence, nostalgia can pave the road to the future – envisioning a possible future by imagining a positive past.

Nostalgia and Storytelling

The imaginative dimension of nostalgia often conflates with the art of storytelling and the oral tradition that thrives on myths and folklore and invites the reader to enter non-Western worlds of miracles and wonders.⁹⁹ Writing about the role of the storyteller, and in particular the Xhosa oral storyteller, Harold Scheub stresses the significant interconnectedness of past, present and future:

Storyteller, and this includes the poets and the historians in the oral tradition, fuse idea and emotion into story, and in that interchange audience members are wedded to the experience of the past, as a significant exchange occurs: the past influences and shapes the experience of the present, at the same time that the experience of the present determines what of the past is useful and meaningful today. (1996, xv)

What Scheub describes for the oral tradition can be adapted to nostalgic narratives where idea and emotion make up not only the experience of nostalgia but also guide the narrative structure by transgressing temporal boundaries and moving freely in time and space. In nostalgic narratives, nostalgia as an emotional force inspires the imagination about the past – hence idea, as imaginative force, and emotion are fused and produce a floating experience of time. This will become obvious especially in Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* which uses two time levels thereby emphasising the relevance of the past for the present and future.

Generally, the play with multiple time levels that disrupt the Western rational sense of time and order is a key strategy often employed by postcolonial authors. The characteristic postcolonial experiences of dislocation find expression in the narrative time structures representing nostalgia: nostalgic analeptic and proleptic journeys disrupt the story’s linearity and thereby achieve discordances on the story level.¹⁰⁰ This sabotaging of chronology (again) intersects with postcolonial strategies of subverting and challenging Western linear temporality and thinking. In the face of a fragmented present, nostalgic

⁹⁹ As mentioned in the introduction, also the form of memory favoured by the TRC emphasised the role of orality and the need to listen to the personal stories of the very people.

¹⁰⁰ Other typical stylistic devices for looking back are expectations, ellipses, elisions and reminders (Dames 2001, 11).

characters long for an idealised past. Nostalgic narratives enable them to construct a coherent narrative out of the bits and pieces which constitute their transitory home. In that way, the act of narrating itself becomes a strategy with which to create meaning. Thus, the narrative structure (of anachronic time structures) enforces the triggers of nostalgia and the characters' search for coherence on the story level.¹⁰¹

While the preceding chapters discussed the chronotope of postcolonial narratives of nostalgia with a special focus on nostalgia's extra-dynamic timescapes, the following section will continue to analyse how nostalgia is employed in postcolonial fiction by having a look at focalisation and voice and how these devices are used to challenge authoritative narration.

2.4.4 Challenging Authoritative Narration

Postcolonial fiction is characterised by challenging Western forms of dominance and authority established during colonial times. In literary postcolonial discourse a frequent way to challenge the European dominance of a single, authoritative voice or narrator is by presenting multiple perspectives in dialogic narratives. According to Gerald Prince, dialogic (or polyphonic, which is used synonymously) narrative is

characterized by the interaction of several voices, consciousnesses or world views, none of which unifies or is superior to (has more authority than) the others. [...] the narrator's views, judgments, and even knowledge do not constitute the ultimate authority with respect to the world represented but only one contribution among several, a contribution that is in dialogue with and frequently less significant and perceptive than that of (some of) the characters. (1991, s.v. "Dialogic Narrative")

Monologic narration, on the contrary, is characterised by one dominant voice or consciousness whose "views, judgements, and knowledge constitute the ultimate authority with respect to the world represented" (Prince 1991, s.v. "Monologic Narrative"). The aspect of one versus many narrative voices has crucial narrative consequences as it offers different possibilities to use and play with focalisation and voice. Nevertheless, monologic, and specifically autodiegetic narratives, though representing a single voice, do not (necessarily) have to take a back seat in challenging this dominance. This, for instance, is the case in unreliable narration and the complex play of satire, irony and sympathy for which Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket* provides an example. The selected novels consist of both, monologic and dialogic/polyphonic

¹⁰¹ I am deeply indebted to Katja Lehnert for this insight and for discussing matters of narratology with me.

narration, and in both instances they challenge a single authoritative voice. The following will take a closer look first at monologic narratives, featuring an unreliable autodiegetic narrator, and second, at dialogic narratives and their representation of multiple perspectives. Before, however, diving into the representation of unreliable narration, it is crucial to dissect nostalgia's, and for that matter memory's, inherent unreliability.

2.4.4.1 Unreliability – Nostalgia, Memory and Authenticity

The concept of reliability is crucial for the analysis and interpretation of nostalgic narratives since these are prone to unreliability. In fact, nostalgia, as one form of memory, is from its outset unreliable and subject to inauthenticity. While narratives such as (auto)biography, memoir or diary, usually (cl)aim to represent “true” memories of lived past events, critical nostalgic narratives do not attempt to provide an authentic account of a person's life or of historical events. Herein, lies a key point of the present study's argumentation: the power of nostalgic accounts lies in the imaginative act of constructing virtual worlds – the imagination of how past worlds could have been – rather than in their truthfulness.¹⁰² This denotes the crucial difference between retrospective narratives based on memory as (supposedly) genuine remembrances of what happened in the past – what Henri Bergson called memory in its pure form (*mémoire pure*) and Walter Benjamin termed reminiscence (Dames 2001, 4) – and those based on nostalgic accounts. The former emphasise a reliance on memory as recounting an authentic past; the latter are from the onset known to be inauthentic and enriched or distorted by imagination. In addition, nostalgia, is often (mis)used as “commodified experiences inculcated by capitalist or nationalist interests” (Su 2005, 2).

However, even if nostalgia is based on lived or imagined experiences, it remains a form of memory. According to Harold Maltz, “[i]n the presented world the appeal to memory operates on the principle that to appeal to memory is to imply that one is speaking the truth: one cannot remember what has not happened” (1990, 310). While Maltz's arguments fails to see that memory in general is unreliable, nostalgia, as one of memory's most imaginative forms, sabotages this logic and demonstrates that indeed one can remember what has not happened – but what could have happened. Nostalgic retrospectives imagine as they recall and recall as they imagine – that is, such narratives are genuine feelings and recollections of the past yet they are not factual. It is, however,

¹⁰² That is not to suggest that nostalgia might not slip into any of the subgenres just mentioned. However, nostalgia paints the past in its own colours – perceived as a romanticising and idealising of a highly selective past – and thereby as deforming past “real” events.

difficult to draw a clear line between narratives of recounted memory and narratives of nostalgia, as they at times, slip from the one into the other and intermix.

In addition to nostalgia's ability to create alternative worlds through the imaginative power of the mind, nostalgic narratives can also illuminate (official) history from another, informal, personal angle. Nostalgia, as both memory practise and narrative, offers an alternative representational way through which to perceive the past and the present. While historiography appropriates memory as a collectively accepted recollection of the past, nostalgia emphasises the emotional attachment of selectively experienced or imagined remembrances. Edward Casey emphasises the liberating potential of nostalgic recollections which are free from the pressure to remember "accurately":

[N]ostalgia takes us forcefully out of our accustomed ways of thinking about memory and the past. By leading us into a past that was never given in a present, it liberates us from a preoccupation with the rigors of recollection. (1987, 366)

Personal as well as fictional and nostalgic narratives can be the site for exploring one's past, for searching for one's roots or one's lost home, and for wandering through the ruins of one's past.¹⁰³ As Bissell notes,

[r]ather than viewing nostalgia as poor history, we need to engage with it as a social practice that mobilizes various signs of the past (colonial and otherwise) in the context of contemporary struggles (2005, 218).

Nostalgia can be helpful in looking beyond public history and in enforcing solidarity; it can emphasise, for example, the pasts of minority groups – not accounted for by official history. As alternative narrative about the past, nostalgia opens a space in which dissatisfactions and taboos can be voiced and what is absent in the present can be longed for. If the nostalgic manages to transform his or her longing productively into creative forms of representation or active criticism of the present situation or system, nostalgia gains subversive potential. However, again it would be fatal to dismiss its risks. Nostalgia remains an unreliable narrative about the past which can easily be (mis)used in order to create certain truths for specific (political) purposes, as for instance reinforcing the myth of a national homeland (cf. Chapters 2.2.1.1 and 2.3.1).

This study views a reflective, critical nostalgia not as opposing but as enriching, adding intimate and affectionate recollections of past events to the canvas of history. As

¹⁰³ The fragmentary view of the past and the challenging of historiography as coherent recount of the past is, of course not a new thesis. At least since Jean-Francois Lyotard's (1979) attack on master narratives and their rootedness in history as the only truth and Hayden White's (1978) emphasis on the aesthetic value of historiography, history as objective truth has been re-evaluated.

Lowenthal (1989, 30) significantly notes, a non-nostalgic reading of the past that is by contrast honest and authentic does not exist. The slippages and gaps of historiography, left due to the fact that official history writing can never account for all the personal narratives about past events, leave space for alternative historical narratives. Thereby, nostalgic narratives tell about the gaps historiography does not cover.

2.4.4.2 The Unreliable Narrator

Considering the imaginative power of nostalgic narratives, the question of the narrator's reliability becomes vitally important. A narrator who proves untrustworthy because of his or her distorted views and moral attitudes or because he or she violates social norms¹⁰⁴ might function as a way of appalling the implied reader and challenge him or her to formulate his or her own judgement about a certain subject matter.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, an unreliable narrator can serve to create a more or less clear distance "between the narrator's views and those of the implied author" (Abbott 2002, 69).¹⁰⁶ Such discrepancy usually precludes the implied reader from sympathising with the narrator and might rather, in turn, align him or her with the implied author with whom he or she shares certain values and attitudes.¹⁰⁷ According to Monika Fludernik, "[u]nreliable narrative discourse creates the impression that the implied author is communicating with the reader behind the first-person narrator's back" (2009, 27). In that way, the narrative itself leaves gaps, defies closure and challenges the reader to take position. As will be illustrated in *The Restless Supermarket*, the protagonist Aubrey Tearle is represented as an unreliable autodiegetic narrator in several ways, the most obvious being his overt racist attitude and nostalgia for the apartheid period – he is thus a narrator whose views the implied reader is supposed to reject. Similarly, the character Xoliswa of Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, who represents one of the voices within the polyphonic novel, is revealed as unreliable due to her uncritical embracing of "America" as *the* model for progress.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Abbott 2002, 69–670 and Fludernik 2009, 27; 161.

¹⁰⁵ According to Fludernik: "A reader only realizes that a first-person narrator is unreliable because he or she assumes that the implied author holds views in direct conflict with those held by the first-person narrator" (2009, 27).

¹⁰⁶ The distance between the implied author and unreliable narrator is not necessarily clearly visible but, at times, rather opaque.

¹⁰⁷ In narrative theory, a further distinction is made between unreliable narrators "whom we can trust for the facts but not for their interpretation [...] and those we cannot even trust for the facts [...]" to which Doritt Cohn refers to as discordant narrators (Abbott 2002, 69). With regard to autodiegetic retrospective narrators Cohn speaks of dissonant and consonant self-narration. In dissonant self-narration the narrating self is distant both in time and degree of wisdom from the experiencing self. In consonant self-narration, on the contrary, the narrating self attempts to identify with the experiencing self.

Irony as Distancing Technique

In order to move beyond the sensibility of the narrator for a just assessment of the novel's import (Abbott 2002, 77), it is helpful to consider the implied author. One of the implied author's strategies for distancing him- or herself from the narrator is the use of irony and satire. In this way, the implied reader – rather sympathising with the sensibility behind the narrative than with the unreliable narrator – also manages to distance him- or herself from the narrator's views and attitudes. Irony, thus, functions as a distancing technique implying that the intention lies in the unsaid and aligns the implied author with the implied reader (Hutcheon 1998; Matzke 2006).

Mike Marais, who convincingly analyses the ironic layers in *The Restless Supermarket*, argues that “in requiring the reader to relate the said to the unsaid, irony consciously involves the reader in the process of inferring meaning in addition to and different from what is stated” (2002, 109). Irony is, thus, created through the disjunction between the unreliable narrator and the implied author and, in turn, between the unreliable narrator and the implied reader. In the combination of irony and nostalgia, the implied reader is challenged to question the represented idealised past and to match it to the existing realities outside the narrative. For instance, *The Restless Supermarket's* representation of a restorative kind of nostalgia, expressed in racist, fundamentalist attitudes, is problematic for the implied reader and dissociates him or her from the narrator expressing such views. This discomfort, however, is usually intended by the implied author challenging the reader to make up his or her own mind. On the one hand, the implied reader can sympathise with the emotion of nostalgia. On the other hand, he or she is asked to confront a troubled past and face uncomfortable questions about the characters' values and relation to the past. In unreliable narration, the monologic or binary representation of nostalgia consists of silences and gaps which the reader has to fill, making room for an implicit commentary by the implied author.

Applying Boym's reflective nostalgia, one might argue that the awareness of the fragments and dis-unity of the past provides the implied reader with critical distance to reflect upon bygone times. In a silent comparison to the real world, caused by the unspoken cleft between the fictional and the real world, positive memories of a horrific or traumatic past, then, need to be put into perspective. In South Africa, positive memories of a White, privileged childhood thus need to be juxtaposed to the lives of the oppressed, traumatised, humiliated and disadvantaged. Reflective or critical nostalgia therefore does not deny the possibility of having positive memories about certain aspects of life, during

the time of apartheid. However, it asks for the circumstances under which it was made possible, and it looks towards the various fragments that make up “the broken pots” of the past. The reflective imagining of the past, then, does not idealise the past by retelling or restoring a coherent, linear story, but confronts the past as made up of cracks and ambiguities. Returning to the ironic representation of restorative nostalgia, Boym analyses a reflective nostalgia as potentially humorous and ironic whereas “restorative nostalgia takes itself dead seriously” (2001, 49). The critical or reflective nostalgist is aware of the gap between the real and the imaginary, between origin and restoration and thus able to take the uncomfortable representation of nostalgia with a pinch of irony.

As will be seen in the analysis of the novels, Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić make extensive use of irony, and especially sarcasm and satire in order to produce a discomfiting (restorative) nostalgia. Both authors “are aware of the risks and lures of nostalgia, and seek to expose those through irony” (Hutcheon 1998) and biting sarcasm.

2.4.4.3 Multiple Perspective

Moving away from the autodiegetic narrator to an extradiegetic heterodiegetic narrator,¹⁰⁸ and from monologic to dialogic or polyphonic narration, the latter provides a platform for many characters and their views, focalisations and voices to be heard. It is helpful to turn, once more, to Bakhtin who explored the dialogic nature of language and extended his concept of the inherent plurality of language, i.e. the intentional novelistic hybrid, to the plurality of voices in the novel¹⁰⁹:

A plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices is in fact the chief characteristic of Dostoevsky's novels. What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event (1984, 6; emphasis in original).

In narrative theory, the term “polyphony” defines the many different and internally stratified voices, speeches and languages represented in the novel.¹¹⁰ The novel marks the

¹⁰⁸ In Stanzel's terminology, this would be referred to as authorial narrative situation (Fludernik 2009, 150; Jahn 2005).

¹⁰⁹ Hence, he demonstrates that in the form of the novel, differing points of view, differing language intentions are in battle with each other. Therefore, he singles out Dostoevsky's poetics as the realisation of different voices and consciousnesses and declared the Dostoevsky novel as the prototype of the polyphonic novel.

¹¹⁰ According to Bakhtin, the novel as such is the product of a plurality in style, speech and voice and consists of a “diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices” (1984, 262).

place where multiple voices or utterances are articulated and different discourses are in dialogue with each other. The subversion of the dominant voice is achieved by presenting many voices which are all equally valid and which undermine the authoritative voice guiding the reader through the narrative. Bakhtin's concept of the polyphonic novel gains significance in postcolonial discourse as it denotes another form of challenging the narrative authority. The dialogic character of language contains a political moment where "one voice is able to unmask the other" (Young 1995, 22).

In sum, the dialogic and monologic representation of nostalgic voices challenges the reader in different ways. While in the former the reader would have to make up his or her own mind judging from the equally valid voices in the novel, the latter confronts the reader with either accepting or questioning the authority of one narrating voice. The polyphonic structure represents a broader community by hearing different, at times opposing voices, whereas the monologic representation binarises the world of the narrative to the world of the implied reader who thus is challenged to grasp the complexity of a broader community.

The Implied Author

Finally, it is of crucial importance to inspect the implied author and his or her strategic use of nostalgia as a mode of contrasting and connecting past and present worlds, of criticising present realities as well as of approaching an undervalued or suppressed past and (cultural) identity. According to Ansgar Nünning, the implied author is "the source of the beliefs, norms, and purposes of the text, the origin of its meaning, the embodiment of "the moral and emotional content of each bit of action and suffering of all characters" (2005, s.v. "Implied Author"). The concept of the implied author proves particularly useful for the analysis of the selected novels in order to explain such phenomena as unreliable narration, irony and sarcasm "because the implied author provides the otherwise elusive standard against which to gauge the *reliability of a narrator's statement" (2005, s.v. "Implied Author," asterisk in original). However, in postcolonial literature, the real author is of immense importance since he or she usually writes for such reasons as to deconstruct Western dominances, criticise the colonial/apartheid past or to alert to neo-colonial or neo-imperial structures in the present. Therefore, the real author also needs to be considered.

For instance, Zakes Mda, who has been criticised for his nostalgic tone and his romanticising of the "original people" of South Africa, feels a strong urgency to revive the past and re-imagine the past in the present. Nostalgia for him can be of crucial

importance in revitalising historical memory and recuperating cultural identity, as illustrated in Chapter 2.2.3.5. With reference to his novel *The Restless Supermarket*, Ivan Vladislavić reveals his strategic use of nostalgia as a method for creating discomfort and challenging the reader to question his or her own value scheme in face of present dissatisfactions and disillusionments with the changed socio-political realities:

This idea of a critical nostalgia, which I never really developed, was embodied in some ways in *The Restless Supermarket* before I tried to theorise it. There the nostalgic impulse was treated satirically, and dealt with in an exaggerated and parodic way. In the end, my narrator's nostalgia is about unattainable things, and quite silly things or trivialities, and he avoids the bigger picture [...] (Vladislavić 2008, 341)

Along with James Phelan (2004), this thesis emphasises the continuity between the real author and the implied author, “defining the latter as ‘a streamlined version of the real author, an actual or purported subset of the real author’s capacities, traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, and other properties that play an active role in the construction of the particular text’” (cited in Nünning 2005, s.v. “Implied Author”). Thus, nostalgia can be strategically employed by the implied author in order to elicit social critique (Ladino 2004, 1), to sabotage chronology or to play with unreliability and irony in narrative fiction as illustrated above. Therefore, on the level of analysis, the term of the implied author will be used especially when dissecting narrative strategies, while the real author needs to be considered particularly when he is stating his own views and opinions expressed in interviews. Likewise, on the level of analysis, the thesis will employ the term of the implied reader to refer to “the inferred recipient of the narrative” (Abbott 2002, 191–192).

Having discussed how nostalgia can be represented in narrative discourse of postcolonial fiction, and having provided the narrative tools used throughout the analysis, the following will take a closer look at what is represented on the level of the story.

2.4.5 Nostalgia on the Story Level

Nostalgia most prominently and obviously occurs as a sentiment felt by characters on the story level of narrative fiction. The characters analysed in this study long for bygone times either as actually experienced or imagined retrospections: for imaginary times and places of their childhood, for the old political order, for a traditional home or – reviving the Garden myth – for an idealised home in nature. The nostalgic site, for the purpose of this study, is a home in transition – a home which one either returns to as an exile or one

which has altered tremendously so that without leaving the place, some protagonists experience “inner exile” and a deep yearning for roots.

On the story level, nostalgia is usually triggered by the personal or collective experience of radical change, of disruption and insecurity in the present caused by the transition from apartheid to democracy. The times of insecurity cause the characters to drift into and to re-imagine (idealised) past times. However, the way these changes are perceived and the choice of the period in the past being longed for is complicated by South Africa’s cultural diversity and by the difficulty of defining South Africa as a historically grown nation. Hence, the changed dynamics of the “new” South Africa pose diverse challenges for the different characters; which challenges they face largely depends on their cultural backgrounds as well as their Black- and Whiteness. Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić represent their characters as being part of complex communities characterised by both their closedness and their hybridity. Due to their dissimilar historical and cultural backgrounds, the past has different implications for them: different myths, different cultural rootedness, different anxieties, shames and pleasantries.

Moreover, the inability to homogenise South Africa’s cultural and “ethnic” diversity into one national symbol or monument becomes obvious in represented entities of the narratives, such as monuments, museums, artefacts or souvenirs, which are likely to trigger collective nostalgia. A war memorial as depicted in *The Whale Caller*, for instance, which commemorates White South Africans’ involvement in World War II can hardly be called a national monument as it ignores the existence of the majority of Black citizens. Nevertheless, certain objects of the past – such as struggle images and township objects – have become nationally cherished souvenirs signifying political correctness and suggest one’s anti-apartheid position; they have even gained export value, as Vladislavić satirically points out in *The Restless Supermarket*, commodifying and thereby de-historicising history. This (paradox) example of “struggle souvenirs” already illustrates that nostalgia as an emotion is easily exploitable, an aspect discussed by Mda in *The Heart of Redness*. In this novel, nostalgia is (mis)used to create a strong community identity of the struggle community – “we, the united Black people” – in order to lure the rural people of Qolorha into embracing a non-sustainable tourist complex. Vladislavić’s *The Exploded View* reflects a form of White nostalgia in the idea of a secure European home, which has turned into a non-racial fashion for a prestigious lifestyle. Thus, nostalgia on the story level reflects cultural attitudes and different ways of approaching and negotiating the past and the present.

In summary, the representation of nostalgia in (postcolonial) fiction is multi-faceted and requires a closer inspection of the story as well as of the discourse level. While it can be represented as an honest emotion or as cultural products nostalgically evoking bygone times on the story level, it can also be ironised and used as a way to undermine a suggested coherence, originality and authenticity associated with restorative nostalgia. Nostalgia can be used as a way to transgress spatial and temporal borders in complex ways as well as to question the represented truth of the narrative and nostalgic worlds.

2.5 Conclusion

Part I of the thesis introduced and analysed the theoretical complexity of the project's focus and provided various analytical tools. Accordingly, the present discussion of nostalgia has embraced an eclectic approach by investigating theories derived from cultural and literary studies, sociology, philosophy and psychology in order to offer an integrated tool for the analysis of diverse nostalgic journeys in the selected novels.¹¹¹

This study understands nostalgia both as a fundamental human condition and as a form of memory. Home and be-longing form the crucial components of nostalgia and function as its driving forces. Hence, nostalgia as understood and used in this thesis perceives the components of place, time and be-longing as integral to the phenomenon. Thereby, the *nostos-algos* configuration can be imaginary and real; in other words, they can exist as ideas and need not be physically present or experienced.

Longing for a specific home and time and for a belonging to a community and thus to a cultural identity is a crucial articulation of nostalgia. Hence, nostalgia is inevitably entangled with a sense of identity and the ability to identify with a (cultural) community as well as with a sense of disruption and disorientation which leaves the characters lost and unable to identify their home and community.

On the story level, nostalgia is a yearning desire for imagined past worlds, for alternative places in the past that stands in contrast to a fragmented present. Thereby, nostalgia enables a dialogue between the past and present. It brings into contact a distorted, idealised past and a lived, deficient present. This dialogue between remembering and forgetting can raise uncomfortable questions, motivate a reflection upon

¹¹¹ Despite emphasising nostalgia's multidimensionality, this thesis does not aim to cover all its dimensions. Thus, for instance, the political (mis)use of nostalgia has not been covered as it does not feature as significant in the analyses of the selected novels.

the past, evoke pleasant memories, be supportive in establishing a cultural link, create a sense of unity or usher in ignorance, exclusion and escapes from the present.

On the discourse level and on the level of the implied author, in particular, nostalgia in this study is a way of reflecting upon deficiencies and continuing imbalances in the present by conducting imaginative, literary journeys to the past. Nostalgia can be used to reveal present dissatisfactions and to recover a repressed or forgotten past. It can also be used satirically to inspire a critical engagement with the past in the present. While nostalgia has many faces and one needs to be wary of its tendency to fuel nationalistic and excluding forces, it also bears the potential to create a sense of coherence and continuity with the past which had previously been repressed or devalued. Overall, the worth of nostalgia lies in the imaginary act of constructing alternative worlds.

In order to illustrate the productivity of the presented nostalgia theory, the two authors Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić and their key texts prove to be exceptionally fruitful. Each novel addresses diverse, at times overlapping aspects of the theory predominately in the depiction of their characters, thereby representing different ways of approaching the past and the present. By analysing the representation of nostalgic longing in certain individual characters by two contemporary authors, this study will illustrate that nostalgia is a way of addressing the past and the concepts of home and community in the present and of asking questions about the future.

To sum up, the following analysis will use the entangled concepts of the dissertation's title, nostalgia, home and be-longing, in order to scrutinise which approaches to the past the two authors take for their characters. As home and be-longing provide the motives for nostalgic journeys, the analyses of the novels will first examine the notion of home and the feeling of be-longing in key characters in order to understand their nostalgic journeys. Having dismantled what exactly triggers nostalgia with regard to the characters or the public (as in monuments and gated communities, for instance), the study will utilise the concepts of restorative and reflective nostalgia in order to read the various facets of nostalgia as outlined in the theory chapter; i.e the forms and mechanisms of nostalgia and the relationship of nostalgia with identity, tourism and environmentalism on the content level. In which ways the cultural background of Mda and Vladislavić play a key role will be scrutinised by employing the concepts of the implied author and (un)reliable narration on the discourse level. As will be demonstrated, nostalgia can function as a healing force, as recuperating aspects of a past valuable to the present, as revealing an inability to cope with the present as well as a way to enforce old

racial stereotypes and to eradicate borders along lines of racial purity.

The first four segments (Chapters 3–6) of Part II will give a detailed analysis of the four selected novels by Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić respectively and will employ the theoretical ideas and concepts introduced in the first part of the thesis. The final segment, Chapter 7, will summarise the features they share as well as their differences.

PART II

3 Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*

Synopsis

The novel *The Heart of Redness* is set on two time levels which deal with the confrontation between traditional Xhosa life and global capitalism. On the past time level, the novel takes place during the nineteenth century and narrates the colonial invasion by the British and the subsequent colonising of the Xhosa community in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. The present time level of postapartheid South Africa is about the invasion of global capitalism (neo-imperialism), regarded as a new form of colonisation administered by Western companies.

In the colonial past of the 1850s, the cattle of the Xhosa die in masses, suffering from an illness imported by Friesland bulls shipped in by Dutch settlers. During that time of misery the girl Nongqawuse preaches salvation for the Xhosa, salvation from the inexplicable mass dying of their livestock and salvation from the colonial forces. According to her prophecy, if all people slaughter their cattle and burn all their crops, the spirits of the ancestors will arise and drive the colonisers into the sea. This prophecy splits the Xhosa people into the opposing fractions of Believers and Unbelievers. The descendents of Xikixa, Twin and Twin-Twin are the first generation to be divided into the camps of Believers (Twin) and Unbelievers (Twin-Twin). The Believers followed the prophecies and thereby drove the whole Xhosa community into suffering from starvation and finally into subjugation by the colonial oppressors.

On the present time level in 1994, this conflict is revived and revolves around the issue of economic development. The Unbelievers, led by Bhonco and his daughter Xoliswa, embrace the plan of a casino and tourist resort as a sign of progress and propagate development and modernisation, to them equivalent with civilisation. The Believers, lead by Zim and his daughter Qukezwa, on the other hand, oppose these projects as they see them as a threat to their traditional life.

While this conflict is ensuing, the protagonist Camagu returns to South Africa after thirty years of exile in the United States and experiences the postapartheid era. Upon returning to South Africa in the time of political and economic transition, Camagu, who has a PhD in economic development, is full of enthusiasm for the building of a new

democratic nation.¹ However, he already becomes disillusioned in his first few days looking for a job in Johannesburg when confronted with the grim realities of fraud and corruption among the “new elite.” Just as he is on the verge of going back to the United States, he is utterly smitten by a woman, NomaRussia, who he then follows to Qolorha-by-Sea in hopes of meeting her again. Although he cannot find her there, he decides to stay for a little longer in the small village. From the beginning, he is drawn into the conflict over the casino resort between Believers and Unbelievers. As an outsider to this community and their internal battle, he takes on the role of a mediator. Together with Dalton, a White man who is more of a Xhosa than most of them, he tries to help the villagers with his development expertise. However, in disagreement over their different developmental ideas, Camagu and Dalton set up different projects.

Even though Camagu tries to remain neutral in the villagers’ conflict when caught in a love triangle involving two women from the opposing camps, he finally has to choose sides. Nevertheless, due to his own development project supporting the self-empowerment of the people in Qolorha, he lays the grounds for acceptance and tolerance among the opposing people. The end of the novel is a turn towards reconciliation and integration where it is possible to have two different projects exist next to each other and in co-operation.

In traditional Xhosa culture, the women adorn themselves and dye their clothing with red ochre as a sign of beauty.² Therefore, the Believers are also known as the “red people.” In reference to the title, an obvious play on Joseph Conrad’s *The Heart of Darkness* (1899), the colour red is used to subvert the image of the “Dark Continent” and the apparent savagery of African life. While for the Unbelievers redness is a metaphor for backwardness, for the Believers and for Camagu, it symbolises the richness of traditions and myths. Throughout the novel, the narrative employs colours combined with poetic language in order to refer to the myths of the past time level, especially in Qukezwa’s nostalgic re-imaginings of the past.

A narrative feature which greatly contributes to the representation of the competing characters is the use of irony. The basic irony of the Believer–Unbeliever conflict is that while the Unbelievers on the past time level were suspicious of the

¹ Camagu has spent most of his life in exile in the United States. There, he received his formal education in the field of communication and development and worked as a consultant for organisations like UNESCO and for the Food and Agricultural Organisation.

² This is still a common practise in the rural areas whereby the colour might vary from red to beige/terracotta.

prophecies and did not blindly believe in them on the present time level, it seems, they uncritically follow the prophecy of progress in the form of Western development. Thus, the conflict of believing and unbelieving is not only taken up again after the Middle Generations, but the roles are, in fact, reversed, which renders the whole conflict even more absurd.³ In addition, the ironic staging of the characters, dialogues and the tone of writing further produce a comical effect. The implied reader thus questions the norms and structures of the villagers and sees through the nonsense of their division. In that way, the narrative confronts the implied reader, in a cheery manner, with his or her own norms and perspectives that might need to be rethought and revised (Feldbrügge 2004, 64).

Introduction

In constructing his romantic brief for ethnic conservatism, Mda has chosen the Great Cattle Killing as his master symbol of the old ways, at their most toweringly powerful and terrifying and compelling. (Rush 2003, 31)

American author and critic Norman Rush is quick to judge Zakes Mda's novel *The Heart of Redness* as mediating a "controlling, reflexive, culturally backward-looking ideology" (2003, 32). Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 of this thesis will explore whether Zakes Mda is "in the grip of nostalgia" in his portrayal of his characters' sense of home and be-longing. In his review of *The Heart of Redness* Rush writes:

I think he is in the grip of nostalgia for the feelings of power and possibility that absolute belief, belief à outrance, confers. [...] I sense in Mda an extreme, almost religious, impulse to identify with forbears who have, irrationally or not, given up everything in the struggle against an ultimately unstoppable adversary. (2003, 31)

The analysis of *The Heart of Redness* will question Norman Rush's simplistic reading of the novel by showing that while nostalgia does indeed feature in his representation, it is far more complex than simply a "backward-looking ideology."⁴

³ As Mda himself points out, "[t]he irony of course is that [the Believers] may be standing for this progressive ideology for the wrong reasons. By default, so to speak. But the results are that the people finally have a stake in the development of their community" (Mda in Wark 2004).

⁴ Norman Rush also ludicrously accused him of omitting the Aids pandemic – a topic that, as follows from his argument, should not be missing in an "African novel" (note the reviewers' situatedness in the typical lingo about Africa as identical with the Aids pandemic): "With AIDS omitted, Mda has created a novel that is, finally, an escapist dream, a fable more than a parable" (2003, 31).

Nigerian poet, writer and critic Tanure Ojaide groups Zakes Mda among those writers who were born in the 1940s and 1950s and who were socialised and educated in Africa but then left the continent for various reasons:

In their writings, they tend to compare their native African environment with the new Western environment. These writers view the Africa they know with a sense of nostalgia and often maintain an African identity in a foreign land. (Ojaide 2008)

The Heart of Redness is, according to him, one of those works which “are filled with nostalgia and set in concrete space and time” (Ojaide 2008). This nostalgia becomes striking in Mda’s use of folkloric language as well as in the significance he places on landscape and myth. “The recourse to mythologizing,” according to Ojaide (2008), “is an expression of [...] cultural identity.” Ojaide emphasises the authors’ exile status as giving rise to their nostalgia, however, compared to Norman Rush’s negative evaluation of Mda’s nostalgia, he already points to nostalgia’s potential in establishing cultural coherence when he notes that this generation of authors write,

with deep understanding of the Africa they left behind, propose solutions to Africa’s moral, ethical, and developmental problems in the debate about the need for development, on the one hand, versus the need to maintain a cultural identity in the people’s “redness” and a pristine environment that contains traditionally known curative herbs, on the other. The writers tend to eulogize ancient virtues that they think contemporary Africa can imbibe to be strong; hence the heroic and nostalgic manner in which older times are presented. (Ojaide 2008)

Ojaide’s arguments support the claim that nostalgia is a way of reaffirming cultural identity. However, as will be shown in this part of the thesis, Zakes Mda’s representation of mythologies and the past (indeed portrayed in poetic, colourful language) is more complex than a simple eulogizing of the amaXhosa past for the creation of a strong present amaXhosa culture. As will be illustrated, Mda narrates a problematic and ambiguous past of the amaXhosa nation in the Eastern Cape, centred on the prophecies of Nongqawuse in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Interestingly, and countering the above two critics, South African writer and critic Lewis Nkosi termed *The Heart of Redness* anti-nostalgic and failing to re-imagine the nation. Countering this view, this chapter sets out to demonstrate that Mda, while having the exile experience and showing nostalgic sentiments, (also) has a distant and reflective perspective on rural communities. He is critical of how people deal with the past and demonstrates both the values and the dangers nostalgic journeys can have. Thereby,

historical memory plays a vital role for the construction of identity, community and nation, as Mda suggests variously in his novels. Moreover, his novels celebrate the cultural richness and vibrancy, the many cultural heritages as well as the hybridising of cultures into a uniquely South African identity.

3.1 Polyphonic Nostalgia – Nostalgia and Be-longing in Individual Characters

The analysis of *The Heart of Redness* aims to illustrate the polyphonic representations of nostalgia, home and be-longing in individual characters as well as in the question of development exemplified via nostalgia tourism. Therefore, the following interpretation is subdivided into two main chapters: first, the polyphonic representation of nostalgia and be-longing in individual characters will be scrutinised. The second section will scrutinise different nostalgic tourist and conservationist practises as proposed or realised by individual characters, in particular Camagu and Dalton, and discusses the novel's presentation of sustainable development through reorientation to the past.

3.1.1 Narrative Devices and the Chronotope of *The Heart of Redness*

The Polyphonic Structure of the Novel

In order to present the conflict in *The Heart of Redness* from different perspectives, Mda employs many equally valid voices. Accordingly, the reader cannot rely on one narrative voice guiding him or her through the novel but faces the complexities of life in Qolorha-by-Sea. Through this polyphonic structure, Mda creates a multi-faceted picture of culture in the past and in the present. He portrays the amaXhosa culture as genuine as other cultures and the past as complex as the present. This he achieves further through different focalisations and multiple time levels. According to South African critic J.U. Jacobs, “[b]oth the 1856 and 1994 narratives are coded in terms of ambivalence and cultural heterogeneity that resonates back and forth between past and present” (2002, 230).

The polyphonic structure of the novel allows the reader “to compare a variety of available versions in order either to choose among them or to construct a composite image from all of them” (Brink 1998, 39). In fact, the many voices in the novel make it difficult for the reader to choose sides just as it is difficult for the protagonist Camagu to side with either the Believers or the Unbelievers: “But it is difficult for many people to know which side to take. Even Camagu, with all his learning, cannot make up his mind”

(HR, 91).⁵ At first the reader is more drawn to the Unbelievers' side and it is not quite understandable why the Believers so vehemently reject progress in their village as it would make daily life easier. However, in the course of the novel Camagu, and with him the implied reader, come to understand and appreciate the Believers' position and in fact see that their stance for preservation is indeed more progressive.

Multiple Timescapes

Mda uses the technique of multiple time levels in order to depict the colonial encounter in the 1850s and the contemporary spirit of postapartheid South Africa. The novel moves freely between the two narrative time levels and, thus, disrupts the European linear sense and order of time. At the beginning of the novel, the shifting between past and present is easy to follow as the narrative gives long passages from each time level. Towards the end of the novel, however, the passages on each time level become shorter and fuse into each other, thereby causing disorientation for the implied reader. The confusion caused by the technique of multiple time levels is supported by the duplication of character names which confronts the reader with an overall opaque "time-character zone." Furthermore, the narrative's time structure of interweaving past and present represents the Xhosa cosmology of cyclic time and life, which does not end with death and in which the ancestors have decisive influence upon the present (cf. Chapters 3.1.2.4 – 3.1.2.6).

Through the setting of the novel on two different time levels, Mda can explore the traditional values, beliefs and practices of the past and their significance for the present. By the same token, he suggests certain continuations of colonial practises in the present in the form of Western global capitalism, exemplified by capitalist mass tourism invading local areas such as Qolorha-by-Sea. Both time levels, as already indicated, are represented as consisting of complexities, of the beauties and the horrors of genuine life. The narrative plays with the ramification and memories of divergent (imagined) histories. While the past is painful for some, it is shameful for others and yet for others it inspires a deep longing. Due to the juxtaposition and fusion of the time levels, the narrative emphasises the presence of the past in the present and reveals the failure to deal with grievances on both time levels. In that way, the narrative poses questions of the prospects for the future.

⁵ It can be argued that the confusion and disorientation on the narrative level reflects the confusion of defining South Africa's new identity after the end of apartheid. This can be observed in the struggle of some of the characters to find their identities.

The Site of Conflict – The Village Qolorha-by-Sea

The place associated with the notion of home is the rural village Qolorha-by-Sea. The novel opens with a romantic description of the postapartheid village, “when peace has returned to the land and there is enough happiness to go around” (Mda 2000, 3). Throughout the novel, the village is represented as a colourful and mystical place bearing vibrant memories of the past. For some of the characters, especially Qukezwa, the place triggers a nostalgic longing for bygone times when the natural surroundings were still untouched by Western progress. Despite its idyllic elements, Qolorha is represented as a village that consists of ambiguities. This is due to the (village) community’s internal fighting and due to the colonial and neo-colonial invasions on the respective time levels. The sporadic expressions of a romantic picture of the present and a nostalgic depiction of Xhosa traditional life are constantly disrupted by arguments of the villagers on the present time level and the horrors of war and colonisation on the past time level. In the past, the locale has seen and given rise to “mass suicide” (as the historic cattle killing movement has been called), starvation and misery. It is further revealed to have seen several violent wars and injustices. In the present, Qolorha continues to be a place of rivalries – despite its haunting beauty.

Moreover, Qolorha disqualifies as a nostalgic locale since, according to Rita Barnard, it does not represent the bounded isolated space of ethnographic nostalgia (2007, 162); rather it is represented as a contact zone on both time levels.⁶ Qolorha is a place of transcultural interaction throughout time between the Khoikhoi, the Xhosa, the abaThwa, the British and the Afrikaners. As a tourist site it suggests further encounters with people from all over the world. Thus, it is a richly imagined chronotope and although “Qolorha conforms in certain respects to nostalgic ideas of village life” (Barnard 2007, 162), it is represented as an overall multidimensional community.

The following chapter will look at the polyphonic representation of nostalgia and be-longing in individual characters on the present time level. The characters either display different nostalgic longings for time and place, and in particular home and be-longing, or the rigid rejection of the past.

⁶ For a discussion of the rich portrayal of hybridity on various levels in the novel see Feldbrügge. 2004. “The Representation of Hybridity in Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness* and Mda’s Perspective for the Future.” Master’s Thesis, University of Leipzig.

3.1.2 Negotiating Senses of Be-longing

3.1.2.1 Returning Home – Exiles’ Perspectives

The narrative represents home and especially the return home as problematic when referring to those having been in exile during apartheid. Frustration, it is suggested, is what most of the exiles share when they come back to their “home.” Also Camagu is frustrated. Disappointed by the realities of the new South Africa, he meets some other émigrés at a nightclub called Giggles who share his sense of frustration: “Most of Giggles’ patrons are disaffected exiles and sundry learned rejects of this new society. He is one of them too, and constantly marvels at the irony of being called an exile in his own country” (HR, 26).

While Camagu returned home with the prospect of helping to rebuild the nation, other returnees are portrayed as returning home while nostalgically looking back to the moment when they had left. Nostalgia’s oldest definition – if we think of Odysseus – is the longing to return home. These exiles, however, once they returned home are paradoxically nostalgic for the moment they had left the country (which was the time of deepest apartheid), pitying themselves by, simultaneously, praising their sacrifice for the country. Instead of looking forward and participating in the rebuilding of a new nation, they look backward and strategically bemoan both the passage and the irreversibility of time (their departure into exile) in order to emphasise their neglected situation in the “new” South Africa: “It was becoming too hot at Giggles, with the exiles moaning and whingeing or going on nostalgic reminiscences about what they sacrificed for this country, enduring hardships in Tanzania, Sweden, America, or Yugoslavia” (HR, 26). The returned exiles pity themselves without, however, acknowledging the hardships of those who stayed at home and who had to suffer the atrocities and daily humiliations of apartheid rule.

Moreover, Mda mocks the exiles’ nostalgia by criticising their inactive attitude: now that the “revolution” they were fighting for has been achieved, they deserve and should get a good portion of the cake without actively participating in the process of rebuilding a nation. Mda comically portrays the clash between exiles and those who stayed at home, both accusing each other of getting the full cake while all of them failed to join the “Aristocrats of the Revolution.” The irony of their self-pity as victims is such that, were they among the Aristocrats, they would most likely also take the full cake to themselves. Thereby, Mda criticises the passivity on both sides – instead of getting active,

they expect to have things delivered to them.⁷ Camagu also moans. However, his frustration concerns the nepotism and corruption flourishing in the new democracy which results in him not even wanting to join the freedom dance: “Whining and whingeing is the pastime of this new democratic society, thinks Camagu, not recognizing the fact that he was doing exactly the same thing for the greater part of the wake” (HR, 32). Nostalgia, in this case, is portrayed with a pinch of irony as it reveals the exiles’ failure to look forward and participate in the present and future.

Paradoxically, awakening to activism during the wake of a deceased, Camagu decides to take the challenge – even if at first unconsciously – to commence his, and allegorically the young nation’s, initiation, as will be further illustrated in the next subchapter.

3.1.2.2 Camagu – The Exile’s Journey to his Traditional Roots

Frustrated about the return to his homeland, Camagu is on the verge of going back into a second exile when he attends the wake on Giggles’ rooftop. He joins the ceremony and even tries to participate in the traditional dance, however, “[h]is steps are rather awkward” (HR, 28). Camagu, it is suggested, is out of touch with South African traditions and cultural practises and therefore his approach to these is ill at ease. The voice and image of the makoti, a young bride or “daughter-in-law” (Jacobs 2002, 229), singing at the wake captivates him. Despite himself, he is not driven by lust. The makoti, Noma Russia, inspires something else in him: “She is more like a spirit that can comfort him and heal his pain” (HR, 28). His encounter with NomaRussia inspires a feeling of belonging in him due to her “mothering spirit” (HR, 28).

This feeling of home-ness is enforced in him as soon as he arrives in Qolorha. The landscape, plants and traditional houses instigate his longing for the times of his childhood:

Camagu is filled with a searing longing for an imagined blissfulness of his youth. He has vague memories of his home village, up in the mountains in the distant island parts of the country. He remembers the fruit trees and the

⁷ This is an attitude Mda criticises in his theoretical work on theatre-for-development. Later in the novel, Mda under the alias of Camagu voices his criticism of the government having created a dependency mentality in the very people: “It is happening throughout this country. The government talks of delivery and of upliftment. Now people expect things to be delivered to them without any effort on their part. They expect somebody to come from Pretoria and uplift them. The notions of delivery and upliftment have turned out people into passive recipients of programs conceived by so-called experts who know nothing about the lives of rural communities. People are denied to shape their own destiny. Things are done for them. The world owes them a living. A dependency mentality is reinforced in their minds” (HR, 180).

graves of long-departed relatives. He can see dimly through the mist of decades all the lush plants that grew in his grandfather's garden, including aloes of different types. There are the beautiful houses too: the four-walled tin-roofed ixande, the rondavels, the cattle kraal, the fowl run, the toolshed. Then the government came and moved the people down to the flatlands, giving them only small plots and no compensation. (HR, 59)

This passage already illustrates Mda's emphasis on place and landscape so characteristic of his writing. Camagu is spontaneously invited to the homestead of Bhonco, the leader of the Unbelievers, and the festivities there along with the rural village bring back childhood memories that he had almost forgotten: "So many things in Qolorha bring back long-forgotten images. He is glad to find himself in the middle of these festivities" (HR, 60). The beauty and colourfulness of the landscape evoke "a feeling of nostalgia for the vague memories of youth and long-forgotten images of a good place" (Bell 2009, 21). These positive images are, however, disrupted by the memory of forced removals during apartheid. This already reveals that the narrative does not paint a solely rosy picture of the past despite the memories of stunning natural beauty. In an interview Zakes Mda tells about his own memories of his family's forced removal:

Only fifty years ago my grandfather had his orchards of peaches, apricots, apples, grapes, pears and quinces [on the pink mountain]. The apartheid government forced the mountain communities down to the lowlands; crowded spaces that could afford better surveillance against what they referred to as terrorist activity. (Mda 2009b, 10)

In his novel as well as in his memory, Mda juxtaposes the idealised ancient village with the brute reality of the apartheid era. Thus, his, as well as Camagu's, nostalgic memories are directed at one period of the past (precolonial/preapartheid) and disrupted by another (colonial/apartheid).

With his poetic and beautiful description of the rural landscape throughout the novel, Mda is in danger of idealising the setting of Qolorha in specific and of the rural areas in general. While the city is characterised as an unfriendly place where Camagu only experiences frustrations, Qolorha-by-Sea and its natural surroundings represent the exact opposite (as will become obvious in later chapters). The parallel, beautiful descriptions of the past and present rural landscapes establish a unity between the two places and reflect Mda's appreciation of landscape (cf. Chapter 2.2.6.4). Only a careful reading and knowledge about the region allows one to see the locale's devastating deficiencies. While the novel's setting, the Eastern Cape, doubtlessly displays breathtakingly beautiful rural landscape, it is also the poorest part of the country with "the

worst levels of poverty, infant mortality, life expectancy, illiteracy, infrastructure, services and skills [...] in the country” (waga Mage cited in Jacobs 2002, 234). As Jacobs notes, “[t]rue democracy is no more readily available to these people than running water or electricity” (2002, 234). Mda does not overtly mention the poverty of the region in his novel. Only the facts, that the villagers do not have electricity or running water and that only Camagu and Dalton have cars implicitly allude to the region’s continuing poverty (Jacobs 2002, 234). Thus, even though the narrative represents the past and present chronotopes in their ambiguities, Mda is in danger of romanticising the rural landscape by ignoring the life-determining poverty in that region. At the same time, and this illustrates nostalgia’s complexity, one might argue, he uses the language of nostalgia and longing in order to reevaluate a vastly ignored region and people of the country.

The Value of Traditions – The Majola Snake

Camagu undergoes an internal transformation in the course of the narrative: at the beginning, he still relies on his Western knowledge and rationality. He is more drawn towards the side of the Unbelievers and wonders “why the Believers are so bent on opposing development that seems to be of benefit to everyone in the village” (HR, 71). However, he gradually comes to appreciate the local mythical and spiritual aura. One key event that brings back Camagu’s own cultural connectedness and confronts him with his own traditional roots is his encounter with a brown mole snake. On one of his first days in Qolorha, he finds such a snake in his bed and is overjoyed because the Majola snake is the totem of his amaMpondomise clan:

Camagu is beside himself with excitement. He has never been visited by Majola, the brown mole snake that is the totem of his clan. He has heard in stories how the snake visits every newborn child; how it sometimes pays a visit to chosen members of the clan to give them good fortune. He is the chosen one today. (HR, 98)

Having lived in exile for over thirty years, Camagu has to large parts been socialised and educated according to Western standards. The encounter with his totem, however, immediately brings back his historical and cultural memory and Camagu celebrates his lucky encounter.

It is this encounter with his totem which opens Camagu's awareness and appreciation of local traditions and their link to mythical interpretations of the world that have been passed on from generations immemorial. Camagu does not think of traditions

and the celebration of myths as backward or reactionary but, instead, grows even more appreciative of them than most of the villagers.

In fact, the encounter with the Majola snake is one of the key incidents which encourages Camagu to positively look back at the past, at historical memory and to appreciate the cultural practises and traditions which symbolise a coherence of past and present. According to Chase and Shaw,

traditions are represented as the means by which our own lives are connected with the past. Tradition is the enactment and dramatisation of continuity; it is the thread which binds our separate lives to the broad canvas of history. (1989, 11)

Nostalgia is deeply entangled with the practises of tradition, not only, as Chase and Shaw point out, because they share a conservative nature through which the past is filtered and manipulated to serve particular purposes in the present but also in a more positive way. As the example of Camagu suggests, the totem, as part of tradition, reconnects Camagu with his cultural self. Moreover, as David Bell suggests, the fact that the well-educated Camagu recognises his own totem suggests a relevance for the African belief system in contemporary and modern South Africa (2009, 23). On a more personal level, Camagu's encounter with his totem strengthens his identity as an African from the amaMpondomise clan. After all, the experience of his own cultural roots brings him to see and accept alternative ways to Western mainstream thinking. From then onwards, Camagu is more critical of the dangers of capitalist development to both landscape and culture.⁸

Connectors to the Past – Women and Landscape

In Qolorha, the choices for Camagu's search for his cultural and historical self are designed by three female attractions. First, as already illustrated, Camagu is caught by the magic of tradition through NomaRussia's voice. In Qolorha where his attention is caught by the village teacher Xoliswa, the Western beauty, and the rural beauty Qukezwa (who eventually seduces him with her natural and mystical aura). Camagu finds himself in a similar situation as Jane Austen's female characters. In reference to Jean Kennard's concept of the "two suitor convention" (1978) (Dannenberg 2004, 4).⁹

⁸ After discovering his traditional roots, Camagu reacts with more openness and understanding to the mystical world: "He says at first he did not understand the reasons for the opposition to what the Unbelievers call progress. But now it is clear to him that the gambling city will not benefit the village" (HR, 116–117).

⁹ Caught in this "two brides convention," he probes his choices between these two rivalling women. Moreover, the narrative presents these two dissimilar women in clichéd ways in order to illustrate the conflict between modernisation and tradition. This clichéd representation is further supported by depicting "female bodies," which,

Qukezwa, as the female bearer of “Africanness,” comes to attract not only Camagu’s sexual but also his cultural desires and his appreciation of ancient traditions and the natural environment.¹⁰ In Johannesburg, Camagu feels empty, disoriented and drained of his enthusiasm to make South Africa his home, all symbolised by his lack of dreams:

Camagu used to see himself as a pedlar of dreams. That was when he could make things happen. Now he has lost his touch. He needs a pedlar of dreams himself, with a bag full of dreams waiting to be dreamt. A whole storage full of dreams. (HR, 36)

In Qolorha, Camagu finds his pedlar of dreams in both the natural landscape and Qukezwa. Both inspire his mystical imagination, his link to the past and to the myth of the surroundings, his connection to his clan and his ancestors as well as to culture and tradition. Moreover, as Dannenberg points out, “Qukezwa commences his cultural re-education in the realities of the local natural environment” (2009, 185). Qukezwa introduces Camagu to the natural environment of Nongqawuse’s valley – the place where Camagu finally gets “[r]estored to a sense of local identity” (Dannenberg 2009, 188). In line with Mda’s understanding of landscape and the *domaine perdu* (cf. Chapter 2.2.6.4), the natural world, trees, rivers, plants are the bearers of the past – at the same time they inhabit the passage of time; the past, the present and the future.¹¹

Especially due to his encounter with Qukezwa, Camagu is also drawn into the mystical world and the rich heritage of the Xhosa people. This move suggests an opening up of the modern identity towards the appreciation of traditional culture. Instead of seeing the appreciation of local colour as a backward leap, the narrative demonstrates the dynamism of traditional life. Thus, the value and the importance of negotiating the different and seemingly opposing forces, modern and traditional, in contemporary society in terms of personal and national identity are emphasised. The dreams that Camagu needs to dream are stored in the landscape of memories to which he finds access and appreciation through Qukezwa. At the end of the novel, Camagu is a character who can

according to Meg Samuelson, “become implicated in a nostalgic restoration of an ‘African identity’” (2009, 237). NomaRussia and Qukezwa represent “Africanness” through their traditional lifestyles and thus embody the Renaissance of the African self.

¹⁰ As Wendy Woodward points out, Camagu undergoes an initiation in reversed form: “In a reversal of the “Jim comes to Jo’burg” trope so common to earlier South African stories in which a country bumpkin learns about the intricacies of the metropolis, the urbane Camagu learns from rural villagers, whom he initially patronised, about his place in post-elections South Africa” (2003, 182).

¹¹ Overall, Nongqawuse’s valley in its natural beauty evokes images of paradise. This impression, however, is again juxtaposed to the site of horror which the valley witnessed during the mass starvation following the cattle killing.

“make things happen” again. He is embedded in a family and established home when he marries Qukezwa and settles permanently in Qolorha:

Although he has not said it in so many words, he regards Qolorha as his home now, and it is reasonable for Dalton to suspect he will not be thinking of going to America or even back to Johannesburg in the near future. He often says this is the most beautiful place in the world. (HR, 139)

Furthermore, Camagu also becomes an active and accepted member of the village community when through him Nongqawuse’s valley is declared a heritage site, and the backpacker eco-tourism project and cooperative he set up turn out to be profiting the local community.¹²

In the encounter with the villagers, Camagu is “spiritually transformed” (Lloyd 2001, 35); he re-discovers his own traditional roots and finds his new home amongst the community of Qolorha: “His sojourn at the village actually initiates a process of rediscovering his Xhosa identity, lost to him during the long years of exile” (Lloyd 2001, 37). Qolorha is the place where Camagu has found his soul.

Conclusively, although Camagu displays nostalgic sentiments, he is not depicted as a classic nostalgist. Unlike the exile who longs for his home, Camagu is an exile who has returned home. Thus, he does not represent an Odyssean nostalgist whose nostalgic journey ends with his arrival on Ithaca. Rather, his nostalgic reminiscences are inspired by the rural beauty NomaRussia and, as has been illustrated, only really begin once he has entered Qolorha, the landscape of beauty, myth and magic. Nostalgia revives not only his own cultural roots but also connects him with the landscape and the people of Qolorha.

¹² In reference to the inherent allusion of the novel’s title to Joseph Conrad’s often debated novel *Heart of Darkness*, Camagu’s journey to the heart of redness is diametrically opposed to Marlow’s journey to the heart of darkness. Instead of darkness and fear, Camagu discovers many colours and beauty. Qolorha and its landscape resembles a canvas of beautiful colours which is added to by Qukezwa’s singing in glaring colours, “[c]olors of today and yesterday” (HR, 271).

3.1.2.3 Dalton's Sense of Be-longing

Any stable notions of home and “pure ethnic” identity as well as the ambiguities of nostalgia become further challenged by the only White character on the present time level, John Dalton. Dalton grew up among the Xhosa community and is represented as follows:

Dalton is stocky and balding, with hard features a long rich beard of black and silvery-grey streaks. He always wears a khaki safari suit. He looks like a parody of an Afrikaner farmer. But he is neither an Afrikaner nor a farmer. (HR, 8)

His outward appearance demonstrates the mutual influence of Afrikaner and British – a parody because he resembles the extremes of these two White settler cultures. Dalton is a hybrid figure on several levels: his “heart is an umXhosa heart” (HR, 8) and “[h]e speaks better isiXhosa than most of the amaXhosa people in the village” (HR, 8).¹³

His eponymous ancestor had first come to this place as a soldier for Queen Victoria. During that time Dalton, as a colonial agent, was among the people responsible for the beheading of Zim and Bhonco's common ancestor, the patriarch Xikixa. He later settled in Qolorha and started a business as a trader. The present John Dalton continues this business and has become an integrated member in the village.

While his colonial forefathers allied with the Unbelievers, the amaGogotya, the present John Dalton aligns with the Believers, the amaThamba, fighting against the Western, capitalist form of progress propagated by the developers with their idea of establishing a holiday complex. As the colonial John Dalton's participation in the colonial war against the Xhosa and KhoiSan suggests, a complete identification of the present with the past John Dalton seems to be problematic. Accordingly, John Dalton does not mention his ancestor during the course of the novel. However, Zim and Bhonco alike remind Dalton of his colonial forbear and his part in shaming the patriarch and his offspring by boiling Xikixa's head several times. It would, therefore, seem logical that Dalton would avoid any positive memories because such nostalgic reminiscences would confront him with guilt and shame since his ancestors were responsible for the suffering during

¹³ He also voluntarily took part in the cultural custom of initiation every boy in Xhosa culture has to undergo. Thereby, he gained the acceptance of his fellow Xhosa, who see him as a “real man”: “In his youth, against his father's wishes, he went to the initiation school and was circumcised in accordance with the customs of the amaXhosa people. He therefore knows the secret of the mountain. He is a man” (HR, 8). Even though he is White, Dalton is not regarded as an outsider. Zim describes Dalton as “not really white. [...] It is just an aberration of his skin” (HR, 147). Thus, Dalton is a White South African of English descent who looks like an Afrikaner and is, additionally, married to a “Free State Afrikaner” (HR, 9).[□] In addition to that, he lives in a village where he and his wife are the only White people among the villagers. In short, he seems to resemble an amaXhosa in personality.

colonialism and during the Middle Generations. However, Dalton is indeed nostalgic, not for his own cultural past but for local precolonial history – a past before his ancestors arrived and damaged both local culture and nature.¹⁴

Dalton's Home

Despite his multicultural identity, the present John Dalton is geographically rooted in Qolorha-by-Sea and has a strong sense of belonging to the place and its community. His sense of rootedness is, however, tested in the course of the new socio-political situation. While the Rainbow Nation proclaims the togetherness of all people within one nation, Dalton's White English South African compatriots challenge him to leave the country and to set up his new home in a safer place in another part of the commonwealth:

“You are the only one who will remain in this mess, John,” says a cottage owner who sees himself as a prospective emigrant down the line. “Everyone is leaving.”

“Not everyone,” says Dalton, not bothering to hide his irritation. “The Afrikaners are not leaving.”

“Do you fancy yourself an Afrikaner, just because you married one?”

“I am staying here,” says Dalton. “I am not joining your chicken run. This is my land. *I belong here*. It is the land of my forefathers. ... The Afrikaner is more reliable than you chaps. He belongs to the soil. He is of Africa.” (HR, 139; emphasis added)

Thus, when it comes to the question of belonging, Dalton ironically identifies with his wife's ancestors in order to emphasise and give value to the continuance of his existence in South Africa – his wife's people had made the decision long ago to identify with Africa and to part with their European home. Home for Dalton is unquestionably Qolorha and South Africa and also in the “new post-apartheid climate of white nervousness” (Dannenbergh 2009, 180) he maintains a strong sense of belonging and identification with the land and its people.

¹⁴ This becomes most striking in Dalton's establishment of a cultural village, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.3.2.1.

In his argument with those who plan to emigrate, Dalton reveals their hypocrisy and unreflectivity:

You call the Afrikaner racist when he wants a homeland for his own people. You laugh at his pie-in-the-sky Orania homeland as a joke – which it is – but you are not aware that you yourselves have a homeland mentality. Your homelands are in Australia and New Zealand. This is why you emigrate in droves to those countries where you can spend a blissful life without blacks ... with people of your culture and your language ... just like the Orania Afrikaners. Whenever there is any problem in this country you threaten to leave. You are only here for what you can get out of this country. You think you can hold us all to ransom. (HR, 140)¹⁵

Dalton reveals his ethnic compatriots to follow similar nationalist ideologies as right wing Afrikaners whom they point a finger at for still perpetuating the “old” racist ideology. As Dalton suggests, the English South Africans’ mass migration to other, predominantly White former colonies not only demonstrates their own nationalist longing for a “pure” White, British homeland but also suggests their continuing of the imperial mission – to milk the colonies and to leave them behind once everything is taken. This, one might argue, reflects a “Frankenstein-syndrome”¹⁶: as soon as the experiment of creating a human – or in this case a new home in the colonies – fails, Frankenstein as well as the colonisers and apartheid agents flee from their responsibilities or escape from the strenuous process of rebuilding a new nation under a Black government. Simultaneously, the quoted passage also expresses the importance of home and homeland as a natural human need. Dalton is content to have found his community in the multiplicity of the South African nation: “He has had it with these clowns and their attitude. They can leave for all he cares. Yes, let them go. He does not need them. He has his community of Qolorha-by-Sea. And his wife’s people” (HR, 141). After all, he embraces the idea of a new South African identity that goes beyond clinging to exclusive ethnic communities, incorporating and embracing cultural hybridity.¹⁷ However, as will be illustrated in Chapter 3.3.2.1, Dalton is not free of his ancestors’ devastating role in the colonising

¹⁵ Orania is an exclusive Afrikaner community in the Northern province which has tried to realize its ideal of an Afrikaner Volkstaat (Orania website).

¹⁶ I am indebted to Kendell Geers for an inspiring discussion about the significance of the Frankenstein narrative in the South African context.

¹⁷ The term *hybridity* is used in its postcolonial understanding. While the term conveyed an extremely negative and racist meaning in the nineteenth century, Robert Young points out that its usage today “prompts questions about the ways in which contemporary thinking has broken absolutely with the racialized formulations of the past” (1995, 6). The application of the term in postcolonial discourse takes issue with colonialism and dismantles its power structures (cf. Young, 1995; Goetsch 1997; Feldbrügge 2004).

mission. His restorative nostalgic and patronising attitude, driven by his rather unconscious guilt pose dangers to a democratic society based on equality as he paradoxically continues the practises of his ancestors by wanting to do good.

3.1.2.4 “Anti-Nostalgics” – The Unbelievers

When first inspecting the two opposing communities in Qolorha-by-Sea, the Unbelievers appear to be strong “anti-nostalgics.” The Unbelievers are mainly represented by Twin-Twin’s offspring, Bhonco Ximiya, his wife NoPetticoat and their daughter Xoliswa. Their collective sense of belonging and identification is complicated by their, at times, divergent desires of wanting to be progressive and only forward-looking – this results in their unreflective imitation of American markers of progress on the one hand, and their need for cultural practises and journeys to the past on the other hand. The Unbelievers stand for progress and want their home to change into a developed Disneyland-like holiday resort. Therefore, they embrace the developers’ plans to build a gambling complex in Qolorha-by-Sea. Bhonco proudly announces:

[The Unbelievers] are moving forward with the times. That is why they support the casino and the water-sports paradise that the developers want to build. The Unbelievers stand for civilisation. [...] He is in the process of persuading his wife also to do away with the red ochre that women smear on their bodies and with which they also dye their isikhakha skirts. When the villagers talk of the redness of unenlightenment they are referring to the red ochre. But then even the isikkhakha skirt itself represents backwardness. NoPetticoat must do away with this prided isiXhosa costume (HR, 71).

It already becomes obvious that the Unbelievers uncritically embrace Western progress on the basis of its trivial signifiers such as attire and physical beauty.

The irony of the Unbelievers, and in particular Bhonco, is that, although they openly reject the past for its backwardness, they constantly take inspiration and meaning from it. They verbally reject any kind of traditions because they signify “the darkness of redness”¹⁸ (HR, 71), but they simultaneously practise rituals and traditions inherited from the past. In the same way, the Unbelievers pronounce their unbelief in all matters while throughout the novel pronouncing their belief, namely in progress, “the light of civilization” (HR, 227).

Ironically, whenever it suits them, that is whenever it comes to a quarrel between the Believers and the Unbelievers – and there is hardly any time when it does not come to

¹⁸ The “darkness of redness” creates a pleonasm which again intensifies the Unbelievers disregard of African traditional life.

that – the Unbelievers recall the past in order to denounce the Believers in the present. Repeatedly, Bhonco blames John Dalton for his ancestor and that man’s role in the subjugation of the Xhosa nation. As Siphokazi Koyana observes, “Dalton has failed to respond satisfactorily to expressions of pain about the beheading of African ancestors under the guise of advancing scientific research” (2003, 57).¹⁹ Holding onto past injustices as an explanation for present wrongdoings, Bhonco repeatedly demands his ancestor’s head back from the present John Dalton.

Towards the end of the novel, Bhonco has come to realise that his stern belief in unbelief and his mobilisation against the “redness” in his village has failed: the Believers successfully manage to declare Nongqawuse’s Valley a heritage site, his wife joins the Believers’ cooperation and his daughter leaves to join the Aristocrats in Pretoria. Upon that, Bhonco’s failures and dissatisfactions acuminate in a dramatic scene in which he holds Dalton responsible for his present misery. He accuses him of the past and hits him on the head with a knobkerrie demanding the replacement of Xikixa’s head:

“I want you to ask your forefather to restore the head of my forefather.”

“The head of your forefather? Have you gone crazy?”

“Give me the head of Xikixa, Dalton!”

Before Dalton can answer, Bhonco hits him with his knobkerrie on the head. The trader falls down unconscious.” (HR, 274)

This scene not only calls for a thorough and equal dialogue about the past and the present, it is also a warning against quickly turning away from the past which can so easily lead to a repetition of history.

The failure to deal with history and the embittered clinging to one’s viewpoint – inherited over generations – also becomes apparent in the Unbelievers’ ancestor (on the past time level): “Twin-Twin wakes up every morning with yesterday’s anger” (HR, 272). Twin-Twin’s failure to deal with the past is paralleled with Bhonco’s failure to do so in the present. This suggests that as long as the Unbelievers and the Believers (and people in general) do not face and try to come to terms with their pasts, the present conflicts will be carried on into the future.

¹⁹ Koyana points to a key difficulty not only South Africans but countries throughout the world are confronted with: how to compensate for past wrongs sensitively, effectively and honestly so that a reconciliation and communication between oppressor and oppressed can take place? As Koyana’s quote further suggests there are still dissatisfactions about the ways in which the past has been dealt with in South Africa, especially by the former oppressors.

Communication with the Ancestors – The Trance Dance as Nostalgic Practice?

The past also provides a significant source of meaning and healing in the present. Ancestors, thereby, play a key role in the lives of the present characters, be they Believers or Unbelievers. As already suggested, Bhonco does indeed believe in the ancestors. Although rejecting traditions, he respects the Otherworld, believes in its messengers and follows mystical practices in order to commune with the ancestors. According to Koyana, the movements between past and present “are connected to African spirituality as it manifests itself in this particular place” (2003, 59). The rural village of Qholorha is a place that lives by myths and magic which gives expression to the Xhosa’s belief system. In Xhosa cosmology the afterworld and the presence of the past in the present through spirits, ancestors and their messengers form the very basis of everyday life (Koyana 2003, 59; metmuseum 2004). As spiritual beings the ancestors become mediators between ordinary mortals and God. Life in the world of the ancestors is a continuation of life on earth and thus transgresses a Western linear understanding of time. Unsurprisingly, and in accordance with the narrative’s breaking from Western chronology, ancestors represent a frequent trope in the novel.

The Unbelievers commune with their ancestors in a trance dance, an age-old tradition borrowed from the abaThwa people, who are often referred to as the “original people” of Southern Africa. According to Bhonco’s logic, the trance dance helps the Unbelievers to induce sadness and thus supports their cult of being “such sombre people that they do not believe even in those things that can bring happiness to their lives” (HR, 3). It is significant to note that the spiritual re-living of the past does not bring the Unbelievers to the Otherworld – “the world of the ancestors that runs parallel to his world” (HR, 262) – but to the past world where the ancestors lived in flesh and blood before they died and entered the Otherworld (HR, 73).

Their memory ritual can be seen as containing nostalgic elements which run along reversed lines of logic: instead of longing for the pleasantries of the past they long for the sad and traumatic experiences of the past. However, no matter if longing for pleasantries or sadness the result of the nostalgic longing is a feeling of relief and vitality in the present. What the Unbelievers find in the past fills them with happiness for the present and future. The journey to the past virtual world is a temporary escape from the present and gives the present selves strength to cope with the challenges of their daily lives. Thus, in a rather vexed way, their return to the past bears nostalgic elements, and the trance dance becomes a way to access and connect with their cultural past world. Moreover,

their mental journey to the past is not rationally questioned or devalued as a trivial, dreamy longing to connect to a bygone past. As already indicated, in Xhosa cosmology time is not understood as linear but as cyclic. Thus, the connection between the world of the living and the world of the dead is not separated from each other but, rather, the world of the ancestors gives meaning and strength to the world of the living.

As the above example exemplifies, the longing for a past time runs across different cultures and world views, which supports and demonstrates the study's thesis that nostalgia is a human condition and a psychological strategy for human beings to connect their present with their past selves in order to endure or find meaning in the present and the future. The Unbelievers' memory ritual becomes a survival strategy in the present. Accordingly, it is almost an existential shock to them when the abaThwa demand their dance back: "But how are we going to survive without the dance? How are we going to induce sadness in our lives without visiting the sad times of the forefathers?" (HR, 188) This quote additionally suggests that the past also functions as a source of appreciating the present via conveyed and imagined experiences.

Writer and critic Lewis Nkosi contests this fictional representation of the trance dance as inauthentic: "In Mda's novels there are moments of nostalgia, certainly, but here even the nostalgia is a borrowed emotion" (2002, 8). Nkosi dismisses the state of trance as "a manipulation of faked emotion which is then portrayed by the author as both decadent and inauthentic" (2002, 8). It is inauthentic because the dance is borrowed and because the past is a borrowed past and "only" imagined. A few lines later, however, he acknowledges that, "[n]ostalgia is perhaps always inauthentic, an onanistic daydream" (2002, 8). In this case, Nkosi renders his own argument obsolete as nostalgic narratives always create a virtual world, a world of selective remembrances or imaginings that are always fictional and therefore inauthentic. What Nkosi does not account for is the implied author's play with authenticity; Mda portrays the elders' nostalgia for the past as, to their understanding, an anti-nostalgic act which also reverses the logic of nostalgia – an emotion occupied by pleasantries only. While for Nkosi, the idea of visiting the site of trauma through nostalgia is not plausible, the narrative's reversed logic of a nostalgic journey indeed bears potential – it might be valuable as a way to find access to a difficult past.

Nkosi analyses *The Heart of Redness* as an example of "anti-nostalgia" and generalises the failure of nostalgic sentiments in contemporary South African literature: "I would say South African literature shows a certain incapacity for generating nostalgia for

the past, a pastness which can be recreated regrettably as a moment of loss or state of vanished happiness” (2002, 9). Countering this, the present analysis demonstrates that the implied author does indeed recreate regrettable moments of loss. Moreover, the question arises why the Unbelievers have to borrow a trance dance in the first place. Apparently, the disruptions of colonialism and apartheid and the advent of modernisation have repressed such traditional practises in order to cut the present off from the past and its heathen practices. The fact that the Unbelievers – although claiming to reject the past and its backward cultural rituals – still borrow cultural practises which bring them into communication with their ancestors hints at a failure of the postapartheid to recuperate the value of ancient African traditions. With reference to the contemporary time level, Jana Gohrisch writes that, “[t]he irony of the memory-ritual draws the reader’s attention to the changed realities in South Africa, which call for a critical rewriting of the disconnected past to enable a shared future” (2006, 241). Hence, nostalgic elements in such traditional practices like the trance dance can provide a link between past, present and future. Accepting the reversed logic and the ability to connect timescapes, the traditional and spiritual act of the trance dance can be analysed as a nostalgic practise which helps to provide access to different temporal dimensions.

3.1.2.5 Xoliswa – The Anti-Nostalgic Par Excellence

A refusal to deal with the cultural past at all is exemplified in Bhonco’s daughter Xoliswa Ximiya. She is an Unbeliever in the extreme and, in fact, the only Unbeliever who does not follow any traditions except, of course, the cult of unbelieving. Xoliswa is the only figure who has totally separated her life from Xhosa background, adopting the American life style. Xoliswa rejects the memory ritual of the Unbelievers precisely because it looks backwards, to the past. “It is embarrassing, really,” she says. “I don’t know why they do not want to forget our shameful past” (HR, 88). Xoliswa’s solution to dealing with the past is to simply forget it and move forward. This, ironically, parallels a White South African strive to forget about the past:

The sufferings of the Middle Generations are only whispered. It is because of the insistence: Forget the past. Don’t only forgive it. Forget it as well. The past did not happen. You only dreamt it. It is a figment of your rich collective imagination. It did not happen. Banish your memory. It is a sin to have a memory. There is virtue in amnesia. The past. It did not happen. It did not happen. It did not happen. (HR, 137)

This mantra most pointedly criticises the attempt to ignore the past by cutting it off from

one's active memory – thereby it refers to all South Africans, and by extension to all people. In his essay “South African Theatre in an Era of Reconciliation,” Mda addresses the dangers of ignoring memory and of wilfully trying to cut out unpleasant parts of the past:

There is a demand from some of my white compatriots that since we have now attained democracy we should all have collective amnesia, because memory does not contribute to reconciliation. Our new identity-in-the-making is threatened by memory. We should, therefore, not only forgive the past, but we should forget it as well. However it is impossible to meet this demand, for we are products of our past. We have been shaped by our history. Our present worldview and our mindset is a result of our yesterdays. (2002, 280)²⁰

With *The Heart of Redness*, Mda has written a novel which draws attention to the continuing difficulties of facing and dealing with the past and challenges the readers to question their own ways of coming to terms with their biography. One way of engaging with the past and connecting the past with the present is, as suggested in this thesis, by nostalgically looking back and seeing or imagining the positive aspects of an overall troubled and violent past.

The Scars of History

The irony of Xoliswa's vehement denial and repression of the past evaporates when she is visited by the scars of history. Xoliswa is reminded by her ancestors' scars that she cannot escape her identity and her past cultural self by just dressing in a new modern identity. These scars function as a reminder of the flagellation of the Unbelievers' ancestor Twin-Twin when he tried to protect his first wife against the accusations of being bewitched. Bhonco also has to bear the scars which are usually only passed on to every first-born male. Just when Xoliswa has decided to turn her back and escape the village of redness she is visited by the symbols of the past:

She wakes up one day and finds that the scars of history have erupted on her body. All of a sudden her ancestor's flagellation has become her flagellation. She rebels against these heathen scars. She refuses to believe that they are part of an ancestral vengeance (HR, 261).

Ironically, the character who rejects her cultural history and myths the most is visibly

²⁰ In another interview Mda said: “There could never be national amnesia. I mean that would never happen because the people have memory and people have recorded what has happened in their day-to-day life and they continue to do so. So, even if anybody could try to make people forget about the past, I mean, the people will not forget” (2009c, 368).

caught up by her past. However hard she tries, she can neither deny the past, nor her forbearers' history and culture any longer since these are inscribed on her body. Xoliswa, however, tries to escape her past in hope of finding a plastic surgeon and of adopting a new and desired identity. But even removing the scars will not delete her past consciousness for it would also delete her identity. Mda is wary of creating a new identity by ignoring a past identity which cuts the present from the past self and thereby leads to an incomplete personal and national identity: "A new collective identity at the expense of memory is, in my view, not feasible. Memory is vital to identity. Memory loss leads to loss of identity, because who we are is fundamentally linked to memory" (2002, 280).

In sum, the Unbelievers' rejection of the past is revealed as only an act of mimicry of Western values. It reveals how effective the colonisation of the natives' minds has worked and continues to prevail in postcolonial times. Thus, while denying their own cultural past, their memory ritual illustrates that historical memory is essential for the construction of the present identity. Xoliswa's extreme anti-past and anti-nostalgic attitude and the denial of her historical memory and her cultural identity is predestined to fail. As the scars of history suggest, one's past is part of one's identity because "[w]e are the sum total of what we are and who we are. [...] our historical memory has got a duty to our identity and will continue to. Because the past is always a strong presence in our present whether we like it or not" (Mda 2009c, 359). As hard as one denies the past, it will, at some point, resurface. A positive embrace of the past is practised by the Believers and especially by Xoliswa's antagonist Qukezwa. The next chapter will therefore look at the Believers' longing for a past time and space.

3.1.2.6 Nostalgics – The Believers

In the same way that the Unbelievers celebrate their cult of unbelief, the Believers celebrate their cult of belief by rigidly rejecting Western progress. Moreover, the Believers' sense of be-longing is deeply entangled with their ancestral home and its natural surroundings (as will be further illuminated in the following subchapters). This becomes most explicit in the elder Zim and his daughter Qukezwa, who are portrayed as the characters with the strongest sense of belonging to the landscape. Hence, Zim does not question his place on earth; his home is indisputably Qolorha and his community the Believers.

Zim

talks passionately about his valley. When he began to walk, he walked in this valley. He looked after cattle in this valley. He was circumcised here. His grandfather's fields were here. His whole life is centered in this valley. He is one with Intlambo-ka-Nongqawuse – Nongqawuse's Valley. (HR, 46)

Zim often visits Nongqawuse's Pool and recalls the prophecies in his yearning for the days before the colonial invasion destroyed amaXhosa tradition as well as the natural landscape.

The Importance of Ancestors

Another parallel between Believers and Unbelievers – despite their opposing each other – that becomes striking is their embrace of the ancestors. The Believers are constantly in contact with their ancestors through communication with birds and bees, which are messengers, and through talking in whistles, in “the language of the spirits” (HR, 117). In their present lives, the Believers take inspiration and meaning from the myths and practises of the past and the Otherworld. The ancestors communicate with Zim in particular, whose worldview is deeply rooted in the myths and traditions of his culture, through birds, bees and the natural world.²¹ Zim “[u]nlike Bhonco, [...] does not mourn the past but communicates with the world of the present ancestors” (2001, 36). The strong connection to the ancestors is also carried on by his daughter and sometimes, “[t]hey both sound like birds of the forest” (Lloyd HR, 46). Qukezwa is the living link to the ancestor in the present and the hope of carrying the traditions into the future. John Su points to the significance of the ancestor figure as representing the longing to reconnect to cultural knowledge and traditions. In South Africa, these were largely suppressed by colonial/apartheid states and ignored by historiography:

The ancestor figure becomes the crucial mediator between a late imperial or postcolonial present and a precolonial past, and the reconnection with the ancestor figure enables the recovery and transmission of memory to the next generation. (2005, 13)

The communication with and belief in the ancestors becomes a “restitutive link” (Davis 1979, 36) between the precolonial past and the postcolonial present. Thus, the nostalgic re-imaginings of the past by the Believers, especially by Zim and Qukezwa, become a

²¹ The Believers have different ancestors responsible for the important areas of their daily lives: “the ancestors of the sea, the ancestors of the forest, the ancestor of the veld, and the ancestors of the homestead” (HR, 38).

way to connect the present culture with the past culture and to thereby establish cultural coherence.

Furthermore, Qukezwa's and the Believers' nostalgia for the times before the colonial disruption can be seen as a reaction to the dangers of contemporary disruption – the forces of capital globalisation entering the village. Nostalgia and the imagining of unspoilt whole healthy social systems and natural environments can be an important trajectory for imaging and creating alternatives in the present and for the future. Recalling Bryan Turner once more, his first dimension of nostalgia implies the sense of historical decline and loss, involving a departure from some golden age of “homefulness.” This sense of loss, according to him, is a feature of historical and social upheaval:

The nostalgic mood is of particular importance in contemporary cultures in association with the loss of rural simplicity, traditional stability and cultural integration following the impact of industrial, urban, capitalist culture on feudal social organization. (1987, 150)

Considering the dangers of, for instance, Zim's harking back to the past, the Believers' nostalgia can be positively interpreted as countering the capitalist/neo-imperial forces which will eventually substitute local traditions and rural values for global homogenisation and urban anonymity. By including the Believers' nostalgic narrative, the precolonial past, as well as the cultural practises during colonialism are rehabilitated.

As this section illustrated, nostalgia is an elusive phenomenon with ambiguous forces. While it is a way for the Believers to make sense of their cultural selves in the disruptive times of globalisation, they are also in danger of hindering their own development by idealising the past through restorative forms of nostalgia.

Descendents of the “Original Inhabitants of the Land”

Zakes Mda has been variously accused of romanticising the Khoikhoi people (Rush 2003; Samuelson 2009). He indeed treads dangerous ground in his descriptions of the Khoikhoi both in *The Heart of Redness* as well as in *The Whale Caller* as he is close to romanticising them as the original people of the land.²² According to Meg Samuelson's

²² The Khoikhoi are known and often idealised as an ancient people and the bearers of age-old traditions. Also in his other novels Mda frequently mentions and refers to the Khoikhoi or related cultures as “the original inhabitants of the land.” In reference to *She Plays with the Darkness*, he explains that “[t]he Barwa, or bushmen as the white people called them [...] lived here happily for centuries, hunting animals and gathering wild fruits and roots, until the twins' ancestors came and drove them away, and killed some, and married others.” (Steele 2007, 240)

analysis of religious hybridity in *The Heart of Redness*, Mda keeps Khoikhoi beliefs inviolable:

Camagu comes to learn that “the Khoikhoi people were singing the story of Heitsi Eibib long before the white missionaries came to these shores with their similar story of Moses and the crossing of the Red Sea” (288). Thus, the Khoikhoi women – Qukezwa the first and second – are the bearers of a ‘pure’ and ‘uncontaminated’ African cultural tradition invested in the son, Heitsi. (2009, 241)

The assumption of any “pure” culture is usually something Mda is eager to contest. However, Samuelson’s sharp observation points to an interesting aspect: Mda’s own nostalgia for precolonial, traditional culture.²³ One might further speculate that his exile position and subsequent distance from his cultural home enforces his celebration of cultural roots and traditional rural culture. Mda himself states that he often depicts rural cultures “because they retain that magic, whereas the urban areas have lost it to Westernization” (cited in LLoyd 2001, 34).

In his novels, the characters that are most connected to African traditions, mysticism and the past, with implicit references to precolonial times, are indeed descendents of the Khoikhoi. And as Samuelson suggests, Mda does at times tend to stylise bearers of Khoikhoi identity, such as Zim and Qukezwa, as icons of the African Renaissance ideology. Hence, Zim and his daughter Qukezwa are the carriers of ancient traditions, re-living and re-imagining their cultural heritage in the present. This is further supported by Mda’s use of language. The passages dealing with the myths and traditions of the Believers are written in a colourful poetic language, which shows Mda’s own appreciation of ancient traditions. However, the descents of the Khoikhoi such as Zim, Qukezwa and particularly Heitsi represent hybrid identities – it would therefore be too quick a judgment to accuse Mda of celebrating “ethnic” purity. Even though he sometimes evokes the impression of romanticising Khoikhoi culture, his overall narrative testifies that Mda generally manages to highlight the diversity and dynamism of cultures and to criticise essentialist views. This becomes most obvious in the representation of Qukezwa.

²³ Mda’s use of the disputed term Khoikhoi supports Samuelson’s argument: since the Khoikhoi and San populations intermixed since times immemorial; many prefer the term Khoi-San. “Khoikhoi” thus evokes a “pure” culture.

3.1.2.7 The Quintessential Nostalgic? Qukezwa, Landscape and Restoring African Identity

Qukezwa is the character representing, next to her father Zim, the closest connection to her cultural past and traditions as well as to the natural and animal world. She is the embodiment of ancient myths and practises and has magic powers which are not fully understandable to the Western reader. Her character is constructed around different values and perceptions embodying African traditions and mythologies, life and culture. She symbioses nature, culture and tradition in her personality, is able to communicate with animals and the ancestors and thereby crosses borders between past and present, and between the human and non-human world. Consequently, Qukezwa has been characterised as representing “a quintessential Africanness” (Lloyd 2001, 36) or “the quintessential ecofeminist” (Sewlall 2007, 3). Moreover, she is representative of a dying tradition – such as the *umngqokolo*, the art of split-tone singing – and culture as she “is the only one left to carry forward the tradition of belief” (HR, 47):

She whistles and sings all at the same time. Many voices come from her mouth. Deep sounds that echo like the night. Sounds that have the heaviness of a steamy summer night. Flaming sounds that crackle like a veld fire. Light sounds that float like flakes of snow on top of the Amathole Mountains. Hollow sounds singing before. He [Camagu] once read of the amaXhosa mountain women who were good at split-tone singing. [...] He did not expect that this girl could be the guardian of a *dying tradition*. (HR, 152; emphasis added)

The colourful and poetic language of this quoted passage illustrates the narrative’s celebration of ancient tradition and Qukezwa’s portrayal as a nostalgic restoration of an “African identity” (Samuelson 2009, 237).

Postcolonial Nostalgia and the Symbiosis of Past and Present Identity

Qukezwa introduces Camagu to the wonders of the past. Contrary to Xoliswa’s vehement rejection of the prophetess Nongqawuse as a disgrace for her and her people, Camagu witnesses Qukezwa’s symbiosis with her ancestors when she praises Nongqawuse and tells him about the wonders inscribed by her into the valley:

“We stood here with the multitudes,” she says, her voice full of nostalgia. “Visions appeared in the water. Nongqawuse herself stood here. Across the river the valley was full of ikhamanga. There were reeds too. They are no longer here. Only ikhamanga remains. And a few aloes. Aloes used to cover the whole area. Mist often covers this whole ridge right up to the lagoon where we came from. It was like that too in the days of Nongqawuse. *We stood here and saw the wonders*. Many things have changed. The reeds are

gone. What remains now is that bush over there where Nongqawuse and Nombanda first met the strangers. The bush.” (HR, 105; emphasis added)

Qukezwa expresses a deep longing for her ancestral past and she even identifies herself as one of the people surrounding Nongqawuse. Due to this identification, Qukezwa relives this time and re-experiences the visions as if first-hand. This identification is neither questioned or judged as either rationally impossible or as romantically tainted. Rather, Qukezwa understands her present identity through re-imagining her past self. Thus, her nostalgia serves to connect the present with the past, to revive local and traditional ways of life and to create a “lost coherence” (Hutcheon 1994). This psychological value of nostalgia as a “restitutive link” becomes especially immediate in the postapartheid/postcolonial area: Qukezwa, one might argue, by nostalgically re-imagining her past cultural identity fills a vacuum caused by the repression and devaluation of traditional life during White rule (cf. postcolonial nostalgia). Thereby, Mda’s narrative technique of merging past and present serves to demonstrate Qukezwa’s connectedness to the past and the meaning it still has for her and her community. Mda couples her nostalgic longing with magic realist effects and the Xhosa cyclic sense of time. This supports the overall narrative frame resembling the African oral tradition. According to Meg Samuelson, “[a]s Qukezwa begins to dominate the plot, the sharp fragments of heterogeneous time begin to melt under the soft glow of nostalgia” (2009, 238). Interpreted positively, nostalgia is, for Qukezwa, a strategy which connects her directly with her ancestors and with which she blurs the borders between past and present time. Thereby, restorative elements of her nostalgia have psychological value.

Nostalgia as Strategy of Retrieving a Devalued Past

Qukezwa’s nostalgic re-living of the past counters prevailing historiographical representations of the Cattle-Killing Movement and in particular Xoliswa’s destructive perspective of their cultural past. Colonials created the version of a “chief’s” plot against the British, the apartheid era denounced the Xhosa tragedy as a national suicide and Xhosa-speaking South Africans today see the cattle-killing as a conspiracy act of the British in order to exterminate the Xhosas (Ashforth 1991, 581). In postapartheid times, this specific history has given rise to various interpretations. It appears that Nongqawuse is, in fact, very much alive in the present and stories about her, as Ashforth notes, differ

according to the political moral being propagated.²⁴ According to Koyana, Nongqawuse has not yet found such prominence in the overall South African population and the mass dying of the Xhosa in the nineteenth century has not yet entered the collective memory of South Africans. He observes that “[a]lthough the events of Qholorha are such an important part of South African history, most South Africans know nothing about these events. They are not part of the collective memory of the wider public” (2003, 58). Qukezwa retrieves the suppressed history and gives Nongqawuse, as the symbol for repressed history/ies, a voice. In other words, through Qukezwa’s (and to a lesser degree Zim’s) nostalgic and poetic re-imaginings of a colourful past, Nongqawuse and her followers are redeemed and thereby that particular past is given an alternative voice.

Landscape and Nostalgic Recuperation of Cultural Identity

As already illustrated, Qukezwa on both time levels is represented as the keeper of ancient and natural wisdom. Focusing on Qukezwa on the present time level, her nostalgia is inspired mainly by the beauty of the landscape which evokes in her a “deep longing for what used to be” (HR, 261). In face of the prospective “wonderful gambling city in all its crystal splendour and glory” (HR, 310), she mentally travels back to precolonial times when nature was still untouched by modernisation and colonial/Western invasions. She turns to nature and the past as sources for her present identity; the natural landscape thereby plays a crucial role in Qukezwa’s identification process as it serves as storing places of memories (Mda 2009b, 3). As Hilary Dannenberg observes,

[a] key aspect of the figure of Qukezwa on both time levels is an affinity with and deep knowledge of the local environment, which are represented as the most positive forces in the novel because they provide a concrete framework for forms of action and orientation which stay true to the spirit – and needs – of the local community. (2009, 185)

Qukezwa displays a profound understanding of the local fauna and flora, lives with nature and is, as her father, able to communicate with the non-human world. Her living of ancient traditions can be interpreted with her overall longing for the past and for her ancestors who still valued a traditional lifestyle in harmony with nature. Through

²⁴ As Ashforth further points out: “Young black activists, for instance, have a way of telling the story that makes Nongqawuse a willing tool of the devious Governor Grey. A lesson for all collaborators who would treat with unjust power. More conservative older leaders often tell the tale to point to the dangers of listening to impassioned youths. A third variation stresses the role of missionaries to press home the point that Black misfortunes are produced by whites. There are many other uses of the story, too. An officer of the Council of Churches for the region where the Cattle- Killing took place told me recently that he uses the story of Nongqawuse in combating the use of witchcraft” (1991, 582).

Qukezwa, Camagu and the reader come to understand the natural environment, the legacies and values inherited by the past and the significance of cultural traditions for her and by extension, as suggested here, for the South African nation. However, her nostalgic recuperating of ancient wisdom bears ambiguous, proliferating and destructive forces as discussed below.

Already during one of Qukezwa's and Camagu's first encounters, she educates Camagu about the local plants. Camagu sees her chopping away at some bushes with a panga, which he perceives as a form of vandalism and destruction of beautiful plants. The narrative juxtaposes Camagu's perspective – "[t]he chopping down of a stupid plant" – (HR, 90) to Qukezwa's own perception of her deed:

Nice plants, eh? Nice for you, maybe. But not nice for indigenous plants. This is the inkberry. It comes from across the Kei River. It kills other plants. These flowers that you like so much will eventually become berries. Each berry is a prospective plant that will kill the plants of my forefathers. And this plant is poisonous to animals too, although its berries are not. Birds eat the berries without any harm, and spread these terrible plants with their droppings. (HR, 90)

Later on, Qukezwa is summoned for cutting down all the "enemy trees" without even needing them in front of a traditional court.

At first, her activism is judged by the Unbelievers as an act of madness. Most of the elders, however, admit to Qukezwa's reasoning that in order for the indigenous plants to flourish again, their space needs to be regained and the foreign trees which spread like parasites therefore need to be cut off. One of the elders even "mutters his wonder at the source of Qukezwa's wisdom when she is but a slip of a girl" (HR, 216). After all, she gains the elders' respect with her ecological wisdom. Her claim in favour for the preservation of the indigenous fauna and flora displays what Sewlall calls her "intuitive ecological awareness" (2007, 10). He remarks that, "[t]hese traditional laws may be rooted in superstition, or even, religious injunction, but they effectively legislate on matters of conservation" (2007, 7). Qukezwa's retrieving of local wisdom and practises turn her into the safe keeper of natural beauty. According to Dannenberg, "Qukezwa is thus depicted as applying specific knowledge and observation of the local environment as part of a contemporary ecological form of post-colonial restoration of the Eastern Cape" (2009, 187).

By and large, Qukezwa represents the ambiguous mechanisms of restorative and reflective nostalgia. Although Qukezwa can be seen as restoring African indigenous and traditional identity to the chronotope of the present Qolorha by nostalgically turning to the past, she does not represent a static understanding of traditions. In other words, while Qukezwa seems to be the incarnation of tradition and the past, she also challenges certain aspects of her culture's ancient practises. When she appears in court, accused of cutting trees, the elders remind her of her status according to traditional law: "You are a minor still. Even if you were thirty or fifty you would still be a minor as long as you are not married", explains Chief Xikixa" (HR, 213). Qukezwa, however, is neither intimidated by the elders, nor by the laws or the traditions. Paying respect to the elders she explains that she indeed acts for the natural surrounding and in favour of the traditions that regulate a respectful living with landscape and animals. Qukezwa counters the patriarchal static system, which still denies females the right of voice and agency. She, in line with her unabashed nature, suggests that the law must be changed. Thus, although Qukezwa looks to the past to inspire her present life, she does not stagnate in the past. Through her, the narrative emphasises that culture and tradition are dynamic and, in fact, modern. As Jana Gohrisch suggests, "[h]er function in the novel is to preserve and pass on the knowledge about alternative ways of life" (2006, 242). Thus, with the help of Qukezwa's depiction, the present quality of historical memory and traditional knowledge is illuminated – knowledge which is not learned in schools. Besides, the significance of the past in the present is rehabilitated. In that way, Qukezwa represents not only her own, but also the implied author's postcolonial nostalgia (cf. Appendix/ Interview with Mda).

However, Qukezwa's activism for the conservation of indigenous plants also bears dangers. Qukezwa aims to restore the natural landscape to a precolonial state. This, however, poses difficulties since the alien plants have been implanted and "found a home" on the African landscape for several centuries. Following her argument, the act of imposing alien plants on the colonies represents a form of subjugation of nature by Western culture. Her acts of destroying everything Western seems to be a reversal of the colonial practises appropriating local landscapes as their playing grounds. Additionally, Qukezwa parallels the implantation of foreign plants and trees with the threat induced by the prospects of a gambling city and American tourists fooling around in the sea and

Nongqawuse's Valley. She, thereby, constructs the West one-dimensionally as a poisonous force.²⁵

Qukezwa's rejection of all Western influence is a form of erecting borders and therefore counter-productive to nation-building and to finding realistic solutions of dealing with conversation and preservation in a globalised world. While her activism in favour of the preservation of local landscape is extremely important, it also seems crucial to deal with the botanical plurality. The narrative demonstrates that in order to meet the demands of globalisation, Qukezwa and the Believers also need to revise their attitude toward progress by finding a constructive way to deal with modernisation. Although it is important to gain space for the native vegetation again, it is also vital to see the imported plants as part of today's flora and fauna translated into society, thereby valuing contemporary South Africa's diversity.²⁶ The novel gives a largely optimistic outlook to the possibility of negotiating African and Western, local and global demands in Qukezwa's and Camagu's final union. All in all, Qukezwa is represented as a keeper of traditions, teaching her (ecological) wisdom and thus assuring the continuity of historical memory. Her restorative nostalgic tendencies bear both dangerous and excluding elements as well as positive elements, and her (postcolonial) nostalgic recollections are not sentimental trivialities but carry significant weight for the restoration of the Xhosa and South African identity.

Summary of Polyphonic Nostalgia

The polyphonic representation of the characters' sense of home and their nostalgia for a better place in the past reveals the postapartheid state to be a site of multiple struggles. The protagonist Camagu travels through hopes and frustrations in his attempt to settle inhabiting more than one home until he finally finds his home in a landscape he associates with his childhood. His nostalgia, triggered by the landscape and the magic of the place as well as his fascination of Qukezwa, supports his openness and appreciation of the past and local traditions and restores a sense of rootedness among the Qolorha community.

²⁵ Mda chooses a problematic metaphor from the botanical world in order to draw parallels to the neo-colonial realities in postapartheid Qolorha/South Africa. He parallels the dangers of botanical colonisation with cultural neo-colonisation and points to the risk of being swept over by an American wave of homogenisation. In so doing, Mda does not argue against globalisation as his novel on various levels shows the forms of globalisation and hybridisation throughout time. Rather, he is wary and critical of globalisation that comes in the form of an all-imposing Americanisation: "We see government reinforcing American cultural hegemony in South Africa, seen already in the proliferation of American cultural products that are threatening to suffocate South Africa's" (Mda 2002, 288).

²⁶ Cf.: Feldbrügge 2010. "The Human and the Non-Human World in Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* and *The Whale Caller*." Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Dalton's sense of home and belonging is challenged when his ethnic compatriots are about to leave the country to escape being ruled by a Black government. For the opposing fractions of the Believers and Unbelievers, home becomes a continuing struggle of old rivalries. It turns out that for both the past provides a source of meaning to their present sense of belonging. Yet they fail to address and deal with their internal splitting in the past as in the present. The only character who rigidly – though unsuccessfully – rejects the past, her home and her local identity is Xoliswa. However, her “amnesic self” will always bear the scars of history reminding her of where she comes from. Her counterpart Qukezwa, on the contrary, turns to the past in order to reaffirm her cultural identity and rehabilitates the local past of the cattle-killing movement by attributing it with beautiful colours. The narrative thereby provides a different perspective on this period of the past. Qukezwa's rigid activism for the preservation of her natural surroundings has restorative nostalgic qualities. By aiming to restore the landscape to its past state before the invasion of foreign trees she also “Others” the foreign plants as aliens. While her acts are indeed ecologically valid, the danger lies in the easy transfer of the botanical to socio-political discourse. The restoration of the precolonial past would then suggest a return to an idealised “pure” culture, an origin home, thereby eradicating the passage of time. However, the restorative elements implied in her imaginative re-living of her ancestors' cultural life (in particular her namesake Qukezwa) work as a restitutive link: a recuperation of the past cultural identity through the connection of the past with the present.

3.2 Nostalgia, Tourism and Conservation

Maybe there are indeed many different paths to progress. (NoPetticoat in HR, 227)

The key conflict on the present time level in *The Heart of Redness* evolves from the dichotomy between Westernisation as *the only correct* form of civilisation and the importance of preserving traditions and the natural landscape. In particular, the prospects and destructive forces of tourism and Western development lie at the heart of the community's internal splitting. Conservation of culture and nature, thereby, provides the significant link to nostalgia as it aims at restoring an idealised past. Against this background, Zakes Mda presents various forms of contemporary tourism and discusses matters of sustainable tourism development for local communities in his fictional account of the Xhosa community in Qolorha-by-Sea.

Tourism enters postapartheid Qolorha mainly in the prospective establishment of a holiday and tourist gambling complex which is to be built in Nongqawuse's Valley. This gambling and motor sports complex falls largely into the category of mass tourism as introduced in the theory chapter. The ones who would profit from this kind of tourism is, first of all, the company which initiated the complex, and second, the different owners of the tourist attractions such as sports gear traders and hotel managers. Least of all, as Camagu remarks, would the locals profit from this kind of Western development.²⁷ Contrary to the Unbelievers, the Believers oppose the tourist project which they see as an invasion of their natural environment and their traditional way of life.²⁸ According to Rita Barnard, "Mda presents a certain kind of tourism as a figure of an invasive and homogenizing modernity" (2007, 167). This form of mass tourism is, however, not presented as an invasion without a choice, such as the parallel invasion of colonialism on the past time level (Dannenbergh 2009, 171). Largely inspired by Camagu and his mediating abilities, the people on the present time level are debating the kind of

²⁷ These are concerns, however, which Xoliswa and the Unbelievers do not raise. Blindly believing in the glorious promises of progress and civilisation, they do not see that local people would not profit from capitalist tourism because, as Camagu later remarks, the companies will bring their own workers. For them, mass tourism is tantamount to progress and civilisation because modern technologies will be introduced and people from all over will come to Qolorha and enlighten the "heathen place."

²⁸ One of Qukezwa's key arguments against the developers' plans, which also opens Camagu's eyes to the dangers of capitalist development, is the fact that she cannot live freely with nature any longer. The Believers are aware that the supposed progress will in fact bring backwardness to their village: it will destroy the natural landscape and their traditional way of life.

development which would be most sustainable. Thus, the villagers are not passive victims but in the course of the novel take an active part in advancing their ideas of local development.

In response to the destructive and invasive form of mass tourism, the narrative offers two counter-models of tourism which are represented by the characters Camagu and Dalton. Both of them see the dangers of Western-based mass tourism in the form of the holiday resort and propose their alternative ideas of eco-tourism. Thereby, the novel does not offer any easy solutions but suggests that also eco-tourism is complex and needs to be critically investigated. While the two characters see the need to preserve culture and nature, their ideas of cultural and natural preservation diverge. While Camagu offers an eco-tourism project which is based on self-empowering development ideas and regards culture as dynamic, Dalton's project of a cultural village attempts to preserve the amaXhosa culture of pre-modern quality in a timeless present.

The following subchapters will look at two outsiders of the Unbeliever-Believer conflict, Camagu and Dalton, who also begin arguing about their opposing ideas of sustainable tourism and development. Chapter 3.3.2.1 will therefore scrutinise Dalton's project of a cultural village before Chapter 3.3.2.2 takes a closer look at Camagu's clothing and seafood cooperative and his backpacker project.

3.2.1 Tourism as a Tool for Sustainable Development – Nostalgia Tourism versus Eco-Tourism

Camagu and Dalton support the Believer's aims to conserve nature and culture. Both of them are the agents who have the means and expertise in the establishment of environmentally friendly and cultural tourism projects. It soon becomes obvious that their approach to conserving both nature and culture vary tremendously and that "their enterprises [are] devoted to very different notions of conservation" (Barnard 2007, 169). Thus, Dalton and Camagu, the outsiders of the Believing-Unbelieving-conflict, also begin arguing about their understanding of sustainable development.

Camagu is well aware of the fact that if they want to successfully compete with the gambling city and get the villagers' support, they have to offer a lucrative alternative. Having interacted with the local people, Camagu is also aware of the villagers' dislike of Dalton's small tourist-touring project because it only profits Dalton and the two women. Thinking about strategies to prevent the holiday resort with Dalton and Zim, Camagu asks:

“But what alternatives do we offer? [...] If we oppose development projects that people believe will give them jobs, we must be able to offer an alternative. I heard that day at the imbhizo that they think you are taking this stand for John’s benefit. They [the villagers] say as things stand now, only his store and the Blue Flamingo Hotel benefit from tourists. And of course John’s lackeys – NoVangeli and NoManage.”

“Surely you don’t believe that,” protests Dalton.

“The important thing is that they do. We need to work out a plan how the community can benefit from these things that we want to preserve. We need –” (HR, 119)

The conversation is cut off, not however Camagu’s thinking of alternative community-based tourism projects which would suit the village as a whole and not only a chosen few.

In need of offering an alternative to both the mass tourist holiday resort and to Dalton’s exotic and nostalgic cultural tourism, Camagu comes up with the idea of creating a holiday camp where travellers come to enjoy natural landscape and traditional life. Dalton, however, while not rejecting that idea, comes up with his own idea of a cultural village – one which focuses on the preservation of traditional Xhosa culture before the invasion of industrialisation and colonisation. Their diverging approaches to conservation and tourism demonstrate two ways of dealing with cultural and environmental heritage and their use or misuse for sustainable tourism development in contemporary South Africa. While Dalton promotes a form of nostalgia tourism by establishing a cultural village where the locals work as actors performing a precolonial life, Camagu initiates an eco-tourist holiday camp, addressing travellers who are interested in both nature and genuine local culture. The following two chapters will look at the relation of nostalgia and Dalton’s and Camagu tourism development projects respectively.

3.2.1.1 Nostalgia Tourism – Dalton’s Cultural Village

While Dalton, the only White character in the village, opposes the form of mass tourism possibly entering Qolorha in the form of the gambling complex, he is not hostile to tourism. On the contrary, as illustrated above, he has already discovered a business in the beautiful landscape, history and mythical aura of Qolorha as well as in the appeal of (precolonial) traditional culture. In Dalton’s little tourism business, two women from the village, NoManage and NoVangeli, earn their living by displaying the customs and cultural practices of the amaXhosa called *amasiko* (HR, 96). After Dalton has toured the

tourists around Qolorha in his bakkie, he brings them to the two women who are then performing their “Xhosaness”.

Dalton’s cultural tourist practises are, however, not without problems. His urge to preserve both nature and culture and his initiated staging of ancient traditions as a tourist attraction verge on paternalism and exploitation. As a way to protect traditional culture against the invasion of Western capital and modernisation and as an extension of his tourist tours, Dalton plans to preserve the amaXhosa culture by creating a culture village. In his proposed cultural village, the Xhosa people would perform (and pretend to live) a past traditional lifestyle. Camagu opposes Dalton’s plans precisely because his village would not help the Xhosa to keep their traditions alive but, instead, it would freeze their culture in a pre-modern time. As Koyana rightfully points out, “Dalton hopes to transport his clients to an experience of deep, archaic time, regardless of how false this is” (2003, 60). In a conversation with Camagu, Dalton defends cultural villages, which display traditional culture as a proven kind of business. He says:

“Tourists like visiting such cultural villages to see how the people live. The village will have proper isiXhosa huts rather than the newfangled hexagons that are found all over Qolorha. Women will wear traditional isiXhosa costumes as *their forebears used to wear*. [...] Tourists will flock to watch young maidens dance and young men engage in stick fights.” (HR, 247; emphasis added)

Camagu rejects such tourist projects because they act out a lifestyle that is no longer lived. Instead, they are products of the marketing and stereotyping of a culture seen as immune to development and progress. Furthermore, Camagu criticises the fact that cultural villages combine different cultural practices from different cultures in one place, thus adding to their inauthenticity and artificiality. Upon Dalton’s argument that a cultural village intends “to show various aspects of the people’s culture in one place” (HR, 247), Camagu counters:

“That’s dishonest. It is just a museum that pretends that is how people live. Real people in today’s South Africa don’t lead the life that is seen in cultural villages. Some aspects of that life perhaps are true. But the bulk of what tourists see is the past ... of lot of it an imaginary past. They must be honest and say that they are attempting to show how people used to live. They must not pretend that’s how people live now. [...] It is an attempt to preserve folk ways ... to reinvent culture. When you excavate a buried precolonial identity of these people ... a precolonial authenticity that is lost ... are you suggesting that they currently have no culture ... that they live in a cultural vacuum? [...] I am interested in the culture of the amaXhosa as they live

today. The amaXhosa people are not a museum piece. Like all cultures, their culture is dynamic.” (HR, 247–248)

Camagu’s reasoning reveals the dangers of performing a life that is no longer lived and thus creates an impression as if that culture were beyond time. The staging of culture in a timeless present works against the appreciation of lived, real culture. In fact, the inauthenticity and artificiality of displaying culture contributes to the museumification of lived culture and tradition and contributes to the ignoring of their present realities. Moreover, Mda under the alias of Camagu, argues that tradition and progress are not opposing each other. Seeing culture in a vacuum and as static is to deny people the natural passage of time. In an interview Zakes Mda explains:

Tradition, of course, may include modernisation. [...] culture is dynamic, of course, it will always change in order to meet the demands of the present. That is what tradition is all about. In other words I don’t see it as something that is static. I see it as something that is dynamic, that will change all the time to meet the needs of the present [...]. (2009c, 359)

However, “dividing for the sake of dividing” seems to have also caught these two characters. Hence, Camagu and Dalton do not find a common path to negotiate their diverging eco-tourism ideas and Dalton establishes his cultural village in competition with both the capitalist holiday resort and Camagu’s planned backpacker ecotourist holiday camp.

Staged Authenticity

The display of culture in Dalton’s cultural village is linked to the act of performance. Bhonco describes the village as the following:

Although it is called a village, it is not really a village. There are four mud rondavels, thatched with grass and fenced in by reeds. The outside walls of the rondavels are decorated with colourful geometric patterns. Inside there are clay pots of different sizes, which are for sale. Grass mats are strewn all over the cow-dung floor. There is nothing else. In a large clearing in front of the rondavels, village actors walk around in various isiXhosa costumes. Some are sitting on tree stumps, drinking sorghum beer. When the tourists come, the amagqiyazana, the young girls who have not reached puberty, are *invited to dance*. They are always happy for the tips they get from the visitors, who are usually guests at the Blue Flamingo. (HR, 274; emphasis added)²⁹

²⁹ It is indeed interesting that the reader does not get to know any details about the Blue Flamingo Hotel – who owns it and how is it run?

Hence, the village becomes a “staged authenticity” (MacCannell 1999): the actors wear traditional costumes; instead of the modern hexagons, the village consists of the traditional rondavels, and as soon as tourists come, the acting of traditional life commences. The fact that the girls are “invited” to dance for the tourists emphasises that the actors are performing voluntarily. However, the tourist dollar already hints at a certain kind of economic dependency as could already be detected in NoPetticoat’s case. This suggests that the tourists who come to see Xhosa traditional life pay in order to see and experience something different – i.e. the (stereotypical) image already created by the tourist industry to “step back in time” and to be a distant viewer of a remote lifestyle. Again, this image does not represent the villagers as equals but as a romanticised ancient people and thus speaks to the tourist’s nostalgia for a pristine life and for the noble savage (cf. Chapters 2.2.6.2 and 3.2.2).

Dalton’s cultural village, which can be analysed as a performative act of inauthentic culture, consists of a front and back area (Goffman in MacCannell 1999). The front area is the space of performance and the back area the space where the performers are invisible to the audience and can relax or change their costumes. In contrast to NoPetticoat’s lack of a back region, the fact of the artificiality and the act of performance in Dalton’s village maintain, as Rita Barnard argues, the villagers’ dignity: “The very inauthenticity of their performance is, one might say, its saving grace: there is, in Irwin Goffman’s terms, the possibility of a ‘back region’ of ‘intimate reality’ to their public and commercial ‘front’” (2007, 167). However, to the unknowing tourist, front and back region merge together and the native actor is perceived as the “real native”. Even though the actor can retreat to a back region outside the village the image of culture and “the native” as being outside of present life is manifested. A culture and its people which are not part of present life are easily stigmatised as either backward or idealised as romantic savages. In any case, they are excluded from any important present-day socio-political interaction.

MacCannell argues that the tourist quest is a quest for the authentic and a response to the alienation of modern society.³⁰ A cultural village such as Dalton’s, one might say, satisfies the tourist quest momentarily; it represents a simulacrum thriving on nostalgia

³⁰ Moreover, the problem inherent to a cultural village is the fact that the (mass) tourist, longing for the simplicities of life, for nature and the rural, wants to believe in the authenticity of the cultural display (which upholds the stereotype of the ethnic Other). This image would be destroyed if one saw the back region or the “native” in his normal life.

for the precolonial: the “ethnic” group pretends to be a pre-historical authentic community and the village pretends to be living as in pre-historic times.³¹ After all, Dalton’s village “does fulfil the ethnographer’s dream of a bounded site” (Barnard 2007, 169).

The Heart of Redness presents two such performative cultural shows – the local dancers in the Flamingo Hotel and the villagers and dancers in the cultural village. While the first performers are not paid for their performance although they clearly play into the hands of the Flamingo Hotel – they only share the tips they get from the tourists – Dalton’s actors are paid workers as the cultural village should be “owned and operated by the villagers” (HR, 247). Hence, despite its controversial representation, Dalton wants to uphold the idea and image of ethical behaviour to the locals. How much of a say the actors have in the village is, however, not mentioned. As MacCannell confirms, the economics behind such bounded spaces often lie in the hands of entrepreneurs and not in those of the villagers. Furthermore, MacCannell points to the dangers of displaying inauthentic culture, as in the process of commodifying an inauthentic culture the very people alienate themselves from their authentic culture:

Perhaps what really matters in ethnic tourist contexts is only that the rhetoric of ethnic relations changes to create the impression of progress while older forms of repression and exploitation are perpetuated beneath the surface. This is how the pseudo-change works. When an ethnic group begins to sell itself, or is forced to sell itself, or ... is sold as an ethnic attraction, it ceases to evolve naturally. (The group members begin to think of themselves not as people but as *representatives* of an authentic way of life.) (1992, 178; emphasis in original)

Thus, for the prospects of often poor economic profits the villagers would participate in the destruction of their own cultural identity. Although the economic exploitation of Dalton’s performances promises to be slightly better than that of the Flamingo Hotel, it still represents a neo-colonial form of exotic tourism.³² As such the cultural village lives

³¹ However, what such ethnographic display really portrays is a set of images and desires that people from the modernised world want to indulge in. The mass tourist longing for the simplicities of life, for nature and the rural, wants to believe in the authenticity of the cultural display (which upholds the stereotype of the ethnic Other), as it provides him with a temporary escape from their reality of modern industrialisation, modernisation and technology.

³² Mass or “exotic” tourism denotes a form of tourism where people predominantly travel for reasons of pleasure and to enjoy certain luxuries without paying special interest to but rather “using” culture and nature. Mass tourism and market liberalisation as well as open borders tend to give rise to a form of top-down development wherein the tourist industry determines the production and selling of tourist products or places to the mass tourist. This thesis focuses in particular on what is classified as the “ethnic” or “exotic” form of mass tourism, which markets the Otherness of tourist places and people. The exotic tourist industry thrives on the Otherness of the Other since the tourist needs to be able to satisfy his or her voyeuristic desires of seeing “exotic” difference. Therefore, one might argue that

on nostalgia longing for primordial culture and the display of Otherness and creates an image of the ethnic group as static. It can therefore be seen as a restorative form of (predominantly White) nostalgia for an authentic, pure people and for the simplicities of life before the modern fall of man. The villagers become objectified for tourism, in order to satisfy public curiosity and a nostalgic longing for “purity,” authenticity and nature in times of postmodern culture and globalisation. Finally, Dalton’s cultural village illuminates the thin line between appreciation and respect for a culture and the exploitation of a people for one’s own economic or psychological benefits.

Dalton’s Imperialist Nostalgia

Overall, Dalton is drawn as an ambiguous character. His idea of performing a precolonial past speaks, one might argue, to his own nostalgia for a pristine Xhosa culture before the disruption of his forefathers which relates to what anthropologist Renato Rosaldo has called “imperialist nostalgia.” While the present Dalton cannot mourn what he himself destructed, he displays nostalgia for the colonised culture as it was when his namesake and his fellow colonisers had first encountered it. While the paradox of imperialist nostalgia is the fact that “agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life they intentionally altered or destroyed” (Rosaldo 1989, 108), Dalton’s longing for traditional culture works on slightly different terms. Since we as the readers do not get to know how Dalton relates to his colonial relative, we have to judge by his actions. The fact that Dalton’s hybridisation goes as far as to include English and Afrikaans culture – two formerly hostile cultures that still share certain animosities – and the fact that he is more of a Xhosa than a White man does not identify him with the colonisers’ deeds. His position seems to be a reconciliatory one and his re-evaluation of local culture and identification with the Qolorha community suggest a (probably unconscious) compensatory attitude. Memories, according to Rosaldo, which evoke a mood of imperialist nostalgia, both reproduce and disrupt imperialist ideologies. Imperialist nostalgic ideologies are fictions designed to conceal feelings of guilt (Rosaldo 1989, 110). The fiction of a precolonial culture in postapartheid South Africa seems to be Dalton’s way of dealing with and compensating for the past. However, well-doing and well-meaning are two different paths, separated only by a thin line and often one is mistaken

exotic mass tourism operates on an accepted indirect form of racism which clearly defines the “ethnic” Other as inferior and abnormal to the Western, White tourist or in terms of positive racism as closer to nature, more sensual and spiritual.

for the other. Dalton, so it seems, cannot fully reject his ancestral lines and in spite of his amaXhosa heart and his attempts to rehabilitate Xhosa culture, he still has to learn how to live with them as equals.

The irony of Dalton's nostalgia for precolonial and therefore for supposedly pure culture is that he is the living example of "impurity" – of the untenable myth of cultural purity. Mda, through his mouthpiece Camagu utters his aversion of such neo-colonial tourist practises which pretend to do well while destroying local culture. Dalton's cultural village falls unquestionably into the category of restorative nostalgia tourism – the creation and visualisation of an imagined past in the present. Driven by his White, imperialist nostalgia, he wants to rebuild the past as it was. The protagonist Camagu, on the contrary, is an example of a reflective or critical nostalgist who reflects about the past and the desire to restore the past in the present. As shall be seen in the following chapter, he calls for lived traditions and dynamic culture.

3.2.1.2 Camagu's Idea of Sustainable Tourism Development

In the democratic era in South Africa, tourism is seen as a development tool.
(Rogerson cited in Telfer and Sharpley 2008, 139)

The mediator between the polyphony of opposing voices in the conflict between the Unbelievers and Believers is the character Camagu. He emerges as an intellectual catalyst³³ who is able to see the conflict in the village from a fairly neutral standpoint. He develops into an activist for the protection of natural and cultural rights. Thereby, he does not reject tourism per se. Due to his sustained development knowledge, he is well aware that, "[t]ourism also has the potential to make a positive impact in terms of promoting a sense of place and identity for a local community" (Rogerson in Telfer and Sharpley 2008, 131). Thus, Camagu puts forward a form of eco-tourism which includes the local people in decision-making processes and in benefits on an equal basis. Due to his expertise in the field of development, Camagu tries to combine and negotiate the two opposing forces of progress and traditionalism so that both sides can profit from it.³⁴ His

³³ In his PhD work *When People Play People*, Mda writes: "Catalysts - a term the authors use to signify those outsiders with specialist skills in theatre and in community development who work as organised groups in communities - must have a higher level of social consciousness than the villagers, based on their education and general social experiences" (1993, 19).

³⁴ In the course of the novel, he first establishes a little seafood and traditional clothing and beadwork cooperative in Qolorha working together with the two local women NoGiant and MamCirha. Thereby, Camagu initiated the first self-empowered business, which runs on sharing profits and appreciating culture and nature: "It is not as

idea is that of a backpacker hostel which values local landscape and dynamic, modern Xhosa culture and heritage. Thereby, Camagu is well aware of the importance of giving the tourists a feeling of an authentic experience. The difference to Dalton's performed authenticity lies in Camagu's offering of *dynamic* present culture. His idea is to invite the guests to join in the locals' daily life and cultural practises such as cooking. Moreover, the hostel should be built by the villagers the way they build and thatch their own houses. Travellers should have "the opportunity to experience life in an African home" (HR, 240). Tourists would thus participate in real, actual culture instead of in performed, past culture. In respect to economic profits, the hostel should work as a cooperative, just like the traditional clothes and seafood cooperative where "[t]he villagers who come together to build the place will own the place" (HR, 240). Contrary to the developers' plan for a tourist resort and casino, employing skilled labour from the cities and destroying the environment, the backpacker alternative would enable the villagers to run and profit from such a project.

The Rehabilitation of Local History – Nongqawuse as Tourist Attraction

In his ideas for alternative tourism, Camagu, like Dalton, goes back to the controversial history of Nongqawuse and her prophecies:

"We'll advertise the place throughout the South African backpacker's network. But we'll also target different types of tourists. There are those who will come, for instance, because of the historical significance of the place. Remember this is a place of miracles! This is where Nongqawuse made her prophecies." (HR, 240)

Initiated by his own nostalgia for local history and cultural heritage, as argued here, Camagu uses Nongqawuse and the traumatic cattle-killing past in order to have Qolorha and Nongqawuse's Valley declared a heritage site. Thus, with his tourism project, Camagu also aims at raising awareness for an almost forgotten or misinterpreted past.³⁵ Turning to Nongqawuse and the historical events of the prophecies, Camagu revives a traumatic past which split and weakened the amaXhosa nation during colonial times; it is a legacy still present in the area of the wonders in contemporary times.³⁶ He, thereby, carries forth Qukezwa's positive embrace of the prophetess as part of the Xhosa cultural

lucrative as they might wish. It is struggling on. But Camagu, for the first time after many years, is a very fulfilled man" (HR, 139)³

³⁵ This tourism project is on the edge of "dark tourism" (Tarlow 2005, 52) – the commercialisation of places where tragedies occurred through the prism of history.

³⁶ I am indebted to Professor Zulu for pointing the continuing pain of this part of history out to me.

past and addresses questions of old rivalries which have never been commemorated or dealt with as well as questions of national unity which are extremely pressing in the postapartheid. In so doing, he does not romanticise this historical event but juxtaposes the colourful landscape and cultural practises to the dramatic events of war and death. Camagu welcomes the miracles of the past into his worldview by trying to understand its relevance for the people. What Camagu's turn to the historical events suggests is a re-evaluation of a past which has been devalued as an act of madness and suicide in official historiography. Instead of denying or forgetting a supposedly shameful past, Camagu elicits the valuable aspects of that past and thereby helps to rehabilitate the amaXhosa national consciousness. In extension, Mda, through his polyphonic structure – and especially through characters as Qukzewa and Zim and the poetic and colourful portrayal of “their” past – shows the complexities of the past and offers many voices during the significant time of colonisation at the Eastern Cape. In that way, the novel counters the dominant narrative of a backward heathen people who stupidly followed prophecies. Nostalgia is thus a key ingredient in paving the way to access a difficult past and in recuperating its value – as a form of learning from history – for the present. Camagu reflects upon the past and comes to the conclusion that “it is wrong to dismiss those who believed in Nongqawuse as foolish. [...] Her prophecies arose out of the spiritual and material anguish of the amaXhosa nation” (HR, 245). Thus, without seeing the past as unproblematic, Camagu emphasises the significance and benefit of the historical miracles.

Simultaneously, however, Camagu's promotion of the local place and its history is a dangerous project since it can easily turn into romanticising the place, its people and its mythology. As already mentioned, he turns Nongqawuse as a historical icon into a marketing object and is, thus, in danger of commercialising history. “As is evident in Camagu and Dalton's last conversation,” Koyana observes, “progress within the context of globalisation may incorporate commercializing the sacred past. At the same time, this sacred past redeems Qholorha's inhabitants” (2003, 58). The narrative alludes to the ambiguities and difficulties of heritage tourism, which is a two-sided sword. Always on the verge of trivialisation and kitsch, the celebration of heritage might (also) help to recuperate alternative pasts in the present in order to enrich collective memory and to counter the formation of master historiographies.

Similarly, even though Camagu offers a potential way of negotiating between the opposing forces of modernisation and those protecting the natural world in a cordial way, he treads on treacherous ground by constructing tourist projects for an environmentally

conscious elite instead of for ordinary people. As Anthony Vital suggests:

The ecotourism project may be designed for the sensitive traveller, but eroticising the indigenous as an obscure object of desire for modern tourists may not in the long run preserve the dignity and survival of what is valuable in traditional cultures. (2005, 312)

Camagu's promotion of the local place and its history is a difficult project. Even though, as Arif Dirlik suggests, it is necessary to revalue local place in order to resist globalisation, to romanticise the locality can likewise be counterproductive. If local place is nostalgically idealised, place and people are in danger of being essentialised "into a kind of primordealism that fixes and romanticises social relations and identities" (Hardt and Negro cited in Peeters 2007, 37). Ultimately, Camagu emerges as promoting and paving the way for sustainable development in form of eco-tourism. His pragmatic approach enables the villagers to participate in the global economy while, simultaneously, they themselves can protect their natural surrounding and traditional practices to a certain extent. Despite Vital's valid criticism that Camagu caters for a kind of sophisticated tourism, Mda writes a form of "Fiction for Development"³⁷ (Mervis 1998, 39) by providing a blueprint for action in literary form. In his narrative he propagates the possibility of living a modernised African life which thrives on nature and traditional culture without exploiting it.

Overall, Camagu's turn to the past consists of nostalgic sentiments which enable him to rediscover his own traditional roots and his appreciation of traditions and the past. However, instead of idealising and desiring a restored past, he engages actively with the cultural heritage, traditions and nature in the present. He represents an anti-restorative nostalgist whose "vision is an ecocritically ethical one" (Sewlall 2007, 6), which becomes obvious in his vehement dismissal of Dalton's cultural village and any forms aiming to portray stable and pure notions of culture, community and identity. Camagu finally manages to prevent his new home from capitalist exploitation by recuperating its history and to promote a positive valuation of the traditional past without euphemising it. With the proclamation of Nongqawuse's Valley as a heritage site, the prophetess finally manages to save the village. Thereby, Camagu alias Mda cherishes natural heritage as a

³⁷ This term relates to the practise of "theatre for development" which is the focus of his PhD work *When People Play People: Development Communication through Theatre* (1993). In consistency with the idea he expresses in his PhD that theatre is a social activity which is available to everyone, his novels can be viewed as engaging in the social lives of local South African people struggling to be heard and fighting for their natural right to live their traditional lives.

significant force in boosting personal and national identity and for valuing historical memory.

3.3 Conclusion of *The Heart of Redness*

The aim of this chapter was to show that *The Heart of Redness* represents a polyphony of nostalgic sentiments which tell their own stories about the present and the past of the rural village Qolorha-by-Sea and, by extension, of South Africa. Although nostalgia is not a dominant feature of the overall narrative, it has decisive influence on current debates circling around the classic conflict between modernisation and traditionalism as well as forms of natural and cultural preservation mainly prompted by the influence of tourism.

The present time level provides two main narrative strands. The “modernisation narrative” looks forward; its characters even reject the past in their blind belief in capitalist development (in the form of Western tourism). The Unbelievers vehemently claim their progressiveness seeing only heathenism and barbarism in the past. However, in the course of the novel, the Unbelievers are revealed as unreliable characters for not only do they believe but they also turn to the past as a source of meaning. The past, it becomes obvious, can, after all, not be denied as it shapes part of personal and cultural identity. Countering the narrative of looking forward is the narrative of looking backward. Diametrically opposed to the Unbeliever’s rejection of the past, the Believers are deeply nostalgic for their cultural history, ancient myths and natural environment. Thereby, the Believers risk portraying themselves as a kind of primordial, pure culture. Moreover, while especially Qukezwa’s nostalgia for the past provides her with a way to re-imagine the past in the present and to establish cultural coherence, her attempts to restore the present to past quality bears immense dangers of hindering development and of excluding other cultures.

The dangers of nostalgia become striking in (contemporary) tourist practises which only aim for stereotypical images of culture and the Other. Such practises are not only typical for mass tourism but might also underlie eco-tourist ideologies in the form of paternalistic, well-meant attitudes. Dalton’s cultural village displays a bounded space of staging and selling Otherness by essentialising culture and people in a timeless past-present. This, as well as Dalton’s patronising attitude to speak and do things *for* the people instead of *with* them – and thereby treating them as inferior – reveals a continuation of colonial practises and a form of postapartheid “positive racism.” In that way, nostalgia tourism enforces stereotypes and thereby hinders the self-empowerment of

the people. The selling of culture and local identity is definitely one of the destructive effects of global tourism.

Camagu seems to be the only character who uses his appreciation for historical memory constructively in his eco-tourism project, which aims to incorporate local and global demands. While Camagu himself is, at times, caught up in nostalgic sentiments about his past and inspired by nostalgia for the rural and for traditional culture and by his encounter with Qukezwa, he is aware that there is and should not be a return to the past. Thus, while nostalgia – usually in its restorative form – can bear the dangers of excluding and Othering, a more reflective and critical kind of nostalgia and the appreciation of historical memory open the way to recuperate the past for the present and to find alternative ways of dealing with the challenges of cultural and natural preservation.

Overall, the implied author is critical of restorative tendencies of nostalgia when it aims to freeze the past, which all too easily can shift into social exclusion; but he simultaneously acknowledges the psychological need to restore the past in order to establish a lost coherence. Thus, he makes explicit the characters' need for their cultural traditions in order to make sense of themselves. And so the narrative reflects a contemporary need in the postapartheid era to restore and find a cultural and national identity in and amongst the overall discrepancies of modernisation and traditionalism. By casting his nostalgic characters, such as Qukezwa and Camagu, as predominantly positive and by creating autobiographical parallels to his protagonist Camagu, the implied author creatively uses nostalgia without any (obvious) moral uncertainty, i. e. without any distancing effect.

Coming back to Lewis Nkosi's claim that *The Heart of Redness* does not represent nostalgia or imagine a new nation yet, the analysis has shown that the novel, indeed, represents various forms of nostalgia. In summary, Mda's complex and multi-layered narrative demonstrates nostalgia's significance in fostering cultural identity and recuperating cultural heritage and historical memory; nevertheless, he also outlines the dangers of an unreflective nostalgia which aims at restoring a timeless past.

4 Zakes Mda's *The Whale Caller*

Synopsis

Set in the coastal town of Hermanus in the Western Cape of South Africa, Mda chooses a setting which is known for its spectacular whale watching and is thus frequented by tourists. The unnamed protagonist, who is only referred to as the Whale Caller, communicates with whales through a kelp horn. Unlike the “real-life” professional whale crier William Salakuzi, who guides tourists to the whales, the Whale Caller does not like or intend to attract publicity. Rather his fulfilment in life is to musically communicate and live with the whales in seclusion.

After thirty-five years of wandering the coasts, the Whale Caller returns to his hometown Hermanus, which he finds to have been transformed into a fancy tourist town. The Whale Caller represents an outcast who is gazed at for his Otherness primarily called forth by his peculiar interaction with whales. His outside position is supported by his strange appearance and odd behaviour as he meditatively stands on the rocks and plays his kelp horn most of the time. When he was still a child he discovered his ability to communicate with whales through a kelp horn by producing vibrating sounds under water, which attract the whales. Ever since, he has been spending his days along the coastline caring more for whales than for human beings. Settling in a Wendy house right at the coast, he lives as a loner and avoids coming into contact with other human beings. Hence, he seems asocial, having retreated increasingly into nature. In fact, the people of Hermanus are as strange to the Whale Caller as the Whale Caller is to them.

The Whale Caller has built up a romantic relationship with one of the whales in particular: Sharisha. In order to welcome her back for her seasonal visit,¹ he dresses ceremonially in a tuxedo, which he has bought especially for her. Apart from the whales the Whale Caller's only contact is, at first, Mr Yodd, a recluse confessor who lives in a grotto among rock rabbits. The narrative never makes it clear whether Mr Yodd is human or animal or whether he only exists in the Whale Caller's imagination. Mr Yodd functions as the Whale Caller's constructed deity and also his personal therapist. Through the Whale Caller's confessions the reader is able to see his inner feelings – his passion, his environmental concerns and his remembrance of bygone eras when, to him, the human world was not diametrically opposed to the non-human world. Mr Yodd's only reply to

¹ The southern right whales return to the shores along Hermanus from June to December for mating.

the Whale Caller's confessions, however, is occasional laughter – a desired form of mortification for the protagonist. This already hints at the problematic relationship of the protagonist to other human beings and his close relationship to the non-human world. The Whale Caller's attention, however, slowly shifts to the human female Saluni, the village drunk who persistently stalks him. The two opposing characters enter into a passionate but problematic relationship.

While the Whale Caller finds spiritual strength and healing in the whales and Mr Yodd, Saluni discovers healing powers in her visits to the Bored Twins, two neglected young girls who live in an old deserted mansion. The twins' angelic appearance is supported by their angelic voices with which they captivate people in general and Saluni in particular. The two marginalised human protagonists, the Whale Caller and Saluni, eventually establish a turbulent romantic relationship full of trouble and jealousy – for there is still Sharisha. Saluni, for instance, tricks the Whale Caller into taking to the road with her after Saluni wilfully blinded herself during an eclipse. She thereby intends to draw him away from the whales and particularly from her rival Sharisha.

The Whale Caller is trapped between two women and, seen from a rational, biological perspective, also between two species. The two female characters represent two opposing worlds to the Whale Caller. While the whale's world suggests a life with and in nature, the human world embraces "civilised living" and the pleasures of carnal and material joys.² The natural world in contrast, is the sphere of Sharisha, the southern right whale. It is a world which the Whale Caller enters spiritually. In short, while Saluni stands for progress and capitalism, Sharisha symbolises a connection to long bygone times when nature and animals were still appreciated and treated with respect.

For the Whale Caller the classic binaries of nature versus culture, human versus non-human, rationality versus irrationality do not exist and he constantly and magically transgresses these borders. Without making a clear decision for either of his beloved, he loses both Saluni and Sharisha in an apocalyptic ending as the rivalling females both fall victim to a ritualistic death: Sharisha beaches and is exploded in an almost ceremonial spectacle, and Saluni is stoned to death by the Bored Twins. Additionally, Mr Yodd's

² Similar to Camagu's "two brides convention" (Dannenberg 2004, 4), the Whale Caller is caught in between these two women; however, unlike Camagu he fails to choose or negotiate between the two. Saluni, like Qukezwa also represents a strong woman and a guiding voice in the male protagonist's life. However, unlike Qukezwa who teaches Camagu about the natural world, Saluni teaches the Whale Caller about "civilised living" and introduces him to the human world of capital logic – at least hypothetically, since neither of them has the means to participate in consumerism.

grotto is destroyed due to a storm and the Whale Caller can no longer follow his ritual of confession and mortification. The novel ends with the protagonist having lost everything; he eventually destroys his kelp horn and goes on a journey of self-flagellation carrying a sandwich board which reads: “*I am the Hermanus Penitent*” (WC, 210).

Introduction to The Whale Caller

Zakes Mda’s novel *The Whale Caller*, published in 2005, addresses similar concerns as *The Heart of Redness*: invasive tourism, protection of nature and the struggle to negotiate capitalist and environmental values. As in his previous novel, landscape and the memories it bears also play a key role in *The Whale Caller* – it is the novel in which Mda formulates his environmental message most pointedly. While *The Heart of Redness* is more concerned with traditional culture and the protection of local identity in the face of an increasing capitalist globalisation, *The Whale Caller* shifts the focus to the interaction of the human and the non-human world as well as to the dynamics of the new South Africa. Therefore, this chapter scrutinises the representation of nature-nostalgia and touches on the controversial discourse of environmentalism in the postapartheid state.

Although, the novel is set in the narrative present of contemporary South Africa, the heterodiegetic narrator moves back and forth between the present and the past in various analepses seen through either of the two human protagonists’ as focalisers.³ By contrasting the past with the present, nostalgia features as a strategy to elicit social and environmental critique (Ladino 2004). In doing so, Mda offers alternative options for a present ecologically conscious life in the old traditions of transcultural indigenous peoples. The protagonist’s nostalgic journeys, in specific, serve to criticise contemporary abuses of nature, to re-value the conception of landscape and to provide ecological alternatives found in precolonial culture. While *The Whale Caller* also shows a polyphonic structure, it is not as pronounced as in Mda’s previous novel but illuminates the two human protagonists in particular. Their nostalgia(s)⁴ represent surprisingly multifaceted recuperations of past times.

³ The novel, in fact, begins with a prolepsis of the novel’s dramatic ending: “The sea is bleeding from the wounds of Sharisha. But that is later” (WC, 1).

⁴ When referring to the journeys to different periods and incidents in the past, nostalgia in the plural will be used.

Chapter 4 consists of four main sections. After introducing the novel's chronotope in Chapter 4.1, the second chapter examines the Whale Caller's present home to which he has only recently returned. Confronted with the proceedings of modernity in the form of tourism, the Whale Caller finds himself living in two worlds: his own retreat into nature and the animal world on the one hand and the confrontation with civilisation and global capitalism as a citizen of Hermanus on the other. The unsettling forces of modernisation and tourism in the present – a similar scenario as in *The Heart of Redness* – as well as his unsuccessful negotiation between two female characters disturb the Whale Caller's re-settling into his hometown and trigger his nostalgia for bygone times.

Chapter 4.3 analyses the two human protagonist's nostalgia(s). Focusing first on the Whale Caller, not only his home is disjointed but also his (and Saluni's) longings for a past time, place and identity are fragmentary. He does not long for only one period and place, and his reminiscences highlight the past as both golden and traumatic times. According to Jennifer Ladino, to imaginatively return to the "home" perceived as "fractured, fragmented, complicated, and layered [...] is to revisit a dynamic past and to invert or exploit official narratives in ways that challenge dominant histories" (2004). As will be illustrated in Chapter 4.3.1, the Whale Caller's journeys to past times reveal the diversity of precolonial and colonial times and suggest as well the potentials of transcultural border-crossings enabled by the imaginative power of the mind. As the analysis proposes, the Whale Caller's nostalgia has the potential to reveal present deficiencies and to offer alternatives in silenced or forgotten pasts. He recuperates transcultural indigenous ecological practises and demonstrates their potential in the present without, however, attempting to restore (pre)colonial culture.

As Chapter 4.3.2 demonstrates, Saluni's nostalgia is complex as well. Her activation of historical memory and ancient wisdom emphasises the significance of nostalgia in creating cultural and personal coherence. The final section (Chapter 4.4) of this chapter shifts the focus from personal and individual nostalgia to collective and public forms of nostalgia as in the practice of naming (Chapter 4.4.1) and a local war memorial (Chapter 4.4.2).

4.1 The Chronotope – Past and Present Hermanus

The novel's setting, Hermanus, serves as a microscopic depiction of South Africa representing the intertwined invasions of capitalist globalisation and tourism interfering with the Whale Caller's desired retirement. Hermanus is represented as a contact zone of various kinds. In contemporary times, it is a place of vibrant mixtures: local township dwellers and villagers, international and national tourists, the poor and the rich, the marginalised misfits and the "elite" – they all reside in the beauty of the locality.

Similarly, Hermanus of the old times presents a contact zone along colonial parameters between the Khoikhoi indigenous inhabitants and the Dutch settlers and later also the English colonisers. Although he does not overtly refer to the contact between the Khoikhoi and the early colonialists, the narrator mentions that the land was stolen from the Khoikhoi, which hints at a brutal encounter.

Independent of time, the whales function as a "transoceanic" and "transnational" link (Woodward 2008a, 6) between the local and the global, connecting different continents with each other and reinforcing Hermanus as a contact zone. The whales are at home as much in South African as in New Zealand and Australian waters and are at home as much in the past as in the present; they are permanent inhabitants of the waters. Moreover, the narrative connects the different continental cultures in a hybrid mix of the local Kalfiefee, the whale calf festival held annually in Hermanus, and in the mythical stories of whales and sharks told to the Whale Caller by "transoceanic" sailors. Hence, similar to Qolorha-by-Sea, the locality of Hermanus does not represent the bounded, isolated and idyllic place so typical of romanticising nostalgic narratives but instead, as outlined, a contact zone in various ways.

Temporal Binaries – An Environmental Past versus a Technological Present

As illustrated in the theory chapter, fast moving times developing from rural to urban and technological societies are likely to arouse nostalgic sentiments for a more stable home; a home of familiarities. According to political analyst Kimberly Smith, who analyses nostalgia as a key concept in the political conflict over modernity,

[n]ostalgia is peculiarly associated with the transition from a stable agricultural society to a highly mobile industrial one. Although we can feel nostalgia for any past, it is not coincidental that the emotion is most commonly associated with the loss of the rural past. (2000, 515)

The developments in South Africa since the overthrow of apartheid and the country's entry into the global market have been manifold. In both of his novels discussed in this thesis, Mda points to the invasion of global capitalism and advanced technology as unsettling the rural areas. Moreover, he poses crucial questions about the maintenance of cultural identity and natural environment. In the face of an invading tourism and technological advancements, the Whale Caller, similarly to Qukezwa in *The Heart of Redness*, lapses into imaginings mainly of precolonial pasts. He yearns for a world where his relationship to the natural and animal world was not disrupted by processes of modernisation, industrialisation and more recently mass tourism.

The Whale Caller expresses his dislikes of progress and technology by derogatorily referring to the present as “*these* days of engine-powered trawlers” (WC, 2, emphasis added), which are responsible for the disturbances of the natural world. The binary contrast between past and present becomes striking in the demonstrative pronoun “these” which gives the present a negative connotation. This is further supported by the choice of words and the narrative juxtaposition of, “loud under water bangs produced by seismic surveys” and “gas and oil explorations” (WC, 129) with relics of the past such as the colourful fishing boats along the cliffs that “used to belong to fishermen of a century ago” (WC, 2). The boats are now restored “to their former glory” as a reminder of a bygone era and bygone manual practises “so that present and future generations [...] can see how fishermen of old endured the stormy seas in small open boats powered by their own muscles” (WC, 2). The narrative already hints at the paradoxes of (post)modern culture which is wary of conserving history, but thereby also silences it as museum pieces detached from present life.⁵

⁵ The irony of mourning dying traditions, cultures, and practises becomes visible in contemporary museums portraying bygone eras and thereby documenting not only the passage of time but also what one has destructed. This mourning reveals the dangers that today's blind belief in technological progress causing irreversible destruction to the ecosystem might again be preserved and mourned one day. Time, just as the destruction of the natural environment, is irreversible. Hence, today's nostalgia for the past serves as a warning to prevent a future nostalgia for the days of today. Museums as archives of the past can be valuable, but too often they preserve past times and practises to a static perception irrelevant for the present.

4.2 The Whale Caller's Home – Triggers for his Nostalgia

The earth as home or as *the relationship between* humankind and the natural environment (animate and inanimate) has become one of the most disseminated symbolic motifs of our time. (Robertson 1990, 56; emphasis in original)

Similar to the protagonist Camagu's return home in *The Heart of Redness*, the Whale Caller also resettles in his town of birth, in this case, after decades of wandering the seashores. Upon his return he is glad to re-find the place of his memories. The natural beauty of the landscape and the famous "crown of mist" (WC, 10) around the mountains are as he remembers them from his days of childhood, and his hometown "ha[s] not lost the soul of the village of his youth" (WC, 10). The presentation of the protagonist's return explicates the narrative's central conflict between the past and the present and (respectively) between nature and culture. Thus, the stable mountainous landscape is juxtaposed to the changed cultural life in the Whale Caller's hometown: his former village has developed into a "beautiful holiday resort" (WC, 10) and a retirement paradise with double and triple storey buildings for national and international (affluent) tourists temporarily escaping the tumult of Johannesburg by spending "part of the year enjoying the spoils of their wealth in the laid-back ambience of the village" (WC, 10). Hence, the place is filled with tourists – not least because a new fashion has developed over the time: whale-watching.

The Whale Caller enters this scenario, again similar to Camagu, as an outsider. He even feels like an intruder "both in the lives of the whale watchers and of the local citizens. No one knew him any more" (WC, 10). Due to his vagabond, nomadic life of spending more than three decades along the coastlines of South Africa and Namibia, the heterodiegetic narrator refers to the Whale Caller as *strandloper*. According to Boonzaier et al.,

[t]he word '*strandloper*', or beach-ranger, comes from the observation by early settlers at the Cape of people living along the beach and subsisting on marine food, such as seals, shellfish, fish, crayfish, birds and occasionally beached whales. (1996, 10)

Thus, the Whale Caller is associated with an age-old Khoikhoi lifestyle in union with nature. The connection to the Khoikhoi is a key aspect in the Whale Caller's nostalgia for an ancient way of life in harmony with nature (cf. Chapter 4.3.1.2). His seemingly uncivilised lifestyle has removed the Whale Caller from human socialisation and has offered him a life free of the restrictions of modern society. Home, for the Whale Caller, has for a

long time been a travelling and floating notion, similar to that of whales floating through the sea, which has opened a zone of freedom not confining him to four walls and a roof. During his life along the beaches, he only stayed longer in one place when people – especially women – seemed friendly:

He survived on fish, some of which he bartered to non-fishing folks for grain and other necessities. He stopped for months at a time in fishermen's villages that dotted the coastline. In hamlets where women were buxom and welcoming he stopped for a few years. Sometimes he hired himself out as a hand to the trawlers that caught pilchards off the west coast of southern Africa. (WC, 9)

The Whale Caller's desired home and sense of belonging is linked to his unrestricted access to and spirituality with nature and communion with the non-human world. Thus, to a certain extent he continues a supposedly ancient, local lifestyle.⁶

Invasive Tourism

Moreover, the invasion of mass tourism contributes immensely to the disturbances of the Whale Caller's desired home in harmony with nature. As already indicated, the typical mass tourist, already familiar from *The Heart of Redness*, also features in *The Whale Caller*. While in *The Heart of Redness* tourists do not yet enter the narrative scene, the present novel satirises the tourist mass invasion by relying on well-known stereotypes as in the following:

the usual tourists with floral shirts and funeral faces. [...] Binoculars and cameras weighing down their necks. Sandals flip-flopping like soft coronach drumbeats as the feet trudge in different directions. Fat Americans, timid as individuals, but boisterous and arrogant in groups. Puny Japanese, excitable and fascinated by the most mundane of things. Inland South Africans who look apologetic and seem to be more out of place than the Americans and Japanese. All clicking away at the slightest of provocation. (WC, 13–14)

Tourists, among others, mark the opening of South Africa's borders and her entry into the global tourist market. The Whale Caller perceives the new culture of tourism and global capitalism, spurred by the new government, as a threat not only to his much-preferred quiet life but also to the natural surroundings. The tourist industry, as the novel suggests, abuses and Others the non-human world not only by using the land as a "playing ground," but also by subjugating animals as objects and toys. In his didactic tone, the

⁶ As illustrated in Chapter 2.2.1.1, the floating notion of home also reflects Mda's own understanding of home, being himself a permanent traveller.

heterodiegetic narrator educates the reader about the destructive consequences mass tourism can cause:

[The Whale Caller] grieves because of the new ways of watching whales. Despite the fact that the town is well suited for watching whales from its many cliffs, some entrepreneurs have introduced boat-based whale watching. [...] The Whale Caller has seen tourists getting off the boat and excitedly boasting of how they actually touched a whale when it came alongside a boat and peered at the passengers. [...] People enjoy it when they agitate the whales, even though they know that they are not allowed to do that. This troubles the Whale Caller. He has never touched a whale. He has never even touched Sharisha, except with his spirit – with his horn. There is no doubt in his mind that soon this boat-based whale watching will be abused. (WC, 118–19)

Again similar to *The Heart of Redness*, mass tourism is perceived as a form of global invasion of capital that – if not treated sensitively – might destroy local nature as well as local identity. Mda criticises the insensitive behaviour of the majority of tourists by parodying them as “whale-watching invaders” (WC, 14) and “boerewors-roll-chomping tourists, mustard and ketchup dripping from their fingers and chins” (WC, 16). The protagonist’s annoyance with tourists is largely caused by their disrespect for nature.

The Whale Caller rejects the human’s hubristic domination of the non-human world in general and the tourists’ disrespect for local nature in particular. By contrast he feels emotionally attached to the times when the human and the non-human maintained a respectful equilibrium – one that he could, presumably, still follow in his *strandloper*-life on the desolate coastlines of South Africa and Namibia. The Whale Caller’s nostalgic evocations of the past, as will be seen in the following, serve Mda in advancing his ecological concerns. By contrasting past and present and the diverging forces of technology and nature, he explicates the destructive forces of humans’ exploitation of the non-human world.

Nostalgia, Environmentalism and Poverty

As outlined in the theory chapter, the colonial/apartheid alienation of many (urban) Black South Africans from the natural landscape along racial lines has shaped a lasting dichotomised thinking. Rural landscapes came to be seen as backward and the non-human world primarily as a resource without spiritual value to urban, modern lives. Mda is aware that ecology is a minor issue for many poor people because it does not help them in their daily struggles. This becomes explicit when his two human protagonists encounter a perlemoen poacher. The encounter highlights the vicious circle of poverty and abuse of

the natural environment held so sacred by the forefathers of the land. The Whale Caller is angry about the poacher and explains that only four perlemoens a day are allowed for self-consumption. He is enraged about finding a full sack of those protected mussels: “But this is wrong. It is all wrong. Do you know how long it takes for those perlemoens to mature? Eight years. Eight years, I tell you” (WC, 174). Saluni, as the social critical voice takes the side of the poverty-ridden poacher. The poacher explains his motives for poaching himself:

‘We have to eat sir [...]. We have got to feed our children. Big companies are making money out of these perlemoens. The government gives them quotas. What about us, sir? Do you think if I apply for quotas I will get them? How are we expected to survive?’ (WC, 174)

A little later the poacher explains the politics of corruption and exploitation to the Whale Caller and by extension to the reader.

There are established racial hierarchies in the illegal abalone trade. Coloured folk sell their harvest to white men who pay around two hundred rands a kilogram. The white men sell to the Chinese men for about a thousand rands a kilogram. The Chinese ship the abalone to the Far East where they get about two thousand five hundred rands a kilogram for it. And these are the old prices. (WC, 175)

The poaching industry seems to represent the South African nation in a microcosm. The irony of the “new” South Africa is that now it is the very people who have struggled for freedom, equality and social improvement who are the ones continuing international racial hierarchies and exploitation. Again, it is the ordinary poor who remain at the bottom of the food chain. Although promoting his stance for environmentalism, Mda does not turn a blind eye to the conditions of the people who are more worried about their daily survival than about protecting nature and animals. This, however, reveals a paradox (already familiar from *The Heart of Redness*): many Black South Africans believe that progress lies in technology and capitalism without realising that their forefathers who led an ecologically conscious life were in fact progressive. The irony of civilisation and progress, it becomes obvious, is that it is dangerously anti-progressive since the human world cuts itself off from its natural resources.

Ecology seems to be a largely neglected topic in South Africa as people are concerned with their daily survival and have other worries than the protection of nature and animals. Zakes Mda had to experience first-hand that uttering environmental concerns is a luxury and a valuing of nature over humans. He has been accused of writing

“White things” in *The Whale Caller* and neglecting the poor and marginalised upon whom he had usually focused in his previous plays and novels:

The journalist told me that there was consternation among my black readers. “Now Zakes is writing white things”, was the refrain. [...] Caring about animals and telling stories about them cannot be a “white thing” because these are the very animals that featured as characters in the stories that my grandmother told me when I was a little boy; stories that had been passed to her by previous generations of grandmothers long before white people came to South Africa. (Mda 2009b, 12)

Mda criticises the “pampered black elites” (2009b, 12) for their indifference towards the ecological crises. Instead of talking to the people and re-valuing landscape and a respectful treatment of nature they ignore both the urban and rural poor people. Mda points to the political significance of environmentalism. Especially the rural areas are directly affected by the consequences of pollution. This, however, is, according to him, not made explicit to the people. “The problem, therefore, is not that black South Africans do not care about the environment, but that the discourse on environmental justice is not framed in a manner that relates directly to their lives” (Mda 2009, 12). Mda leaps into didacticism and *The Whale Caller* at times reads like a guidebook for ecologically correct behaviour. Despite his moralising finger, which disturbs his more effective biting sarcasm and satirical and magical writing, Mda addresses important issues that are largely neglected in the postapartheid era – or rejected as elitist or White. Through his characters’ nostalgic imaginings of the past, he provides a different view on landscape and recuperates its often neglected or forgotten cultural mystical stories.

While the narrative does not offer any ready-made solutions, it does raise awareness between the link of poverty and the difficulty to lead an ecological life and thereby criticises the political agents neglecting the needs of both rural and poor people and their right to live with nature. In order to explicate the importance of ecology, Mda’s creation of literature symbioses with his environmental activism and his literature becomes “a literature of public action” (Mda 2009a, 6). Nostalgia is thereby a crucial ingredient in order to reassign value and appreciation to the ecosystem and cultural traditions.

This chapter has scrutinised the Whale Caller’s home and sense of be-longing, which is strongly influenced by two major incidents: the invasion of global capitalism in the form of tourism on the one hand and the Whale Caller’s love triangle with a whale and a human, reflecting the central conflict of the narrative between civilisation and

nature and also between environmentalism and poverty on the other hand. The following chapter will turn its focus to the personal nostalgia(s) of the two human protagonists starting with the Whale Caller's nostalgic escapes from his present struggles to adjust to a new environment and to negotiate between the two women in his life.

4.3 Personal Nostalgia(s)

4.3.1 The Whale Caller's Nostalgia(s)

He is racked by the sadness of the present. (WC, 3)

4.3.1.1 Childhood nostalgia

The Whale Caller has developed his own technique for journeying to the world of bygone times: he animates the past in his imagination, usually being an outside observer of (imagined) past events. For example, as a boy he used to have a searing longing for his hardly-remembered father (inspired by seeing other kids playing with their fathers). He would then “re-invent his father” (WC, 27) by imaging the fisherman's life and death at sea, “[until he] finally got tired of resurrecting him only to have him devoured by the fish again” (WC, 27). Despite this dramatic resurrection, “[h]e does not remember ever thinking of his parents with any measure of nostalgia” (WC, 27). His mother died soon after his father and his memories of her are vague. However, when the Whale Caller first comes close to and even touches Saluni “an image of his long-departed mother flashe[s] before his eyes” (WC, 21). The Whale Caller is perplexed because Saluni looks nothing like his mother and morally represents the opposite to her until he discovers their similar smell: “The mouldy yet sweet smell that his mother left in everything she touched. Saluni exceeds the same whiff. And it overwhelms him with long-forgotten emotions” (WC, 30). The sensory stimulus inspires an inexplicable nostalgia in him. Similar to NomaRussia's “mothering spirit” (HR, 28), Saluni captivates the male protagonist by evoking a feeling of familiarity and belonging – a sense of rootedness and coherence. As already becomes evident in the Whale Caller's longing for his parents, his imagined past is made up of complexities: his childhood memories convey motherly securities as well as the experience of death.

Moreover, the complexity of the past is also revealed in the religious community he grew up in. Recalling his parents, the Whale Caller implicitly travels back in time to the point where the inhabitants of Hermanus split into the opposing churches of “The Church” and “the Church of the Sacred Kelp Horn.” The Church represents the Christian

missionary institutions whereas the split church represents a hybrid form of Christian and indigenous beliefs. Due to the beautiful sounds of the horn, the Eminence decided to do away with harps and tambourines because a kelp horn “was a natural musical instrument that took the congregation back to its roots. It was an instrument that celebrated the essence of creation. [...] the new church brought the worshippers closer to nature” (WC, 6). Hence, already the split which the Whale Caller experienced in his childhood circled around nature and local tradition versus civilisation (harps and tambourines) and Western tradition. It was a time when White ideologies of Christianity and civilisation were imposed upon and dominated the locality. Yet again, it was also the time when the Whale Caller learned to play the kelp horn and discovered his ability to communicate with the whales.

To some members of the community, including the Whale Caller, the sound of the kelp horn evoked a feeling of nostalgia for the early beginnings of humankind and its closeness to nature before colonial disruptions. The Whale Caller has continued to play the kelp horn ever since he discovered its magic of establishing a spiritual relationship with the whales. The kelp horn has become his magic link to a lost world; its sounds evoke in him a feeling of home and belonging. However, while the Church brought him to his skill and passion to play the kelp horn and to communicate with the whales, it also alienated him from the world of human community and civilisation, as he preferred the whales instead of divisive humans. Hence, despite the Whale Caller’s nostalgia, the narrative neither romanticises the past as a golden time nor dooms it entirely as an era of colonial/apartheid devastations.

The following chapter scrutinises the Whale Caller’s imaginative returns to a lost world which the sounds of the kelp horn seem to evoke. It is the time when the Khoikhoi inhabited the coastlines and suggests a different life with nature.

4.3.1.2 The Whale Caller’s Nostalgia for the Precolonial

Nostalgia and landscape are crucial forces in *The Whale Caller*. For the Whale Caller both the environment and the past have comforting qualities. He shows a deep ecological knowledge passed on by the wisdom of the “original inhabitants of the land.” This becomes explicit by the narrative juxtaposition of past and present interaction with nature. Faced with the changes of urban development and the booming tourist town, the Whale Caller escapes the present in nostalgic journeys to imagined past times. While the past

suggests an environmentally respectful and mythical way of life, the present is associated with technological disturbances of the natural environment.

When the Whale Caller is in a happy mood, he animates a past which exceeds his own experience and re-imagines long bygone times. These analeptic passages break with the narrative past tense and are narrated in the present tense, emphasising that the past is not distant for the Whale Caller but that he is spiritually re-living those times in the present. As the following quote illustrates, he repeatedly, nostalgically recuperates the past before the times of colonisation and the implementation of industrialisation:

He can see even deeper in the mists, before there were boats and fishermen and whalers, the Khoikhoi of old dancing around a beached whale. Dancing their thanks to Tsiqua, He who Tells His Stories in Heaven, for the bountiful food he occasionally provides for his children by allowing whales to strand themselves. But when there are mass strandings the dance freezes and the laughter in the eyes of the dancers melts into tears that leave stains on the white of the sands. The weepers harvest the blubber for the oil to fry meat and light lamps. They will ultimately use the rib-bones to construct the skeletons of their huts, and will roof the houses with the baleen. Ear bones will be used as water carrying vessels. Other bones will become furniture. Or even pillows and beds. Nights are slept fervidly inside variable whales that speckle the landscape. (WC, 2)

What becomes obvious in the Whale Caller's nostalgic imagining is his lamentation for the loss of a respectful and spiritual relation to the non-human world, one which he finds in the times when the "original owners" of the land, the Khoikhoi, still inhabited the coastlines. His nostalgia, in a rather idealising way, suggests that they were interacting with nature in an ecological manner; hence, the Khoikhoi made use of everything they could utilise of stranded whales. Even though they were thankful for a stranded meal they also respected whales as creatures of the same world and becried their hopeless mass strandings. What is implicitly contrasted in the Whale Caller's nostalgic world is the Khoikhoi's balanced use and spiritual respect for the non-human world in the past and people's alienation from their daily supplies nowadays. What is criticised here is the new religion of technology and progress that is, in fact, backward progress because it destroys natural resources and disturbs the ecosystem.⁷ Thereby the narrative suggests that today many local people have lost touch with basic products such as food and housing. The

⁷ For example, the Khoikhoi relationship to their cattle was traditionally detached from processes of trade: "To the Khoikhoi, cattle were not seen as a product to be bought and sold; they had ritual and social significance far beyond monetary value" (Future Perfect Corporation). Cattle were part of their social and political life which was destroyed by the introduction of trade with the Dutch settlers. Trade, however, contradicted the Khoikhoi's worldview and led to a breakdown of the social and economic values (Future Perfect Corporation).

novel demonstrates that mass production has contributed to both the exploitation of the natural world and the alienation of the human from nature as well as from the means of production.⁸ As outlined in the theory chapter, the colonial/apartheid alienation of Black South Africans from the natural landscape along racial lines shaped a lasting dichotomy particular to Black urban South Africans. Rural landscapes came to be seen as backward and the non-human world primarily as a resource without spiritual value to urban, modern lives.

In order to criticise the unreflected domination and abuse of nature the protagonists' memories of precolonial times are set against these negative and devastating effects of modernisation and colonialisation. Thereby, ways of life are recuperated as ecologically conscious and, in fact, progressive. South African literary scholar Duncan Brown substantiates this progressiveness of supposedly backward aboriginal cultures by making the significant observation that

far from involving contradictions or unbridgeable divisions of knowledge or assumption, the apparently atavistic understandings of aboriginal peoples are often fundamental to modern and postmodern beliefs and practises; [...] aboriginal societies are often able to negotiate the divides of ancient beliefs and modern sciences in ways that may be illuminating for us in our present circumstances. (2006, 3)

As the Khoikhoi of the past, the Whale Caller (of the present) appreciates nature and leads an ecologically respectful life. With regard to that, the Whale Caller represents Zakes Mda's environmental concerns which are also reflected in his previous novel:

I've always had compassion for all [...] life, that's why I don't even eat meat. So whales are part of our natural resources out there. In *Heart of Redness* I wrote about aloes and birds in the Eastern Cape that were threatened with extinction. It's always been my interest – our natural heritage has always been [my] interest. (Eaton 2005)

In both of his novels discussed here, Mda rehabilitates Khoikhoi culture as “the original owner of this land” (HR, 108). In *The Whale Caller* in particular, he depicts them as an ancient people who lived on the lands “which used to be the home, variously, of the Khoikhoi and the San peoples long before the village came into being” (WC, 6). By (implicitly) retrieving a past “before the land was stolen from the Khoikhoi” (WC, 60) by the Dutch and European colonialists, the narrative counters the old myth that the land and

⁸ This is not unique to South Africa, however here as in the rest of the former colonies, the introduction of industrialisation and modernisation is connected to and therefore associated with the advent of colonialism.

the coastlines were empty of indigenous people. In so doing, Mda again draws on historical facts which he merges with his imagination:

In *The Whale Caller* I'm talking about the Khoikhoi people and what they needed to do with whales long before the white people came. That's for real, that's not just for my imagination. In *The Whale Caller* I write about the Khoikhoi people how they used to feast on whales, how they used whale bones to build their houses or furniture and so on. That's how it happened. (Mda 2009c, 364)

Historians confirm that Khoikhoi surviving on the various marine resources also inhabited the Indian Ocean coastlines.⁹ They “lived on shellfish and ultimately became known as *strandlopers* (“beach walkers”) by the Dutch” (Beck 2000, 13). Hence, the depiction of the Whale Caller as a contemporary *strandloper* connects him and his way of life to the coastline's former inhabitants. The Whale Caller's nostalgia for the Khoikhoi way of life thus suggests his identification with their forms of ecology, which he misses in the present.

The Shadows of the Past

Instead of purely romanticising a better past, the Whale Caller also recalls times when the harmonious balance had been destroyed, for example during the whale massacre which happened in Helena Bay in 1785. The slaughtering of masses of whales by “French, American and British whalers” (WC, 13) tells of a colonial intrusion into the local environment demonstrating humankind's domination over the natural world. Implicitly, the defeat of the whales, and thereby the proof of human superiority, also evokes the defeat and domination of the “indigenous” people, who, as the Whale Caller tells later, cried over every whale that could not be used for their own needs:

Five hundred southern rights in one season! They harpooned the calves in order to get their mothers who would come to the rescue of their little ones. Seasons of mass killings! The smell still haunts these shores. (WC, 13)

The Whale Caller evokes the traumatic past of the massacre in order to emphasise the dangers Sharisha might encounter in the present even though officially whales have been

⁹ Geographically, “[t]he Khoikhoi lived mainly near the west coast, raising cattle as their main occupation but also hunting and gathering. It is also reported that one group on the seacoast lived by fishing. The San, on the other hand, lived in the south and in the eastern coastal region, earning their livelihood by bow-and-arrow hunting and plant gathering” (Tanaka 1980, 4). Since the time of Dutch and later British colonisation, the Khoikhoi and San have been forced to migrate inland to the harsh surrounding of the Kalahari Desert. All in all, little is known about the history of the San and Khoikhoi. Only rock paintings portray canvasses of life from which to draw knowledge about these groups in precolonial times.

protected since 1935. Thereby, the narrative suggests the human's steady continuation of destructively mastering the natural environment: "The whales have come back since then but I cannot presume that Sharisha will be safe on her voyage from the southern seas. There are pirates and poachers" (WC, 13).

The narrative draws a clear parallel between the domination of nature and the non-human world in the present and the global wave of colonisation and imperialism about two hundred years earlier. The Whale Caller's remembering of the past – here in anti-nostalgic fashion – can thus be read as a warning of the contemporary wave of globalisation and capitalism which South Africa is facing after the demise of apartheid and her entry into the global world market. At the same time, the Whale Caller evokes, without explicitly wording it, an image of the past before the colonial intrusion as harmonious and balanced. Thus, while the narrative portrays "the past" as being made up of different events and connotations, it also implicitly leaps into a romanticising of precolonial times (a nostalgia which will be more closely scrutinised in the following subsection).

The Whale Caller's Safety Mechanism

The Whale Caller's technique of becoming nostalgic counters, at first sight, the typical triggers of nostalgia. Surprisingly, he becomes nostalgic when he is in a good mood. Hence, nostalgia for him is not an expression of momentary sadness, alienation and inner dislocation but an activity he indulges in when he is happy. Nostalgia thus boosts his spiritual connection to the natural world and his identification with the vanishing Khoikhoi culture. The Whale Caller's compensation for the times when he feels sad and depressed is embodied in his spiritual god-like figure Mr Yodd. Thereby, rituals of self-flagellation and mortification provide him with personal happiness. Mr Yodd's spirituality is supported by his very name which shows sounding parallels to both God and the Yod-figure in astrology. "Yod" defines a triangular pattern in an astrology chart, also referred to as "The Finger of God," or "the Finger of Fate."¹⁰ Hence, Mr Yodd functions as a link between the real world and the spiritual world. The "Mr Yodd-therapy" mainly consists of the Whale Caller confessing intimate thoughts and feelings which distress him. Thus, one can argue that the Whale Caller's constructed deity,

¹⁰ The "yod" also refers to the smallest letter, i.e. 10th letter of the Hebrew alphabet which means, "Finger of Yahweh" (Standley). For more on the Yod in astrology see for example: Cunningham, Donna. 2008. *How to read your astrological chart: Aspects of the cosmic puzzle*. York Beach: Weiser Books.

incorporating the planted seeds of Christian concepts of guilt and penitence, serves as a safety valve, a release for his present discomforts, whereas the periods in the past which he repeatedly journeys back to are expressions of temporary happiness, all the same giving expression to present lacks and deficiencies.¹¹

Moreover, while the Whale Caller feels a strong connection to the natural world, his nostalgic journeys to precolonial indigenous myths suggest that he misses a cultural spiritual link to the natural world in the present. Wendy Woodward suggests that, “[s]urely the most profound tragedy can be ascribed to the lack (due to colonialism) of an indigenous ecological tradition that can save earth others, as well as ourselves” (2009a, 350). Colonialism and the civilising mission have cut off “indigenous” inhabitants from their own forms of spirituality and implanted their seeds of Christianity successfully into the colonised subjects and their heirs. The Whale Caller’s analepses to the times of his childhood reveal his own growing up under the mantle of Christianity. Mda, who has variously stated his criticism of religion and dogmatic belief systems, both seems to mock the Whale Caller’s construction of a god-like figure who only answers his concerns with laughter without giving him any useful advice while at the same time showing the human need to believe as a source of compensation and strength for the present. Following the argument that the Whale Caller decries a loss of spiritual or mythical connection to the whales he has found two substitutes in the present: his breaching the mists of the past and his construction of a spiritual figure combining Christian and animist belief systems – Mr Yodd. While the Khoikhoi, as suggested by the Whale Caller’s nostalgic reminiscences, had a balanced and spiritual relationship with the non-human world, this connection seems lost in the present and the Whale Caller must borrow from other indigenous “whale cultures,” which will be illustrated in the following.

4.3.1.3 Transoceanic Myths as Sources for the Present

The Whale Caller does not only recall local age-old practises but also incorporates the ancient myths of transoceanic “indigenous” cultures in his musings about precolonial pasts. As argued here, the Whale Caller bemoans a spiritual vacuum in the relationship with the non-human world in his cultural heritage. Nostalgia, as will be argued further, provides a path for rehabilitating this connection by positively reviving past myths and practises of other cultures. The contact between cultures and their myths thereby provides

¹¹ Moreover, the Whale Caller’s nostalgia for precolonial times as well as his present escapes to Mr Yodd characterise his hybrid spirituality.

a way to borrow or gain inspiration from traditions and stories for a culture which was deprived of or could never fully establish their own myths.

Through the whales, the narrative weaves a fabric of transcultural myths connecting not only oceans and coastlines but also local cultures, feeding on stories about the whales. Thus, just as the southern right whales share various oceanic homes, regardless of national allocation of the waters, so do the inhabitants along those adjacent coastlines share a relationship with the whales. Due to a lack of an indigenous interaction with whales apart from an ecological one long ago, the Whale Caller feeds on myths and oral traditions from across the ocean such as those belonging to the Australian Aborigines and the indigenous people of Papua New Guinea. Thereby, the narrative connects indigenous cultures which welcome the same whales at different times of the year and interweaves oral traditions and mythologies. According to Mda, “[t]he Whale Caller is aware of those cultures, and he learns something from them as well. In order to deal with whales in his own environment, he also draws from those indigenous cultures” (2009c, 364).

The Whale Caller was introduced to different indigenous cultures from various parts of the world through human transoceanic connectors, such as fishermen and travellers. Largely deprived of any local Khoikhoi celebrations of the oceanic world, he indulges in their myths and stories which draw from spiritual relationships with the non-human world. Thus, by re-imagining other aboriginal cultural stories, which offer him an opportunity to bridge the voids in his cultural spiritual connection to whales, the Whale Caller’s nostalgia exceeds the national borders of South Africa. Moreover, the Whale Caller’s nostalgic recalling of indigenous interaction with whales discloses what he misses in contemporary society – an ecological and respectful living with nature. In terms of his personal identity, his nostalgia can be interpreted as an attempt to establish a cultural coherence to the aboriginals of the land he inhabits.

Aboriginal Dreaming

In order to activate an overall ignorant Saluni’s interest in the magic of the impressive giants, the Whale Caller tells her the beautiful Australian Aboriginal fable of Whale Man, Starfish Man and the origins of the whale’s blow:

It is a story from across the vast Indian Ocean, from a people who share their love for southern rights with the Khoikhoi people who lived along the shores of present-day Hermanus way back then when everything here was young and just as young in the continent of Aboriginal Dreaming. (WC, 138)¹²

Although the two indigenous cultures (Khoikhoi and Aborigines) are geographically distant they do have an appreciation for the mammals as well as certain cultural traditions in common. Hence, the Khoikhoi stranded whale feast, mentioned above, finds strong parallels in Australian Aboriginal culture:

Way way back in the Dreamtime of Australian Aborigines the stranding of whales and dolphins attracted people to binges of feasting, as it did with the Khoikhoi of old in what later became the Western Cape. (WC, 200)

However, the Khoikhoi, the narrative suggests, have lost their connection to whales due to being forced inland, away from the coast. According to historians, the landing of the Europeans on the coastlines increasingly and forcefully drew the Khoikhoi from the shores to the inner and more hostile areas of the Kalahari where they joined the San hunter-gatherers (Beck 2000; Davenport and Saunders 2000). As a result, the Khoikhoi were hindered from developing their relationship to the whales and the sea as well as from creating cultural stories – embedded in historical memory – which would give meaning, explanations and assistance to their coastal existence. The lack of mythical stories from the original inhabitants of South Africa might allude to the disruption of a coherent “indigenous” culture by the destructive forces of colonialism.¹³ This departs from Wendy Woodward’s argument that the Khoikhoi lack a mystical relationship with whales by and large:

For Mda what is implicitly lacking in Khoikhoi relationships with whales, even as they use whale skeletons for their houses and baleen for the roofs, is that they cannot account mythically for these mammals as the Australian Aborigines do in their story of Whale Man. (2009, 335)

¹² Saluni seems indeed delighted about the stories “way way back in Dreamtime” (WC, 140). Listening to those beautiful stories of another time and place, she feels the comforts of a child as they provide a temporary escape from her life lived in taverns and townships. Her nostalgia will be examined in Chapter 4.3.2. Sensing the Whale Caller’s deep connection to the “Dreamings,” Saluni suggests, “[p]erhaps in another life you lived in the Dreamtime” (WC, 140). Thereby she takes up the cyclic idea of “rebirth” as already illustrated in Chapter 3.1.2.4 – 3.1.2.6.

¹³ During colonial times, whales were hunted for their bones and flesh, and also in contemporary times, the Whale Caller only perceives a capitalist treatment of the whales – they are a tourist attraction.

Whether or not they ever had myths or could not further develop their myths due to colonial disruption – what seems important to Mda is to recuperate indigenous practises and mythologies and connect them across cultures in the present as they provide a source of knowledge which passes over cultural borders.

The spiritual lack which hinders mystical invention in natural life becomes dramatic when Sharisha beaches after following the Whale Caller's calling with the kelp horn. In contrast to the Strong Man from the myth of the Australian aboriginal Ramindjeri clan, the Whale Caller is unable to activate mythical powers to save her. The Strong Man, whose totem was the whale, could sing a female whale and her calve away from the dangerous shallow waters. The narrative's contrast of the Whale Caller and the Strong Man exposes the whole drama of the colonial and cultural disruption from the natural and mythical world. While the Whale Caller has the ability to sing Sharisha to the shore where she eventually dies the fatal death, he fails to guide her out of the bay which is dangerously shallow after a storm. Indigenous stories and local myths, one might interpret this scene, were ruptured, suppressed and finally forgotten due to colonial attempts to extinguish heathen practises and mythologies. Moreover, unlike the Strong Man, who uses his powers to help the whales, the Whale Caller's reason for musically calling Sharisha in the first place, even though he expects her to have left the local waters, are solely egotistical.

Not being able to use his musical power to save Sharisha, emergency rescue teams from Cape Town arrive and attempt to save her. Finally, Sharisha dies a spectacular death. The narrative thereby emphasises the inability of rationality and science to overpower nature – the scientists and rescuers are as helpless as the Khoikhoi of old. Those danced their thanks to Tsiqua for a beached whale which provided them with food, however their dance froze after mass strandings “and the laughter in the eyes of the dancers melt[ed] into tears that [left] stains on the sand” (WC, 2). Contrasting the traditional Khoikhoi feasting on a beached whale, the comically portrayed crowd of wanna-be important politicians and other spectators celebrate a carnival death ceremony sparked by fireworks. The whale's detonation, which also signifies her funeral, is represented as a mixture of a religious ritual killing and a rock concert:

Like a high priest in a ritual sacrifice a man stands over a contraption that is connected to the whale with a long red cable. With all due solemnity he triggers the explosives. Sharisha goes up in a gigantic ball of smoke and flame. [...] It is like Guy Fawkes fireworks. The glorious death brightens the sky like the pyrotechnics that are used by rock bands in cities like Cape Town and Johannesburg. [...] The onlookers cheer and applaud like the carnival crowd they have become. (WC, 205)

The explosion should keep Sharisha from further suffering. Yet the modern death ceremony does not bemoan the whale as a dying subject but gazes at it disrespectfully only to applaud the bloody spectacle which follows. Again, the narrative contrasts an emphatic, balanced past with a destructive, even sadistic present. The underlying irony is that the carnivalesque crowd applauds their dying ecosystem – and thereby their very source of life. In so doing, they also ironically applaud the failure of modern science and technology and their failure to dominate nature.¹⁴

While the story of Whale Man enriches the Whale Caller's own connection to the natural, he also knows of "indigenous" stories which he cannot identify with, such as the practices of the shark callers of New Ireland. Although this story does not focus on whales but on sharks it also tells of a form of communication between the human and the non-human:

[T]he shark callers of New Ireland – a province of Papua New Guinea – use their voices and rattle of coconut shells under water to attract sharks. The sharks swim to the boat where they can be speared or netted. Sometimes the rattling noise attracts the shark through a noose. A rope attached to the noose is connected to a wooden propeller that is spun around to tighten the noose while pulling in the rope. The shark is then unable to move. (WC, 11–12)

The shark callers' gruesome way of entrapping sharks in order to kill them counters the Whale Caller's ideal of a harmonious human-nature relationship. He rejects a comparison between him and the shark callers because he does not see whales, or in fact any animals, as objects, but as his equals. Rather, the Whale Caller suggests a parallel between shark callers and the official Whale Crier of Hermanus. This insinuates that the Whale Crier's indication to tourists as to the whereabouts of the whales might eventually lead to their extinction. Thus, in addition to nostalgia, the recollection of local stories serves to inspire critical thinking about contemporary treatment of the non-human world. Mda, one might

¹⁴ This becomes further striking in the novel's other two natural phenomena: a solar eclipse, which supposedly has the power to blind Saluni and a tsunami, which destroys part of the village. While human beings have managed to use and live off nature to a certain extent, the natural catastrophe of a gigantic seventeen-meter wave shows that, in the end, human beings are still part of nature and cannot rule over it completely.

argue, presents the traditional practises of the shark callers as a cruel counterpart to the Khoikhoi and thus escapes a full idealisation of “indigenous” culture. However, one needs to bear in mind those cautioning voices that question “the oft-repeated notion that precolonial societies were idyllically living as the first ecologists in complete harmony with nature (Carruthers cited in Woodward 2009, 335).

The narrative’s cross-cultural, transoceanic interweaving of myths suggests the potentials of past wisdom not only on a local but also on a global scale. Moreover, by connecting different cultures, the narrative counters notions of purity and isolatedness and proposes the healing potential of sharing cultural myths and stories. The imaginative power of nostalgia enables the Whale Caller to re-imagine the stories and myths of a traditional culture he has never encountered but with which he shares his love for whales. The Aboriginals’ spirituality with the whales enforces the Whale Caller’s own spiritual connection to whales. Hence, such myth borrowing supports the view of a common humanity. Thereby, the implied author emphasises positive effects of a global connectedness where cultures and people gain a better understanding of who they are through sharing their cultural stories and peculiarities (instead of seeing these as antagonistic).

In sum, the Whale Caller re-imagines a past in which the Khoikhoi sensibly interacted with nature and the animal world thereby inspiring one to critically question present human-nature relationships. His nostalgia is consciously used to both give a warning of the further exploitation of nature and to didactically pave the way for thinking about more sustainable ways of interacting with the natural surroundings. By presenting the Khoikhoi’s ecological way of life, the narrative recuperates the practises of an ancient people as offering alternatives for the present. By contrasting these alternatives with the present the narrative reveals present ecological dangers if disrespect for the natural environment continues. Thereby, the implied author is not as naïve as to suggest a return to past times but, instead, suggests an openness to traditions, the past and other cultural practises. In so doing, he challenges one to question the global dominance of Western progress in contemporary times, while celebrating the positive outcomes of globalisation – cultural interaction and enrichment.

4.3.1.4 The Crossing of Borders – Nostalgia for a Colonial Event

The Whale Caller not only longs for the precolonial times of indigenous cultures but surprisingly also expresses nostalgia for a heroic event during the times of colonialism. His nostalgia for a bygone era is triggered by a visual stimulus when he is forced to accompany Saluni on a trip through the countryside. The Whale Caller obviously misses his whales and hopes for a quick end to their nomadic lifestyle. Upon seeing some shipwrecks his nostalgia for their colonial past is inspired. Hence, “he resuscitates an old habit – that of ambling in the mists of the past” (WC, 172). This time he re-imagines the historical event during which the British ship HMS Birkenhead sunk in 1852.¹⁵ Unlike his other nostalgic journeys to bygone times where he is in the position of an observer, Saluni and he become characters in the dramatic event of the shipwreck taking on the roles of protector and protected:

He is a glorious soldier in Her Majesty’s conquering army sailing westwards to the navy base of Stellenbosch in the troopship. Great storms arise and toss *HMS Birkenhead* against the rocks and wreck it. There are only three lifeboats which are all sacrificed for the civilian passengers. After helping Saluni to a lifeboat, he joins the other brave soldiers of Her Majesty’s brave army, and stands to attention with a salute and an anthem that appeals to God to save the glorious queen as the ship sinks. He is one of the four hundred fifty-five people, most of them soldiers, who perish in the shipwreck. He dies a happy man, knowing that Saluni has been saved. (WC, 172)

The Whale Caller becomes Saluni’s heroic guardian which reverses their real life situation where he fails to protect Saluni from blinding herself. Part of his nostalgic feeling can thus be interpreted as an expression of his helplessness to safeguard Saluni in the present real life due to her ill-will.

In his depiction of the shipwreck, Mda treats a historical fact where most of the British soldiers died, allowing woman and children to take the few lifeboats first. It is reported that about 193 of some 640 aboard died.¹⁶ Considering the soldier’s bravery, the

¹⁵ For more on that see Historic-Uk.com, or Albert Christopher Addison and Walter Robert Matthews. 2006. *Deathless Story, or, The Birkenhead and Its Heroes*. Uckfield: Naval & Military Press.

¹⁶ The dramatic shipwreck entered British history as an example of the bravery of soldiers who were standing firm in hopeless times. This was also taken up in Rudyard Kipling’s poem “Soldiers An’ Sailor Too” ([1907] 2009, 305–307):

To take your chance in the thick of a rush, with firing all about,
Is nothing so bad when you’ve cover to ‘and, an’ leave an’ likin’ to shout;
But to stand an’ be still to the Birken’ead drill is a damn tough bullet to chew,
An’ they done it, the Jollies – ‘Er Majesty’s Jollies – soldier an’ sailor too

Whale Caller's re-imagining of this event can therefore also be interpreted as an expression of courage in hopeless times with respect to his torturing relationship with Saluni.

Moreover, the Whale Caller not only transgresses temporal but also racial borders. Even though being a convinced pacifist, he slips into the role of a soldier and tellingly "of all soldiers a soldier of the colonising British" (WC, 172) in the eighth Xhosa war. Thus, he takes on the identity of the colonial oppressor.¹⁷ This reflects Zakes Mda's own reconciliatory call to be able to change perspective and see the motivation of the enemy. In an interview Mda said,

I try to understand both sides, you see. I'm from the new oppressed, that is my side. But I can't just condemn the other side. I need to understand the other side as well, to understand their perspective. [...] I do not try to be objective. In fact, I don't believe in that kind of thing, objectivity and all that, but I can do my best to try and understand the other side so that I reflect their perspective as well, to understand their fears, some of which are true fears. (Kachuba 2004)

By mixing the facts of a past event in the history of the colonising enemy with fiction, Mda challenges the reader to re-align his or her subject position and see the past from the enemy's position. This change of perspective can be seen as part of the *ubuntu* spirit – the African humanist spirituality which also played a significant role as a driving force in the unique reconciliatory processes of the TRC and which informs Mda's own philosophy. In his novels Mda likes to play with transgressing, supposedly stable borders. Thereby, he retains his sarcastic tone when depicting "Her Majesty's brave army," already familiar from Queen Victoria's soldiers in *The Heart of Redness*.

The Whale Caller's nostalgic re-imagining of a colonial event is not to be confused with colonial nostalgia (cf. Chapter 2.2.3.3). While the Whale Caller returns to colonial times and imagines himself to be a colonial soldier in positive terms, it becomes obvious that he only longs for the courage of the soldiers while he is oblivious to the political circumstances under which the HMS arrived at the South African coast in the first place.

To summarise, both the past and the confessions to his spiritual medium have rehabilitating qualities and healing effects for the Whale Caller. With his nostalgic re-

Their work was done when it 'and't begun; they was younger nor me an' you;
Their choice it was plain between drownin' in 'eaps an' bein' mopped by the screw,
So they stood an' was still to the Birken'ead drill, soldier an' sailor too.

¹⁷ Even though, and presumably deliberately subtle in the text, the Whale Caller's characteristics and social background denote him as a descendent of the colonised subjects rather than of the colonisers.

imagining of the opposing pasts of precolonial and colonial times the complexities of human life – present, past and future are explicated. Reversing the typical triggers of nostalgia, the Whale Caller's longing for the past is not only depicted as a temporary escape from a deficient present. Rather, the Whale Caller also activates his nostalgic imaginations in order to boost his good mood in addition to compensating for present failures or deficiencies. Moreover, in his journeys to imagined past worlds, nostalgia unfolds its complexities: the imaginative return to the past offers alternatives to present ways of life in general and to present ways of dealing with the natural environment in specific. Thereby, the narrative does not suggest restoring the past in the present. Rather, nostalgia, as the analysis of the novel suggests, might provide a path for rehabilitating the negative perception of the natural world by positively reviving past myths and practises. Additionally, the narrative illustrates that caring for nature does not imply neglecting the masses of poor people, such as the Whale Caller himself, but instead that the natural world had always been significant for local culture. Moreover, the contact between cultures and their myths provides a way to borrow traditions and stories for a culture that was deprived of or could never fully establish their own myths. However, while the Whale Caller re-imagines fragments of a diverse past, he moves close to idealising precolonial Khoikhoi culture: while recuperating significant environmental practises he is also in danger of over-idealising local cultures and “respiritualising” (Plumwood cited in Woodward 2009, 336) nature.

4.3.2 Saluni's Nostalgia(s)

Although Saluni is generally portrayed as a representative of worldliness and the here and now, at times she also travels back in time for different purposes. As will become obvious her nostalgia(s) is also directed at various periods in the past. The triggers for her return to bygone times can be found mainly in her frustrations with attracting the Whale Caller's attention. However, she also bears the wisdom of African traditional practises which turn out to be both healing and progressive. The following will look at Saluni's longing first for colonial capitalism and second for transnational pagan epochs and third at her present use of ancient wisdom.

4.3.2.1 Nostalgia for Colonial Times

In her eagerness to get rid of her rival, “the fish,” as she derogatorily calls Sharisha, Saluni re-imagines “wonderful” colonial times. Thereby, she glorifies the very culture which eventually led to her mother’s suicide and Saluni’s marginalisation as a Coloured child during the times of apartheid.¹⁸ She glamorises colonial culture for its industrial usage of nature and does so in a nostalgic and even sadistic manner. In particular she yearns for the times when whalebones were used in the fabrication of clothes, baskets and the likes:

She closes her eyes tightly and a hazy image of the past emerges. She sees genteel women walking on Cape Town’s promenades wearing long colourful dresses. They are perfectly shaped because of the corsets made from baleen. Some are shading their heads from the sun with umbrellas whose ribs are made of baleen. Down on the rocks by the sea men are fishing and their rods are made of baleen. The beautiful corseted women are brining them picnic baskets. She looks at them longingly, for if she had lived during their time she would have been one of them. She would be there with the Whale Caller. There would be no Sharisha, for her baleen would have been part of her corset and umbrella. (WC, 67)

Hence, also Saluni crosses temporal and racial boundaries by imagining herself to be one of the colonial, supposedly British, ladies. Her at first seemingly absurd longing to be one of those women reveals her desires to move out of her poor and marginalised position. The narrative thereby points to the remaining stark imbalances of contemporary South Africa. Moreover, Saluni’s nostalgia for colonial (high) society and unrestricted whale-killing can be seen as a direct response to the Whale Caller’s ecological ideology which is taken to the extreme in his love for a whale. For rather selfish reasons, Saluni rejects the present fashion of having laws to protect not only human but also nature rights, which she sees as backward (reminiscent of Xoliswa in *The Heart of Redness*):

In today’s world, with all the foolish laws that protect these useless creatures, what do you do with a stubborn whale that refuses to let loose your man’s very soul? You cannot just go to any old whale and kick it around and beat it up with your stiletto-heel, shouting that it must leave your man alone. (WC, 68)

¹⁸ One reading of her identity suggests that her 14-year-old mother was raped by her White master. This is supported by Saluni’s repetitive telling of the story of her conception which seems like a self-affirmation that she is a “love child”, “consumed by the flames of love”, that she is “a child of the light” (WC 62, 74). However, her mother’s suicide as well as Saluni’s leaving of the farmstead because of the “climatic darkness” suggest a different story of her conception. Saluni’s over-emphasis of being a love child can thus be interpreted as an attempt to make sense of her present self and construct a coherent identity.

On another occasion the narrator tells how Saluni laments the dying whaling tradition and how she dreams that the whales will strand themselves one day “since the seas are polluted with the ugly creatures that are of no use to mankind” (WC, 133). Unable to revive the past she tries to compensate for her wish to kill by hunting for seals which are accidentally in her way.

By including the industrial processing of whales, Mda dates the domination and destruction of nature in South Africa back to colonial times. Moreover, the civilised living that Saluni so dearly embraces, which can be seen as a relic of the civilising mission as well as a longing to participate in common, “decent” life, has contributed immensely to the estrangement of the local people from the natural world. Contrary to Saluni, the Whale Caller, through his nostalgic re-imagining of an ancient ecological society and his present interaction with nature, shows the importance of living *with* instead of *off* nature. The narrative juxtaposes Saluni’s and the Whale Caller’s nostalgia in order to illustrate the diverging interests of the two characters and what they represent: the complex relationship between the human and non-human worlds.

4.3.2.2 Saluni – Historical Memory and Nostalgia

The Value of Ancient Wisdom

Despite her aspirations for the glamour of the consumer world, Saluni also represents a bearer of traditional knowledge which becomes explicit in her recourse to traditional knowledge for healing powers and in her application of old West African voodoo practises. When one day Saluni visits the Bored Twins, one of the girls is delirious. She is suffering from the flu and her body experiences hot and cold shivers.¹⁹ Saluni immediately applies her herbal wisdom in order to nurse the little girl. Taught by the people of the inland provinces, she looks for the local medicinal herb: “From the early days of humanity in these parts grandmothers have used this herb to relieve the symptoms of flu and to bring down the temperature” (WC, 93). Saluni boils the herbs and puts a blanket over the girl and the pot so that she is covered in steam and can inhale the herbs’ mentholated vapours – a method well known and also appropriated by Western medicine.

¹⁹ The implied author seems to use this incident to alert the implied reader to the harsh working conditions in the postapartheid period. Although there have been changes and vineyard owners no longer pay their workers with cheap bottles of wine, which was a common apartheid practice, many poor workers have to accept bad working conditions in order to survive. Thus, the parents cannot stay at home and care for their little daughter because the fate of “piece-job” workers is: “no work, no pay; no pension; no sick leave; no maternity leave; let alone the luxury of paternity leave; no compassionate leave even if your loved one is dying” (WC, 92). With his critique of a lack of worker’s rights, the implied author addresses a universal problem which is also prevalent in a democratic South Africa.

Thereby, the implied reader is also reminded of the fact that many of today's healing practises and remedies are based on ancient wisdom of plants and the natural environment.

Upon their return from the hard work in the vineyards, Saluni teaches the twins' parents about the healing plant procedure. She thus represents not only a conveyer of ancient wisdom but also a mediator making traditional knowledge accessible to others and guaranteeing its continuity. As already indicated in the analysis of *The Heart of Redness*, female bodies are used as representatives of African traditions (Chapter 3.1.2.2). As becomes explicit in *The Whale Caller*, it is also the human female character who is designated for the sphere of healing as well as to pass on ancient wisdom. In that way, Saluni, similar to Qukezwa, also becomes a symbol for continuity and coherence, connecting past and present and providing for the future. Moreover, considering the fact that the female characters Saluni and NomaRussia inspire a mothering spirit in the male protagonists, Camagu and the Whale Caller respectively, it seems appropriate to argue that Mda emphasises the reproductive quality of women and represents them as carrying cultural traditions and wisdom literally in their wombs.²⁰ As carriers of traditional knowledge, they not only become symbolic for continuity and the passing on of traditional values but also take on an important function in society and in the re-creation of local cultures. Using such gendered stereotypes, Mda moves on slippery grounds by limiting them to this role and depriving them of political agency. He is thus in danger of romanticising and thereby reducing women to the rather problematic "Mother Africa Trope" (Stratton 1994; Samuelson 2009). However, again Mda portrays his female characters as more complex than this. In fact, Saluni is also portrayed as the leading critical voice of society and thus resembles a strong voice similar to Qukezwa.

While Saluni's active historical memory connects her appreciatively to the past, it does not define her as an overall nostalgic person. She uses her historical memory for concrete actions in the present. These practises have ultimately become collectively used traditions (and as such a positive evaluation of the past). The narrative demonstrates in the form of healing rituals that traditions and historical memory might indeed be valuable in the present and illustrates that our present is nurtured by both old wisdoms and the natural

²⁰ See Samuelson's article "Nongqawuse, national time and (female) authorship in *The Heart of Redness*" (2009) for a more detailed analysis of Mda's problematic representation of his female characters, exemplified in *The Heart of Redness*.

environment. This stands in contrast to the abuses of traditions as exemplified in the shark callers and the whaling traditions.

Voodoo Spells

Saluni's importance in conserving historical memory is further enforced by her knowledge of transcultural traditions. Although she has made herself at home and has been in the Wendy house and in the Whale Caller's life for some time, he virtuously goes to bed in the kitchen every night, which leaves Saluni sexually frustrated. Hence, she activates supernatural powers by "chant[ing] spells from the binding rituals of those wonderful pagan epochs" (WC, 83) so as to raise his desire for her. In order to apply traditional Voodoo practises, she "draw[s] deeply from her historical memory" which again makes her the keeper of ancient traditions:

She commands through binding hymns that her beloved should be subject to her will and act according to her wishes. With sand she builds an effigy of her beloved, in the manner that the lovesick moulded such effigies in old Egypt and Greece – a male pursuit in those ancient cultures – and still mould them in the enchanting voodoo rituals of some Africans. [...] She uses matchsticks to pierce the sandman in the arms and the legs and the heart, chanting the binding hymn that the beloved will come to her running, burning with desire, and she will drag him by his beard and even by his genitals, until he surrenders himself completely to her. She tortures the sandman with 'needles' until the Whale Caller feels the pain where he is sitting, and has seizures. (WC, 83)

Voodoo is usually associated with the coastal regions of West Africa, and African diasporas in the New World such as Haiti and certain parts of the US. By inciting such practises Saluni's historical memory does not only exceed her local traditional knowledge but connects her to the African continent and its globally scattered diasporas. Furthermore, Saluni's turn to probably one of the most egalitarian religions in the world (Ember and Ember 2004, 700) – which is thus implicitly juxtaposed to patriarchal Christian religion – illustrates the progressive elements of old African belief systems. In Mda's magic realist style,²¹ the power of the needles is successful, and the Whale Caller finally submits to her sexual interests. However, although she longs for pagan bygone times, she does not retreat into nor does she restore those times. When she imagines a past time, these are temporary escapes from the present – either from her marginalised

²¹ Magic realism denotes a literary mode which is characterised by the occurrence of the supernatural in the world of Western logic and reason, whereby "[t]he supernatural is presented in a matter-of-fact way as if it did not contradict reason, and no explanations are offered for the unreal events in the text" (Spindler 1993).

existence in the new South Africa or from the failure to fight her rival Sharisha in the competition over the Whale Caller.

Moreover, Saluni's historical memory crosses different cultural traditions, which stresses once more Mda's emphasis on a global humanity. His hybrid perception of local culture and knowledge drawing cross-cultural wisdom from times long past challenges any concepts of cultural purity and isolated locality. Mda again demonstrates that, although he is critical of globalisation especially when it comes in the neo-colonial form of flooding local identity, he celebrates a globalisation which connects cultures and traditions across countries, continents and oceans. Likewise, he shows that historical memory and nostalgia are not restricted to any single cultural past or traditions. Rather, his narrative suggests that taking inspiration from other cultural myths and historical memories might enrich one's own cultural life, especially in the face of a history of cultural disruption.

4.3.2.3 Nostalgia for the Spiritual

While the previous two examples illustrated Saluni's ways of activating cultural or religious knowledge from long bygone times for concrete purposes in the present (healing and spellbinding), which were accompanied by her nostalgic reminiscences, the following will shed light on Saluni's spiritual nostalgia through which she experiences healing.

The angelic voices of the Bored Twins inspire in Saluni a nostalgic feeling for a yet unknown world. The girls look "as though they would sprout wings and fly to the clouds" (WC, 22) and their singing has magical healing effects. When she first hears the twins sing somewhere hidden within reeds she is captivated by their innocent voices and appearance. Almost mythically, the children's unearthly voices "evoked a feeling of nostalgia for a world Saluni had never known" (WC, 22). Saluni's inspired nostalgia is an unspecified longing for a past world, unimagined as of yet. This world is not a lived past, although she admits that it might be a world "she had experienced in another life" (WC, 22). The possibility of another life in the past evokes, as in the case of the Whale Caller's Dreamtime and as implied in the Voodoo religion, a cyclical worldview of birth and death. The nostalgic imagination of this other life offers her salvation from her present pains and misery. Interpreting the angelic, ethereal voices as spiritual, they even evoke a divine world: "The voices seemed to connect her to an angelical realm" (WC, 22). The nostalgically imagined spiritual world stands in opposition to her real world and has a healing effect on Saluni as "her body suddenly felt a surge of something akin to

vibrational healing” (WC, 22). In this passage, the narrative illustrates the positive psychological effects of nostalgia when the longing for an imagined world turns into a source of healing power for the present soul. As the village drunk, Saluni represents just one of the marginalised misfits of the new society who, as in the old regime, remain a loser concerning present day politics and change. However, a spiritual connection to an angelic realm, a world devoid of present hardships and unjust hierarchies, relieves Saluni temporarily from her present outcast life. Yet, it does not change her situation. This kind of spiritual nostalgia does not envision alternatives in the future.

The narrative does not visualise a possible future world in the abstract spiritual world evoked by the Bored Twins. They are described as “Euphoriants” who have magical powers to spellbind whoever hears them sing with euphoria and to “cleanse both body and soul” (WC, 61) with their voices. The twins’ mystical power to lure people into euphoria together with their healing powers mark them as unearthly beings. This is supported when Saluni takes them to the Kalfiefees in order to record their beautiful voices. On the recording, however, the girl’s voices are distorted and unrecognisable: “They sound like the voices of ghosts” (WC 163). The twins, in fact, turn out to be devils in disguise coming rather from the underworld than from any angelic realm. Allegorically, one might argue, they represent a new corrupt generation which has its own distorted and brutal ideas of a future South Africa.

Their devilish deeds are directed against both the human and the non-human world, which becomes most obvious in the seemingly innocent tricks they play on Saluni. First, they hide a millipede in Saluni’s bra causing her to faint and to suffer from a terrible rash. Then, they throw a living snake at her, and finally they stone her to death while crying in their ethereal voices: “Sorry auntie [...]. Sorry auntie” (WC, 94). In order to play such tricks they ruthlessly make use of the non-human world thereby representing exploitative forces which abuse nature.²² Beyond the surface of their angelic looks and voices, the twins turn out to be demonic, dreadful creatures who have no sense of morality and ruthlessly exploit nature to serve their purposes.

²² Animals become mere objects with which to brutally experiment. The girls have composed a song about one of their sadistic tortures singing it to Saluni: “It is about croaking frogs in their green and brown colours and how the girls caught them and pierced their eyes with sharp sticks and set them free to hop about in wonderful blindness. It is a haunting melody. They tell Saluni the song is all about the fun they had at the swamps today. (WC, 132) They tell her that they blinded the frogs because in darkness they will not see any danger and will therefore be safer. The logic of blindness resonated with Saluni who adopts it when she blinds herself later on during an eclipse.

Interpreting the Euphorians as a metaphor for the new South Africa, the Bored Twins can be read as a warning of the delusion of the Rainbow Nation euphoria, which disguises the realities of a troubled South Africa. Furthermore, Saluni's stoning death might represent a continuing silencing of the poor who are still ignored by the government.²³ Her tragic death thus anticipates the fatal result of disguising continuing injustices and inequalities.²⁴ By depicting such a symbolic death, Mda evokes biblical forms of punishment for supposedly amoral women. He, thus, chooses a problematic tradition still practised by fundamentalist religious groups in contemporary times, which, as Saluni's senseless death testifies, bears no value in the present but stands in opposition to democratic or human rights values. Thereby, restorative uses of traditions are criticised.

In summary, Saluni re-imagines the past as a direct response to her dislikes in the present. Thereby, she is not fixed to one understanding of nostalgia. Unlike Qukzewa and the Whale Caller, Saluni does not partake in nostalgia as a way to bolster her present cultural African identity or as a recreational remedy. Rather, she longs for the practices of the past as a source of resuscitating tools for the present and adapts past traditions to her present needs. Paradoxically, while her nostalgia for the spiritual temporarily releases her from her present marginalised position, her nostalgia for a historical past takes her back to and glorifies the times responsible for her and her culture's present poor status.²⁵ On top of that, she imagines being one of the colonial women who have the means to dress nicely and enjoy the luxuries of life. Moreover, she revives old mythical traditions, the knowledge of which turn out to be extremely important and of which also Western school medicine increasingly makes use of. Believing in mystical workings, she also makes use of cross-cultural traditions when she chants Voodoo spells.

Saluni is represented as hybridising past and present, Black and White, and nature and culture in contradictory ways. In that, one might argue, she reflects a new nation

²³ I am indebted to Hanna Straß for pointing this out to me.

²⁴ At the same time, the twin's un-empathic behaviour is also a criticism for socially-conditioned parental neglect and the lack of proper care and education for children, who represent the future of the nation. The narrative points to the reality of so many children whose parents cannot take care of them in their need to earn money for basic needs, such as in the case of the twins' parents: "We cannot look after them all the time because we are working people" (WC, 24). Moreover, Saluni's allusion that "[e]ven little girls of your age get raped these days" (WC, 22) reveals the wicked realities of power and violence prevailing in contemporary society mostly affecting women and children and not taken care of by the "new" South African government. Mda thereby poses the question what actually is so new about the new South Africa if the majority of people are still at the hands of arbitrary violence.

²⁵ This does not suggest that Saluni would have been in a better position if colonialism and apartheid had never shaped South Africa's present. It would be too easy to hold colonialism and apartheid responsible for all of today's injustices by a Black government. However, one also cannot deny the strong legacy of racialised subjugation and exploitation.

which still has to struggle to position itself with respect to the multiple opposing forces it incorporates. Although Saluni is, to certain extents, portrayed as conserving cultural memory and knowledge and as teaching her wisdom to younger generations, she can be seen as embodying the colonial result of alienation from nature in her obsessive longing for civilised living and consumption. Moreover, even though Saluni incorporates both worldliness and traditional beliefs, consumption and historical memory, she does not represent a character that successfully synthesises the dichotomies which lie at the heart of the novel. After all, and as the sad ending of the novel suggests, the two human protagonists do not manage to surpass the binary thinking which lies at the centre of present society.

4.4 Collective Ways of Remembering

While the previous two sections focused on the two human protagonists' forms of nostalgia, the final section of this novel's analysis will examine collective and institutionalised ways of remembering. Therefore, the question of symbolic naming and re-naming will be addressed first, and then the public, collective treatment of apartheid history in the form of a local war memorial will be scrutinised. Finally, this chapter will end with a discussion of the narrative's satirical portrayal of the contemporary Rainbow Nation and its tendency to escape dealing with the past.

4.4.1 Nostalgia and the Politics of Naming

The Whale Caller's political ignorance and his longing for bygone times also become explicit in his retention of the colonial name Hermanuspietersfontain. The political shift from colonialism to apartheid to democracy can be traced in the cartography of South Africa's towns and cities. Post-1994 governments were quick to get rid of the old names as reminiscences of colonialism and apartheid.²⁶ The Whale Caller, however, does not care about the changes, such as the renaming of his hometown. He aligns with the southern rights who "don't bother with the politics of naming" (WC, 15)²⁷ and maintains the old name because "it rolls nicely on the tongue" (WC, 60). Thereby, one might argue,

²⁶ Although it is important that the colonial and apartheid history woven into public places, names and architecture changes, it is also important to account for the past. Both Mda and Vladislavić show the danger of getting rid of one ideological past by just substituting it with a new ideology of the present. Substitution then eradicats the possibility of learning.

²⁷ That the Whale Caller, however, is not oblivious to the symbolic power of naming becomes evident in his nomenclature – and thereby anthropomorphising – of his beloved whale Sharisha ("You have given them names? 'Only Sharisha.'" (WC, 37)).

the Whale Caller ignorantly legitimates the colonial founding of Hermanuspietersfontain.

On one occasion when the Whale Caller, surrounded by observers to his ecstatic dance with Sharisha, utters the old name of Hermanus some people wonder what he is referring to:

‘He means us,’ one of them offered helpfully. ‘It is what this town used to be called ... after the shepherd and teacher who came down the mountain past the Hemel-en-Aarde valley and set up camp here almost two hundred years ago ... before the land was stolen from the Khoikhoi.’ (WC, 60)²⁸

One of the crowd of supposedly White people is disgusted by the Whale Caller’s turn to the old name seeing the past as shameful: “‘It is a foolish name. It belongs to an old world. *Does he miss the past?*’” (WC, 60; emphasis added) The irony of course is that the Whale Caller does indeed miss the past in very complex and creative ways as already explicated above. The novel problematises the stereotypical equation of the past with solely negative images as has already become obvious in his two protagonists’ imaginative journeys to White, colonial pasts. As already argued in the introduction, the past is felt to be a site of White shame from the present perspective. The tendency to see the past as solely negative is satirised, for example, by the Whale Caller’s own ignorance of the political implication of naming, which is illustrated by his preference for the colonial name Hermanus. But, the narrative does not argue in favour of a colonial past. Rather, it challenges the reader to perceive the past as made up of ambiguities. History, as becomes obvious, is not only identical with the traumas of colonialism and apartheid but, on the personal level, is also made up of moments rightly missed. Mda thus recuperates the past and challenges the reduction of the past to a single narrative since valuable things would be lost.

The other irony in the bystanders’ hatred for the old name Hermanuspietersfontain is the fact that the change to Hermanus was not caused by the political change to democracy. Rather, “[I]azy tongues,” according to the Whale Caller, “have reduced his town to Hermanus” (WC, 15) when municipal status was given to the town in 1904. Thus, the narrative ironises the shifting changes from old to new in the new dispensation and reveals the superficiality with which postapartheid changes are accepted and absorbed. Following the demise of apartheid there have been waves of renaming towns, villages and

²⁸ As history holds it, the shepherd and teacher Hermanus Pieters followed an elephant trail, which led him to a spring. That spot turned out to be ideal for his sheep and eventually the spring and the developing town were called Hermanuspietersfontein. For more on the history of Hermanus see, for example, “Hermanus – History of the town.”

streets – however, the Whale Caller is oblivious to the political meaning contained in names and sees the renaming as just a temporary trend in the new South Africa. He clings to the old name “[e]ven when its name is changed, as it is bound to in keeping with the demands of the new South Africa, he will continue to call it Hermanuspietersfontein” (WC, 15). The implied author mocks the easy exchange of ideologies, as well as the tendency to implement changes quickly, as another way of bringing closure to the past. These are after all only surface changes, which as the novel insinuates, neither eradicate past wrongs nor present injustices. The postapartheid era is full of symbolic changes which do not affect the lives of ordinary people for whom nothing much has changed and who cannot feed themselves with the renaming policy.

4.4.2 The Hermanus Roll of Honour

Memory is what you make of it.

We all construct our past as we go along. (*Cion* 2007, 236)

Contrary to the quick forgetting of the past, monuments serve to lastingly and collectively commemorate past events. As such the local war memorial in Hermanus stands out as a monumental reminder of past times. The Hermanus Roll of Honour²⁹ commemorates three wars, which tell of two decisive periods of (White) South African history:

The first panel, older and duller, has eleven names, citizens of Hermanus who died in World War One (1914-1918), and another list of twenty-eight names of those who ‘*gave up their lives for freedom*’ in World War Two (1939–1945). (WC, 44; emphasis added)

Both lists lament the deaths of soldiers who fought on the side of the British in the two world wars. South Africa’s alliance with the British as a self-governing dominion within the British Empire (1907) alludes to yet another history – that of the British Imperial Age. Although South Africa became independent in 1910 it remained a dominion and joined the Commonwealth in 1931 ensuring a strong alliance with the British. Hence, South Africa entered the war due to her colonial bondage with imperial Britain. The monument thus not only commemorates those who died in the two world wars but also implicitly commemorates British imperialism and colonialism. The inherent glorification of the

²⁹ The real-life war memorial in Hermanus was erected in 1929 to the memory of those who died in World War I. According to a local website: “Hermanus sent more men to both wars than any other town in South Africa, and in recognition the Union Government presented two field guns as trophies to be mounted on either side of the stone cairn. They eventually fell into disrepair and were replaced in 1963 by the present naval guns. The bronze plaque contains the names of those who died in both wars” (The Cape Odyssey).

British Empire is problematic, since it either silences the atrocities and human rights violations committed under the British crown or praises a racist past. The monument then stands in contrast to the politics of postapartheid South Africa, which has finally won the fight against three-hundred-fifty years of colonialism and White domination.

With biting sarcasm, the narrator cites the panel commemorating those who “gave up their lives for freedom” (WC, 44). Only three years after World War II the racist and inhumane system of apartheid was implemented.³⁰ Thus, the monument also reflects the wicked paradox that while the South African government was sending soldiers to fight for “global freedom” it was ignoring these supposedly heroic aims in their own country.³¹ Hence, freedom, similar to history, always depends on who defines it and is easily manipulated. Moreover, while the monument connects South Africa to imperial Britain and evokes the heroism of the golden years of British colonial rule, the monument does not tell of the thousands of people who suffered and died under the glorious British Empire. It does not tell of the suppressions and violence against non-White South Africans, of the various wars fought in the name of the crown or of the power struggle between the British and the Afrikaners – neither of which considered the Black majority as legitimate on their land – leading to the two South African wars.³² The White struggle over South Africa not only saw the first concentration camps but also laid the grounds for the future violent apartheid system.

Interestingly, and what the lists on the war memorial do not specify, is the fact that “[n]early half the total number of South Africans killed in World War II were Black” (Beck 2000, 120). Supposing that the memorial is a historical building, the few names as well as the term “citizen” on the panel suggest that the memorial only commemorates White South Africans – as Black South Africans were until recently not considered (political) citizens. Thus, the bitter irony of the first panel is that it commemorates the people fighting against fascism globally while, at the same time, supporting racism and conducting human rights violations at home.

³⁰ While J.B.M. Hertzog wanted to stay neutral, J.C. Smuts, also from the United Party, supported the British and again South Africa entered as a British ally into World War II. Afrikaner nationalist sentiments rose, which led eventually to the National Party’s victory and implementation of apartheid under prime minister D.F. Malan in 1948.

³¹ This also reminds one of the bitter irony that former prime minister Jan Christiaan Smuts was a major figure in the post-war formation of the United Nations and set up a draft of the Preamble to the United Nations Charter calling on the world community “to guarantee fundamental human rights, individual dignity, and non-discrimination between the sexes, none of which Smuts guaranteed in South Africa” (Beck 2000, 123).

³² A history of wars over domination and power reached its pinnacle in the two South African wars (Anglo-Transvaal War 1880–1881; South African or Anglo-Boer War 1899–1902 also referred to as First and Second War of Independence). They “left a legacy of animosity that continues to the present” (Beck 2000, 92).

The second, brighter panel joins in the abstruse paradoxes of the monument. It commemorates a younger war – one that remains nameless. The list on the panel only contains four names, “citizens of Hermanus who were killed in some war that is *not* mentioned” (WC, 44; emphasis added). The panel only says: “Republic of South Africa Roll of Honour (1973–1979)” (WC, 44). It commemorates those who died on the South African borders fighting for apartheid and thus against freedom for all people living in the country. By doing so, the monument with the panel commemorates not only a historic event but also the national ideology of the time when the panel was added to the monument and remains as a reminder of that in contemporary times. Today, however, “[t]hey [the citizens of Hermanus] dare not even whisper the name of the war, for they died on the border defending apartheid” (WC, 44). Thus, while the first panel constructs a narrative of a heroic and honourable deed of White South Africans on the side of the British fighting against evil (Nazi Germany), the second panel – by remaining anonymous and by being hushed – tries to hide the “national evil” of White citizens actively fighting for apartheid. The question arises as to why the one past containing a brutal history of suppression and exploitation under British imperialism and colonialism can be overtly commemorated while the other more recent past of systemised and institutionalised human rights violations, exploitations and deprivations under apartheid is too shameful to be commemorated. By incorporating the war memorial into his narrative, Mda addresses crucial concerns about the complexities and controversies of accounting for the past.

In general, the building of a monument aims to “eternally” commemorate people or events in order to set up a collective (national) memory. According to Davison, monuments, like museum collections and sites, “bridge the past and the present and provide cues to recollection” (1998, 160). The war memorial of Hermanus paradoxically foregrounding one historical period over another despite their structural similarities – both systems are based on racism, minority rule, exploitation –, demonstrates that history is always made in the present. Which aspects of the past are to be commemorated publicly and collectively thereby lies in the hands of the dominant political power. Hence, history, and its symbolisation through monuments, always depends on who writes it and at what time – and how it is re-written in other times. The war memorial reveals the constructedness of history made up of different layers of dominant political ideologies

and convictions.³³ Each layer adds up to shaping the past and shedding light on present debates and concerns.

“Saluni refuses to be forgotten”

Generally, monuments can be interpreted as nostalgic sites calling for collective memory of glorious past times and events. This, becomes visually evident in the Roll of Honour’s “[c]annons of a bygone era” (WC, 44). As such, one can further argue that monuments aim at glorifying the present and past nation. Nostalgia, in its restorative form of narrating a single plot of history thereby serves as the engine to manipulate people’s emotions. A key question in the discussion of monuments concerns their intention and purpose. In order to approach that question, Alois Riegel’s concepts of intentional and unintentional monuments, which roughly correspond with Boym’s restorative and reflective nostalgia, prove to be fruitful. Svetlana Boym explains:

What is involved in the restoration of an “intentional monument” is a recuperation of a single moment in history, made exemplary for the purpose of the present. Restoration of intentional monuments makes a claim to immortality and eternal youth, not to the past; intentional commemoration is about victory over time itself. On the other hand, unintentional monuments or urban environments, porous courtyard ruins, transitional spaces, multilayered buildings with conflicting and disharmonious imprints of history are inimical to the idea of commemoration; they are about physical and human frailty, ageing and the unpredictability of change. (2001, 78)

According to this classification, the war memorial denotes an intentional monument: while it commemorates the dead, it simultaneously stands as a reminder and glorifies imperial times. As already illustrated, the Hermanus monument is a memorial solely for White South Africans. Only four names are commemorated on the panel, which stands in stark contrast to the thousands who died in the fight against colonialism and apartheid.

The monument is even further satirised as Saluni becomes part of it and thereby enters a collective (White) commemoration. Saluni, representative of millions of South Africans living on the margins of society, sits on the monument dealing with one of her hangovers:

³³ The constructedness of history in the present recalls an anecdote referring to Nelson Mandela’s inauguration in 1994 at the Union Buildings in Pretoria. As Christopher Warnes writes, the ceremony was participated by two uninvited but ever-present guests: the statues of the first and last prime ministers Louis Botha and Barry Hertzog. These two statues were covered during the ceremony supposedly so that they would not take any harm: “The official reason for this covering was to protect the statues from harm, but opposition political parties accused the government of attempting to cover up the past” (Warnes 2000, 68). Hence, what Mda’s *Roll of Honours* and the covering of Botha and Hertzog suggest is the making and deleting of history in the here and now.

Saluni. She refuses to be forgotten. [...]

Saluni. She is merged with the monument and is in a world of dreams when the Whale Caller, on his way back to Mr Yodd, discovers her. (WC, 44–45)

Saluni's part in British history juxtaposes the official history of British heroism, of colonialism and imperialism, to the silenced histories of the marginalised local groups whose history was eradicated from official memory. The visual prospect of Saluni becoming part of the monument and refusing to be forgotten represents the reclaiming of local, histories and a rewriting of the colonial/apartheid past. Thus, the intention of the Hermanus monument to create a national history of White glorification is undermined by the passage of time making visible the different histories it narrates and simultaneously silences. Saluni as one such layer turns an intended restorative nostalgia into reflective nostalgia and social memory (cf. Chapter 2.2.4.2). In short, the narrative's fictional representation turns the intentional monument into an unintentional monument which not only tells about different layers of the past but also, in postcolonial manner, about the appropriation of the previous master narrative of White history by local and personal histories in South Africa:

Unintentional memorials, places of historical improvisation and of unpredictable juxtaposition of different historical epochs threaten any attempt at selective and embellished reconstruction of history. They reveal something about those other dimensions of existence of another era, carry its physical imprints and its aura; they can become space for reflective nostalgia. (Boym 2001, 78–79)

Saluni as part of the monument adds to the controversial past periods a controversial present which tries to get rid of its past by inserting the little adjective “new,” thereby, however, disregarding the suffering of millions of people. For people like Saluni the postapartheid has not brought many changes. She thus becomes the living memory of continuing injustice and inequality.

The war memorial as well as the rainbow-style (masquerading) hairdos, presented in the following, reiterate the White South African mantra encountered in *The Heart of Redness*: “Forget the past. Don't only forgive it. [...] Banish your memory. It is a sin to have a memory” (HR, 137). The official, escapist treatment of a problematic history is also reflected in the collective repression of memories satirically portrayed in the *Kalfiefee*, which celebrates the supposedly “new” South Africa and which will be looked at in the following.

4.5 Conclusion

The idea of nostalgia and its inherent components of home and be-longing are represented in complex ways in *The Whale Caller*. Nostalgia serves as a tool to recuperate not only a multifaceted past, but also to retrieve ecological forms of interacting with the non-human world. The narrative's nostalgic strands and its movement back and forth between the past and the present recover valuable aspects of the past, recuperate past or traditional ecological practises in the present and challenge the formation of a new master narrative which reduces the past to apartheid and to solely negative aspects. Not only does the novel rehabilitate past culture, tradition and nature, but it also demonstrates that environmentalism was part of local cultures before colonial and Western influence. Thereby, Zakes Mda raises important ecological questions about the interaction of humans and nature in order to further his environmental concerns.

As a reaction to present environmental neglect, the *Whale Caller* is nostalgic for precolonial times when people still worshipped and respected the earth and its resources. His imaginative journeys to a precolonial past have two functions: they provide alternative ways of life with nature in the present and demonstrate that the colonial and industrial invasion disrupted local culture and a spiritual affinity for the non-human world. Saluni's rehabilitation of precolonial knowledge as well as her nostalgia for colonial times, on the contrary, emphasises the significance of cultural and historical memory and the value these might have in contemporary times. Simultaneously, her nostalgic journeys also criticise the continuing poor condition of most of South Africa's ordinary citizens. Thereby, Saluni's longing for the future seems to exceed that of the past. She generally does not retreat to the past in order to escape present deficiencies. Rather, she voices her criticism of continuing injustices publicly. In her poor condition and with her ignorance of the natural landscape, Saluni represents the majority of urban South Africans who do not have a connection to the value of their surrounding landscape. The struggle for basic needs and survival turn environmental concerns into an elitist luxury. Hence, in its analepses to various periods in the past, *The Whale Caller* confirms that, "nostalgia can be a mechanism for social change, a model for ethical relationships, and a useful narrative for social and environmental justice" (Ladino 2004).

Both the *Whale Caller* and *Saluni* express a special form of nostalgic be-longing: it is not only a longing to be *somewhere* else, i.e. a lost time and place but also to be *someone* else. This becomes most explicit in their slipping into other racial identities in

the past. Moreover, both characters' complex nostalgic journeys reflect nostalgia's creative potential in helping to create a multilayered perception of history. Their nostalgia(s) also have comforting capabilities, which becomes evident as the past is equated with healing in different ways. The temporary dwellings in the past or the application of the past to traditions are supportive in the creation of a coherent personal, and by extension national, identity.

Moreover, as the various nostalgia(s) of these two characters have explicated, nostalgia's imaginative power enables a crossing of temporal as well as racial borders. Mda masquerades any concepts of essentialism or cultural purity by constantly transgressing supposedly fixed borders. Thus, he presents whales as connecting oceans and cultures, he plays with the concept of stable racial identities in transgressing the border between man and whale and in transgressing human racial borders thereby challenging the apartheid construct of racial categories. The ability to take on different, including the "enemy's," perspectives is crucial for such an authoritatively segregated society to grow together.

While Saluni's and the Whale Caller's nostalgia(s) tell about personal stories which reveal deficiencies in the present, the nationalist collective nostalgia in the form of a monument tends to silence fragments of personal histories, i.e. the stories of the marginalised. Thus, also in the postapartheid era, people need to voice their criticism and point to continuing imbalances and injustices instead of glossing these over with a fashionable Rainbow Nation make-up. The manifold depiction of nostalgia thereby helps to create a multifaceted picture of the past, to tell about past silences not told by public or collective memory and to challenge "totalizing narratives of resistance, heroism, and nationalism" (Robins 1998, 140).

In summary, *The Whale Caller* can be read as a warning against an unreflected assimilation into global culture when this is dominated by a ruthless brand of capitalism. At the same time Mda illuminates the potential of global interaction and cultural borrowings by crossing national borders and recuperating indigenous traditional life, landscape and environmentalism. He, thereby, writes a form of local postcolonial environmentalism. With witty humour in his didactic tone, Mda calls for agency and action and gives a strong warning against the destructive forces of global capitalism if one does not take initiative in negotiating and finding "modern" solutions to social and

ecological problems.³⁴ Nostalgia and its potentials for overcoming fixed borders, offering alternatives and questioning continuing present wrongs is a key motif in advancing the novel's ideas.

The last two chapters analysed two key novels by Zakes Mda in which nostalgia can be read as a recurrent motif for illuminating differences and continuities between the past and the present, for establishing cultural coherence, and for discussing controversial matters of environmental, cultural and historical preservation. Again, by casting his nostalgic protagonist as sympathetic, the implied author represents nostalgia without distancing himself from the past. This, as will be seen, stands in contrast to Ivan Vladislavić novels. The next two chapters will scrutinise nostalgia's complex abilities in two key narratives by Vladislavić and will demonstrate different approaches to the past mainly by White English-speaking characters.

³⁴ Mda remains true to his former writing in which he gives the voiceless a voice. Again, he has written a blueprint for (ecological) action in literary form, this time focusing on another neglected and devalued sphere – the non-human world and the black South African alienation from landscape.

5 Ivan Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket*

Synopsis

Ivan Vladislavić's acclaimed novel of the transition *The Restless Supermarket* (2001) is set in Hillbrow, a formerly White and, by now, the most dense and mixed part of Johannesburg.¹ It is set during the time span from 1987, just before the official declaration of apartheid's end and Nelson Mandela's release from prison, until 1993/4, just before the first democratic elections and thus covers the tumultuous period of South Africa's political and social transition from apartheid to democracy. The protagonist and autodiegetic narrator Aubrey Tearle, a retired proofreader, is a man of "the old days" – conservative and staid. Looking back over the last six years, he tells about the manifold changes within his immediate surroundings – changes which he regards with utter disdain. The transformations surrounding Tearle are caused by two major developments: the overthrow of the fierce apartheid legislation and the resulting destruction of clear racial borders on the one hand, and the increasing influence of globalisation on the other hand. Suddenly, Tearle is confronted with not only a cacophony of voices which he cannot make sense of any longer, but also an entire world order reversed: beggars become businessman by setting up shops on the streets, formerly White areas turn "grey" and benches without racial restrictions leave Tearle without a place to sit. He no longer finds a place in society. While the world around Tearle moves forward and develops, he fails to accept the transformations. Tearle tries to restore order by socially and racially proofreading his neighbourhood. His only refuge is the Café Europa, the last bastion of White European standards. Despite his unsociable, distant character, he becomes acquainted with a circle of regulars at the café and, without admitting it to himself, he grows fond of the place and its people. However, the "winds of change" also enter the Café Europa which becomes increasingly "invaded" by Eastern Europeans, Blacks and Coloureds who primarily belong to a new generation. The mixing of Black and White people as well as the increase of immigrants, especially from the former Eastern block, disturb Tearle's sense of order and routine. Slowly but surely his last place of belonging also falls apart.

¹ By the 1980s Hillbrow had already become a vibrantly mixed part of Johannesburg. According to Peeters, "Hillbrow has long figured transgressively in the, particularly white, South African imaginary as a space that remained anarchically, and sometimes defiantly, multi-racial and multi-cultural even in the hey-day of Apartheid's attempted special purification" (2007, 35). From the early 1990s onwards Hillbrow became increasingly inhabited by Black Africans, and by now it is the most densely populated suburb in South Africa which scores high in crime, murder and xenophobic animosities.

Tearle has devoted his life to proofreading telephone directories and to maintaining Standard British English. He displays a general obsession with dictionaries and, unsurprisingly, he is familiar with all the different editions of the *Oxford English Dictionary* from which he quotes throughout the novel. In fact, Tearle has several obsessions: most penetrating is his obsession with order, rules and regulations. His aim in life is to complete his collection of “corrigendia,” mistakes that come up frequently, for a contest in proofreading. The result is “The Proofreader’s Derby,” a narrative into which he has inserted all his collected “corrigendia.” The reader is presented with a corrected version embedded² in the main narrative. Tearle’s heterodiegetic narrative is set in the city of Alibia which is a reflection of a painting that presents a distinctly European landscape in the Café Europa. In his imagined city of Alibia, Tearle creates his utopian home of racial purity in which his protagonist Aubrey Fluxman, his alter ego, manages in times of utter chaos, to restore the old order. Tearle, on the contrary, can only detect the “decline in standards” and the degeneration of society without managing to halt this in the narrative real world. He laments the old days and is obsessed with making things stay the way they are and accordingly refuses to adjust to the new spirit of the Rainbow Nation. He would even restore the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* if he could. Thus, at the end of his retrospective narrative he finds himself isolated and lonely.

Introduction

With Vladislavić we move to the urban setting of Johannesburg, the place in which both of his novels discussed here are set. His protagonists are mainly White South Africans grappling with the transforming society and their – from their perspective – newly marginalised position. While Ivan Vladislavić explores similar feelings of displacement and insecurity to Zakes Mda, he depicts them from a different perspective: his characters are White middle-class men grappling with the changing urban landscape during the political transition. The characters share a longing for a European home and identity; they reveal a White South African feeling of belonging to another place. This desire becomes explicit in the creation of images and clichés of how and what Europe is. The longing for another home that displays a European utopia represents a form of restorative nostalgia: one that wants to copy and transfer a desired place and community onto the South African landscape without considering and negotiating the local conditions. Thereby, Vladislavić

² Mieke Bal (1981) and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1983) introduced the term hypodiegetic to refer to embedded narratives.

reveals the development of the “new” South Africa as a continuation of segregation.

In the analysis of *The Restless Supermarket* I shall examine the representation of nostalgia as expressed by the autodiegetic narrator Aubrey Tearle. As has been argued in Part I of this thesis, nostalgia is often an expression of a deep dissatisfaction with the present and an inability to deal with a changing socio-political landscape. While the official history of the transitory time in South Africa – the history of the media and international press – is one of a euphoric moment in time which saw the defeat of apartheid, Vladislavić satirically depicts the story from a different, personal perspective – that of racist Aubrey Tearle. From his perspective the abolition of apartheid is a threat to his personal life, and he sees the “euphoric times” as chaotic and degenerating. As will be illustrated, Vladislavić employs a monologic voice embodied by his protagonist Aubrey Tearle, who laments the loss of apartheid structures and ventures out on his personal mission to restore the old order.

As has become obvious in the theory chapter, Ivan Vladislavić has developed his own conception of the phenomenon of nostalgia. He offers a kind of critical nostalgia which largely overlaps with Boym’s reflective nostalgia insofar as they both emphasise the positive value of nostalgia if the embraced past is consciously reflected upon. With the introduction of his protagonist Tearle, Vladislavić bitingly satirises an offensive, un-critical, i.e. restorative nostalgia (cf. Chapter 2.3.4.3). The following examination will scrutinise in which ways Vladislavić manages to represent his protagonist Aubrey Tearle’s controversial longing for the old order and his odious, racist and excluding attitude on the discourse and story level of his narrative.

Chapter 5 consists of three main thematic sections, some of which consist of several subchapters. The analysis will begin with a discussion of the implied author’s representation of his narrator-protagonist by casting him as a dislikeable character for whom the implied reader nevertheless tends to sympathise with (Chapter 5.1). The subsequent section (Chapter 5.2) scrutinises Tearle’s home and the dissolution of former certainties and familiarities, which leaves him increasingly alienated and isolated and increases his nostalgia for the “old days.” The main focus, thereby, lies on four key points: Tearle’s world in transition (Chapter 5.2.1), his restorative and excluding sense of community (Chapter 5.2.2) and his fear of linguistic and social/racial hybridity (Chapter 5.2.3). The fourth subchapter (5.2.4) takes a closer look at contemporary commercial approaches to the recent past and related issues of authenticity from a more global scale. The events in the present lead to Tearle’s growing confusion and increasing drifts into his

imagined past utopian worlds. Therefore, Chapter 5.3 scrutinises the protagonist's escapes to his imagined European city of Alibia (Chapter 5.3.1), which, as already mentioned, he creatively brings into life in his written fiction of the "Proofreader's Derby" (Chapter 5.3.2).

5.1 The Tension between the Implied Reader, the Implied Author and the Unreliable Narrator

The Restless Supermarket creates a certain tension and interplay between the implied author, the implied reader and the autodiegetic narrator Aubrey Tearle. As already mentioned, the narrator Tearle is cast as a racist, conservative character, who longs for the days of apartheid. Due to his irritating and often offensive behaviour, he is an overall dislikeable character whose views and morals the implied reader should disagree with. This is further complicated by the narrative's representation of a monologic voice. The implied reader is thus only able to see the events through Tearle's eyes, whereby the narrative leaves an unspoken cleft between Tearle's world and the real world. By choosing an autodiegetic narrator, the implied author binarises the past, and the whole meaning of the narrative and the sustained representation of Tearle's world is constructed around silences which the implied author leaves for the implied reader to fill. Thereby, the implied author manages to create a narrator-protagonist who embodies extreme and uncomfortable views about the apartheid past and its continuities; this challenges the implied reader to rethink his or her own morals and values. Nostalgia for the past is problematic for White South Africans as it implies either a selective forgetting of the colonial/apartheid atrocities perpetrated by the White community or it implies a glorification of the prime evil, apartheid, i.e. the racist ideology upon which White South Africans legitimated their superior position. As Vladislavić, himself a White South African, says, "when you become nostalgic about your own life, about a white South African childhood, in a country that has such a terrible history, it's a troubled and compromised feeling" (Vladislavić 2008, 339). Hence, it seems reasonable to argue that the implied author deliberately uses nostalgia in a critical way in order to ask uncomfortable questions.

The implied author enables the implied reader to detach him or herself from the narrator's dubious views which he achieves mainly in two ways: first, he casts his narrator as unreliable – Tearle not only confuses some facts but also, despite claiming his linguistic sophistication, repeatedly makes spelling mistakes. Second, the implied author employs narrative irony as a distancing tool (Marias 2002b, 108). Irony is created in Tearle's extreme views and ideas of society and racial purity, from which the reader, having developed an idea of the sensibility behind the narrative, can infer that what is said, is not the actual meaning. The implied author exaggerates the narrator's obsessive, rude and racist behaviour, thus providing a satirical portrait of Aubrey Tearle. In other words, the implied reader can distance him- or herself from Tearle by establishing a disjunction between Tearle's views and those of implied author (Marais 2002b, 108).

At the same time, however, Tearle's retrospective narrative also discloses human traits the implied reader can sympathise with, especially his increasing feeling of being lost and alienated from former familiarities. The identifying process of the implied reader with Tearle is supported by the implied author's deliberate implanting of errors throughout the novel which function to undermine Tearle's reliability (Marais, Backström 2002, 124).³ In doing so, the implied reader is put into the position of a proofreader and thus shares the same position with Tearle. According to Mike Marias, "Vladislavić deliberately places the reader in the position of proofreader by planting what Tearle would term 'corrigenda' [...] which take the form of 'teasing but false etymologies [...] and solecisms'" (2002b, 109) in the text.⁴ Thereby, the implied author puts the implied reader's assumed contract with him into question.⁵ Thus, irony as used in the novel, works not only as a distancing mechanism but also as a means of identifying the implied reader with the narrator-protagonist Tearle (Marais 2002b, 109). In an interview, Vladislavić says that he intentionally chose a character like Tearle in order to deal with questions of the transition and

³ In the following, these errors will be marked by [sic] when occurring in quoted passages.

⁴ For more on irony and what Marais calls the meta-ironic turn in *The Restless Supermarket* see Marais, Mike. 2003. "Reading against race: J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, Justin Cartwright's *White lightning* and Ivan Vladislavić's *The restless supermarket*." *JLS/TLW* 19 (3/4), 271–289.

⁵ This is further supported by the fact that Vladislavić himself is a proofreader (apart from being a writer) living and working in Johannesburg, which easily leads the implied reader to draw parallels between the implied author and his narrator.

to try and deal with the change, but reflected through a character that could allow one to caricature certain positions, or exaggerate them a little. Also, [...] I wanted to try and make the reader like a character they shouldn't. (Knecht 2006)

In this complex interplay of rejection, empathy and identification, the implied author achieves a critical questioning of one's (the implied reader's) own value scheme and position towards or within a new multiracial, and inclusive society. He, thereby, raises the awareness of the difficulties in creating a new non-racial, non-segregationist society, challenges the utopian vision of a Rainbow Nation and calls for an active and critical engagement with the present, which is also always the carrier of the past and the future. All in all, the implied author, by employing a monologic voice, binarises the past. The implied reader is left on his or her own in judging and inferring meaning from Tearle's controversial statements and ways of seeing the world. Irony and unreliability, thereby, help the implied reader to take critical distance from the narrator's views and attitudes.

5.2 Home and Alienation

While the last chapter introduced the complex relationship between the implied reader, author and narrator, which will be taken up throughout the analysis, this section begins with the in-depth analysis of the novel by scrutinising Tearle's changing home and his growing alienation from the world around him.

5.2.1 Tearle's World in Transition

The main narrative of *The Restless Supermarket* displays a framed structure as both the beginning and the ending depict scenes of disorder and chaos. Disorder and chaos caused by change form the main threats for the autodiegetic narrator Aubrey Tearle, who strongly disapproves of the social and racial transformations around him. He takes it upon himself to save the world from different invasions causing the perceived degeneration.

After his retirement as a proofreader of telephone directories, Tearle feels cooped up at home and ventures out to find a suitable place to spend his time. What he encounters on his walks through the city is a city in decay:

The public spaces in my neighbourhood were uninviting. The parks provided no seating arrangements. Where once there had been benches for whites only, now there were no benches at all to discourage loitering. (RS, 15)

Tearle refers to the heydays of apartheid where “Whites Only” benches⁶, one of the apartheid travesties structured public space and even more so public and private interaction between people. The regulations of everyday life were known as petty apartheid,

beginning with birth in a racially segregated hospital and ending with burial in a racially segregated cemetery. In between, South Africans lived, worked, and played out their lives at racially segregated offices, businesses, schools, colleges, beaches, restrooms, park benches, restaurants, theatres and sports fields.⁷ (Beck 2000, 125)

For Tearle, both the structures of petty apartheid as well as those of grand apartheid – the regulations of land and political rights – signified a necessary order for Blacks living in White South Africa. Hence, the successive liberalisation of apartheid laws under president Frederik Willem de Klerk and his loosening of the strict rules which determined everyday life pose a threat to him as he needs racial borders to define his sense of belonging. This is further expressed when he describes the public library, a place of education which supposedly has already degenerated because of the lack of racial protection:

The public library was a morgue for dead romance. A series of children’s drawings, hideous without exception, had been stuck on the walls in a misguided attempt to brighten the place up. There were no pavement cafés à la française. The weather was suitable, but not the social climate: the city fathers quite rightly did not want people baring their fangs in broad daylight, cluttering the thoroughfares, and giving the have-nots mistaken ideas about wealth and leisure. (RS, 16)

In addition to the decay of institutions, objects and estates, such as libraries, benches and parks – all signifiers of civilisation and education – a clear new binary of the new democracy becomes apparent: a social apartheid between the haves and have-nots contributes to the dichotomy of White and Black. (This is of even greater concern in Vladislavić’s later novel *The Exploded View*, discussed in Chapter 6 of the thesis.)

Tearle’s sole purpose in life therefore is “to hold up examples of order and disorder, and thus contribute to the great task of maintaining order where it already existed and restoring it where it had been disrupted” (RS, 88). Seeing himself as the “trailblazer and [...] minesweeper” (RS, 80) he sets out from tending his garden to

⁶ See also Vladislavić’s short story “The Whites Only Bench” (1996) in *Propaganda by Monuments & Other Stories* Cape Town: David Philip.

⁷ The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act of 1953 “provides for the racial segregation of such public amenities as public transport, parks, beaches, swimming baths, resorts, caravan parks, hospitals, clinics, railway stations, post offices, banks and virtually any public area except a public road or street” (Coleman 1998).

“cleaning up [his] own backyard” (RS, 81). His attitude toward establishing himself as a linguistic and cultural superior reflects the colonial discourse which functions on a Manichean binarism of “us,” which is the singular “me,” that is Tearle, the keeper and defender of standards, and “them” – those incapable of proper English and of civilisation. According to Ashcroft, Griffith and Tiffin,

[r]ules of inclusion and exclusion operate on the assumption of the superiority of the colonizer’s culture, history, language, art, political structures, social conventions, and the assertion of the need for the colonized to be ‘raised up’ through colonial contact. (2007, 37)

The act of “social proofreading” (Marais 2002b, 101)⁸ is not only composed of English as prescribed by the Oxford English Dictionary but also by Tearle’s desired community: White, civilised, English-speaking. Any deviations from his standard are instantly marked as erroneous, namely: Black, foreign, non-English-speaking. Hence in order to prevent these “errors” from gaining space, he ventures out to correct the incorrect because “[o]nly by striving constantly for perfection, and regretting every failure to achieve it, can the hordes be kept at bay” (RS, 96). By reproducing methods of documenting, categorising and Othering people, Tearle continues the apartheid discourse. In so doing, he nostalgically clings to the order of old and tries to defend his desired community.

The Real becomes Surreal and the Surreal Real – The Pink Elephant

The reader is thrown *in medias res* into a grotesque situation which mirrors one of Tearle’s perceived surreal encounters in his changing neighbourhood: “A salesman bugging a pink elephant (excuse my Bulgarian)” (RS, 3). Despite its concise headline style, the reader is already introduced to an autodiegetic narrator who distances himself from the scene he describes (“excuse my Bulgarian”). The scenario has carnivalesque qualities. A man with a respectable job (a man of suit and tie) breaks every expectation one might have of a salesman: not only does he publicly pretend to conduct a sexual act but also the object of his desire is an artificial animal, evoking a loss of morals. The bizarreness of this scene is further enhanced by the term “pink elephant” which refers to a hallucination caused by alcoholism.⁹ The pink elephant comes to symbolise Tearle’s perception of the “new” South Africa as a country in delirium. He is left in a world he

⁸ As Mike Marais pointedly observes, “Vladislavić collapses the distinction between his protagonist’s *linguistic* proofreading and his *social* proofreading” (2002b, 101; emphasis in original).

⁹ According to the *OED*, the term “pink elephant” is “used as a type of the extraordinary or impossible, a characteristic apparition seen by someone drunk or delirious” (*OED* 2nd ed., s.v. “Pink Elephant”).

cannot make sense of any longer as it is a world which does not follow his sense of order. Rather, to him, the new realities which he encounters on the street and in other public spaces are surreal. The implied author plays with the irony that it is not the salesman bugging the pink elephant or any of the other people applauding the barbarous act who have lost their sense of reality. Rather, it is Tearle who lives in a hallucinatory state unable to respond to his real world.¹⁰ In Tearle's perception the surreal becomes real whereas the real becomes surreal.

In addition, the noise and applause by a crowd of people who gathered around the salesman and his object of desire are characteristic of carnival. According to Bakhtin, the traditional form of carnival is a revolutionary way to subvert forms of dominance and power (cf. Chapter 4.4.3). In an overall festive and uncontrollable atmosphere, the disempowered take on the roles of the powerful, reverse the normal roles and thereby criticise the given order:

Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time, life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants. [...] Carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. (Bakhtin 1965, 18)

Bakhtin's emphasis on the inclusion of all people in the spectacle of carnival stands in stark contrast to the experience of protagonist Tearle who finds himself outside the celebratory atmosphere. Furthermore, carnival describes the mingling of high culture with the profane. It is a space of reversal and resistance to authority. One characteristic of carnival is a cacophony of voices which contributes to the dissolution of hierarchies.¹¹ Tearle finds himself surrounded by voices and languages he cannot understand. Following the scenario as "one of the world's most shameless scrutineers" (RS, 3), he hears "indigenous tongues, roaring and cursing" (RS, 6), a "multilingual sobbing" (RS, 6), "four-letter words fly, the whole dashed alphabet. [...] In a word: chaos" (RS, 6). His monolithic voice is destroyed by a discordance of many voices – voices which Tearle

¹⁰ Gaylard remarks that this opening scene represents a comic distortion of life in South Africa, which shows the surreal quality of the new and the rejection of the old (2005, 143).

¹¹ Cf. Chapter 4.4.3 for Mda's use of carnival and spectacle. He also represents a cacophony of voices that are celebrating the Rainbow Nation and the new order. Thereby however, they gloss over new social hierarchies in the present.

cannot make sense of (see also Peters 2008). Tearle is even unable to understand his English mother tongue, as is the case when he hears the word “tawty” – “Just who or what ‘tawty’ is, I cannot say: it’s in none of the reference works and no one will enlighten me” (RS, 4). Tearle’s blind obedience to prescriptions and his belief in the Oxford English Dictionary as the absolute truth already hints at his need for order and authoritative structures. Although he reluctantly acknowledges the development of language as symbolised by the existence of several renewed editions of the *Oxford Concise Dictionary* and his use of the second edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (emphasis added), he regards any forms of slang as a decline in standards. The irony of his object of truth, the dictionary, is, as Marias (2002b, 113) observes, that Tearle searches the dictionary for the origin and meaning of words even though words and language in general are dynamic tools of communication and constantly developing¹²:

Language is changing all the time, I’m the first to admit it. But at any given moment, we must have standards of correctness. What would be the point of having dictionaries at all if that were not the case? I liken it, I said, to the act of proofreading itself, which I have often described, in which a rapid sequence of still points creates the illusion of constant motion. (RS, 238)

Carnival, cacophony and chaos motivate change. Change, however, is all that Tearle despises. Chaos, for Tearle, is signalled in the mixing of languages and, by extension, people. It expresses his biggest fear in life: the destruction of order and stability.

The reader is thrown into the carnivalesque scene, presented by Tearle, not as an act of revolutionary potential but as a decline of standards and morals. This is supported by Tearle’s binary views of the old and the new, whereby the old is the desired version and the new the site of decline. Hence, the salesman is associated with the “Golden City as it were” (RS, 3) which alludes to the White founding of Johannesburg as a mining town and the national financial and commercial centre. This is contrasted to “Egoli, as it are” in its isiZulu name as the site of chaos and decay.¹³ Furthermore, Tearle takes a pinstriped suit as a signifier for a civilised position and, at first, supposes the man to be a respectable salesman. However, while that might have been the case in “the old days,” “[t]hese days the men in lounge suits are good-for-nothings more often than not, while the

¹² According to Marais, the *OED* confirms “the fluidity of meaning” since between 1929 and the time of narration “it underwent no less than seven editions” (Marais 2002b, 113).

¹³ It was at the Witwatersrand that gold was discovered first in 1886, the very reason for Johannesburg’s existence.

real businessmen are waltzing around in Bermuda shorts and espadrillos” (RS, 3). “Those days,” we can assume, things were not only different but better. Such juxtapositions reflect Tearle’s Manichean way of thinking and of viewing the world, and this runs throughout the whole novel.

Generally, the streets as public shared space become a signifier for the hybridised nature of the changing society. Hence, Tearle sees “blacks” appropriating the once so clean pavements, now “crowded with curio-sellers and their wares, wooden animals and idols shamelessly displaying their private parts” (RS, 54). This designates, for Tearle, the embodiment of chaos, a rebellion against his sense of order, and this fills him with aggression: “I was tempted to march through *these hordes* like some maddened Gulliver, trampling them underfoot” (RS, 54; emphasis added). His identification of Black Africans, not as human beings but as a collective of hordes, reveals that he still follows the colonial and apartheid attitude. According to Mike Marais the protagonist Tearle is situated in a colonialist discourse premised on racial difference and Othering (2002b, 103). Marais reveals Tearle’s obsession with order as a relict of the colonial logic because it inhabits a totalising nature.¹⁴ The “ordering gesture” (Geertsema quoted in Marais 2002b, 103) which Tearle so strikingly exhibits can thus be traced back to colonial thinking.¹⁵ Instead of seeing the inventiveness of people setting up their own little convenient businesses, Tearle only sees the decaying of the city and of public space.

The Café Europa

Amidst the signs of public degeneration, Tearle discovers the Café Europa, which becomes his last bastion of White civilisation. The café with the conspicuous name Europa resembles what its name promises: a clichéd imitation of Europe of the nineteenth-fifties with French doors, a grand piano, a woman in a red evening dress playing “I love Paris” (RS, 16) and “cast-iron Tours d’Eiffel in the balcony railing” (RS, 17) where tea is served “in a civilized cup and saucer” (RS, 17). Hence Tearle concludes: “A European ambience. Prima” (RS, 17); and from then on, he would frequent the Café and become a regular “European.” Tearle is especially fond of the café’s European ambience. With that,

¹⁴ In Marais words: “In fact, in its habitual exclusion, elision or homogenisation of radical difference, Tearle’s interpretive activity is the ordering mechanism through which the latter discourse seeks to construct itself as a circumscribed totality” (Marais 2002b, 103).

¹⁵ As Marais further notes: “In fact, in its habitual exclusion, elision or homogenisation of radical difference, Tearle’s interpretive activity is the ordering mechanism through which the latter discourse seeks to construct itself as a circumscribed totality” (2002b, 103).

it represents the exact opposite of what he finds outside, in the “urban jungle” of a degenerating city:

The ambience appealed at once. [...] [A] sort of elevated pavement café with wrought-iron tables and chairs of bottle-green, shaded by striped umbrellas in the Cinzano livery, delicious monsters and rubber plants in pots. It was tempting to sit out of doors. On the other hand, it was so cool and quiet inside, with comfortable armchairs and scones for reading by. (RS, 16)

Moreover, the Café Europa marks the opposite to the outside realities of daily South African life marked by curio-sellers and pavement instalments. It serves Tearle as a microcosm of apartheid South Africa, neither poisoned by racial plurality nor by American-based globalisation – another of Tearle’s despised influences of the “new times.” In this space of White civilised domination he becomes the Café Europa’s “most venerable patron, an incorrigible ‘European’” (RS, 15). Identifying himself as a European, not only as a regular of the Café but even more so as a descendent of the European continent, he explicitly distinguishes and excludes himself from Africa. With the term “Europa” and “European,” the implied author hints at the absurdity of the apartheid ideology and apparatus which used the terms “European” and “non-European” to designate policies and places reserved for Whites only. The binary signification inherent in these terms allowed White South Africans to denote themselves as superiors.¹⁶

The identification as “European” is ridiculous because Tearle has never set foot on European soil, which again undermines his reliability. His only connection to Europe is a claimed ancestry and an aura of European superiority over anything African which nourished colonial/apartheid ideology. While taking on a European identity was common in apartheid South Africa, Tearle’s excluding behaviour runs against the spirit of postapartheid South Africa. The apartheid terms “European” and “non-European” as well as the name of the Café Europa can thus be analysed as nostalgic attempts to fix a superior identity by way of ancestry.¹⁷

Apart from the outer appearance and the French ambience of the place, the social component also appeals to Tearle: “At half a dozen of tables, men of my generation, more or less, were playing backgammon or chess on inlaid boards, or reading newspapers with

¹⁶ As Vladislavić remarks: [T]his whole notion that white South Africans were ‘Europeans’, the terminology itself, is just so amusing. If you think that as recently as the eighties you would have signs on things saying ‘Europeans’ meaning ‘White South Africans’, people classified as such. It’s so ridiculous that it’s almost amusing. (2008, 34²)

¹⁷ Moreover, Tearle outs himself as unreliable, taking on a desired identity which consists only of copied images and clichés.

their folds pinched in wooden staves” (RS, 16). Tearle’s descriptions lack any reference to Africanness, which obscures the fact that he moves on African soil and in African space. His reality is one of a European enclave, one that has been sustained for centuries and has managed to successfully exclude all people of darker complexion. Race, however, lies in the subtext of his descriptions, which express Tearle’s longing desire for a purely White Western European community. The only Black people Tearle accepts are those serving White people. Even though he does not mention the skin colour of the waiter Eveready, who serves his tea in a “civilised cup and saucer” (RS, 17), he later informs the reader that

[o]ur Eveready was a waiter of *the old school*, trained in the beachfront hotels of Durban by a Hindu master. In his spare time, he had a church of his own, with headquarters at his kraal in Zululand, and he was the archbishop. (RS, 165; emphasis added)

Although Eveready is a Zulu, Tearle appreciates him as a well-mannered waiter who accepts his inferior position. Tearle’s view of civilisation seems pathologic as there is hardly any detail that he does not value according to civilised measures.

Overall, the Café Europa designates a simulacrum, an imagined European island in Africa. According to Jean Baudrillard, a simulacrum is a copy of a copy whose relation to the model has become so attenuated that it can no longer properly be called a copy. It is a copy without a model (Massumi 1987). Café Europa copies the idea of European culture as it used to be and specifically French café house culture, and pretends to its guests to be in Europe amongst other Europeans. In an interview with Stacey Knecht (2006) Vladislavić says about the Café Europa and its play on Hillbrow cosmopolitanism:

Café Europa is a kind of ironic reflection on that, because you had these continental-style cafés, where you could sit around drinking espressos and eating bagels and so on. But the fact is, it was still in a city in the middle of Africa. [...] The Café Europa was not a real place, it was a composite of half a dozen cafes of that kind. Some of the people who would sit around there were recent immigrants who were at home in that environment. And also a lot of people who sat around feeling, in a way, that they were ‘in Europe’. (Knecht 2006)

Café Europa can also be interpreted as a place of lack and denial: it denies Black people, it denies Africa and it lacks originality. It reveals an inferiority complex, striving to be like Europe through the designation of negatives of anything African. It thus becomes a place of desire, a projection which again reflects an alienated psyche and distorted sense of identity. As will be shown in the following the Café Europa also “changes with the

times.” As suggested by Vladislavić, the fashion of the times shifted from a European to an American ideal.¹⁸

The Changes of Time – Generation Gaps

Whereas there were mainly people of the older generation frequenting the Café Europa in the old days, the modernisation of the Café has attracted a new, more heterogeneous crowd – younger people who welcome the socio-political transition and participate in racial border-crossings. The new crowd of the Café is identified mainly by the youngsters Errol, Floyd, Raylene, Nomsa and Moçes, who Tearle often just refers to as Errol and Co, thereby homogenizing and denying individuality to each of the “newcomers”. Comparing the youngsters to his nostalgically remembered café culture he judges them as “vandals” and “hooligans,” embracing “polystyrene” atmosphere and incapable of proper English.

His disregard for the younger generation becomes even more intensive when “skin colour” also comes into play. Accordingly, unsure about the name of Errol’s friend “Raylene or Maylene,” Tearle complains that “they all sound like household cleaners to me” (RS, 35–36). Tearle’s lack of respect for her is evident because he does not even bother to find out her real name. He simply does not see her as an individual. Likewise, he robs the “new” waiter of his individuality by reducing him to his Blackness and to the other major fear in Tearle’s life – communism: “Properly: Moses Someone-or-Other. I’d added the hammer and sickle because he was from Moçambique. A little joke between myself and my inner eye, entirely lost on the flapping ear” (RS, 7). The significance of naming becomes striking in the juxtaposition between the former, old-style waiter “Eveready,” expressing his good and immediate service, and “Moçes,” the communist and enemy who has taken over the older generation’s position. Tearle perceives the younger generation and especially Black people as invading his White space in the Café Europa. He sees himself in battle and he is in charge of defending and restoring his space of the “good old days” where racial mixing was a crime.

What Tearle’s Othering of the younger generation also suggests is their different attitude towards the recent past and openness for a multi-ethnic society. While Tearle is represented as someone unable to shift his perspective, the younger generation is portrayed as more flexible and as actively partaking in the discourse of democracy.

¹⁸ With South Africa’s entry into the global market and the influences of global capital, modernisation and consumer consciousness change the “old values” of Tearle’s last bastion of traditions and civilisation. With disdain Tearle detects an increasing Americanisation, which destroys what he holds sacred.

However, the narrative does not offer the simple conclusion that the older generation is unable to develop and move forward. Tearle's most appreciated contemporary at the Café, Spilkin, is indeed able to participate in the new social order. He shocks Tearle when one day he introduces his new girlfriend Darlene. Tearle proofreads her with utmost precision and his "old eye for detail":

I marked the chipped nail polish, the bruised eyeshadow, the great buckles as trusty as a steeplejack's on the straps of her brassière, the bent pins holding together the frames of her sunglasses. None of it up to scratch. I didn't like her colour either. One isn't supposed to say so, but I'm past caring. [...] Naturally, there was more to it than her colour. She was *coarse*, in a raw state, unrefined. She was one of those people who consider it amusing to sneak up behind you and clap their hands over your eyes – never mind the greasy fingerprints they leave all over your lenses – and you're supposed to guess who the culprit is. [...] She was barely literate. She kept saying pri-hority and cr-hative, negoti-hation and reconcili-hation. [...] She developed a passion for pasticchio nuts. She ordered espressos and blonk da blonks as if they were going out of fashion. And she never shut up for a minute. (RS, 163–164; emphasis in original)

Tearle has misread Spilkin assuming that he shares his own views. Spilkin, however, conducts the, to Tearle's mind, barbarous act of entering a serious relationship with Darlene, who is not only Black but also supposedly incapable of speaking proper English. Eventually, Spilkin together with Darlene leave the world of the Café and Tearle is left behind, increasingly isolated from the rest of the world. All, in all, Tearle fails to adopt to the changes of time and fails to deal with the new and changing order as represented by the younger, increasingly racially mixed generation appropriating the old spaces and turning them into new and hybrid spaces.

5.2.2 Restorative Nostalgia and Community

The last section scrutinised the dissolution of national and racial borders, which unsettles Tearle's familiar world, particularly his Café Europa, and estranges him from his home. This section focuses on the invasion of Tearle's space and desired White "European" community by both Black people and Eastern Europeans.

5.2.2.1 The Invasion of Blacks – Tearle's Home under Threat

Similar to his devotion of proofreading, Tearle has a special interest in the sociology of telephone directories, as "there were unique insights to be gained into the city and the ways of the inhabitants" (RS, 127). The telephone directories function as a register of ethnic migration. Hence, after the successive easing of the apartheid legislation towards

the late 1980s, Tearle detects in the telephone directories that “[a]n [*sic*] historic migration was afoot, comparable to the great scatterings of the tribes before Chaka [*sic*], the King of the Zulus.”¹⁹ Due to years of practise, Tearle is able to analyse the increase and decrease of surnames in certain areas and to draw conclusions about the demographic development of the suburbs. For instance, he can tell by the number of a surname whether suburbs have become centres of car sellers or of medical men and so forth. Likewise, the surnames also function as signifiers of race and Tearle can spot which suburbs have become darker – although he is eager to deny any special interest in ethnographic development:

Don’t suppose that I was obsessed with ethnic groups – the concentration of medical men in Hurlingham, for instance, struck me with equal force – but it is in the nature of surnames to conceal age, status and sex, and reveal race. (RS, 128)

From the surnames, Tearle constructs a bird’s eye view of the urban ethnic development which in fact is revealed to be extremely ethnically centred: there are the areas with high Eastern European concentration as well as those of Asian immigrants. What, however, strikes him most is the increase of the “M”-section – a clear sign for a high concentration of Black Africans outside townships. To his horror he, one day, discovers an “M” in Hillbrow – a Black person physically living in his neighbourhood:

‘M’ was then the fastest-growing section, thanks to the burgeoning numbers of African subscribers, but *naturally* one expected all these Mamabolas and Mathebolas and Masemolas to be in Mdwlnds and Mbpne and other far-flung places. This one was in Hillbrow. The 642-prefix corroborated it. I went at once to my desk and dialled the number. A child answered, a daughter of Africa, and while the little one was summoning her daddy, I put the receiver down. (RS, 129; emphasis added)

The term “naturally” reflects Tearle’s belief in the colonial and apartheid myth that racial segregation follows the given laws of nature and that according to the Great Chain of Being the Black person is inferior to the White. Hence, the fact, that there is a Black person intruding in his space implies the breach of a natural law. Furthermore, the fact that “a daughter of Africa” picked up the phone suggests that the one “M” is no exception

¹⁹ He is referring to one of the biggest migrations and redefinitions of the social order in the history of South Africa. King Shaka was a powerful and feared Zulu chief who expanded his chiefdom ruthlessly. The neighbouring tribes fled the Natal area in different directions. This mass flight that took place from 1822 to 1836 is known as the Mfecane and caused immense tensions over land which lead to the sixth frontier war in 1834 (Worsfold 1999, 33–34).

The faulty spelling of King Shaka in the quote illustrates one of Tearle’s errors, deliberately inserted by the implied author to undermine his narrator’s reliability (cf. Chapter 5.1).

and, in accordance with the stereotype of Black African promiscuity, that this is the beginning of a “darkening” of his Hillbrow. In disbelief, Tearle continues his investigation of the Hillbrow “M” – the surname is Merope. Loitering in Mr Merope’s apartment complex, his fear of Black expansion is confirmed:

At first the office-bound traffic was all white, as one would have expected. But by mid-morning, I had seen emerge from the lifts not one or two but half a dozen of men who might have been he, black men wearing suits and toting briefcases, trying and failing to look like chauffeurs or watchmen, and half as many black women besides, trying more successfully to pass as domestic servants. (RS, 129)

It dawns on Tearle that, “[s]ilently, while we slept, the tide was darkening” (RS, 129). Again, Tearle is confronted with the loss of White authority as, now, also Black people move into positions of power and sophistication (“wearing suits and toting briefcases” (RS, 3). Instead of joining the euphoric Rainbow Nation spirit, Tearle holds onto “the golden days” (RS, 130) of apartheid, not wanting to realise that these days are over:

It was not my imagination: there were more and more people of colour in Hillbrow. And it was obvious to me that they were living in our midst. Were the authorities turning a blind eye? [...] It was just a matter of time before these people felt free to wander about outside, and then to poke their noses into every doorway. Why should the Café Europa be spared? (RS, 130)

The fear of being overrun by the “barbarians” becomes even stronger when Tearle for the first time discovers Black people in his civilised Café Europa. It is an irony in itself that in a country with less than 10% of its population composed of White people one could and can still find places which are entirely White. Hence, Tearle behaves as if he sees Black people for the first time. One evening he detects “a glimmer of ebony skin” (RS, 130) on a woman while going to the bathroom in the Café and is shaken: “*Indigenous*, no doubt about it” (RS, 130; emphasis added). His word choice “indigenous” seems absurd since Tearle himself is native to South Africa. Like a spy Tearle follows every step of the woman and her companion – which gives him reason for further outrage: she was sitting in a public space with a White man. According to the apartheid law of 1949, mixed marriages and sexual encounters between the different “races” were considered a crime; this law is inscribed into Tearle’s morals. Unsurprisingly, the postapartheid times are “lawless times” (RS, 131) for him and only later does it dawn on him that “assignations across the colour bar were no longer illegal, strictly speaking” (RS, 131). Despite his denial of the changes around him, he slowly has to realise how the new South Africa works:

As it turned out, averting the eyes if not turning a blind one, was the order of the day. See no evil, etcetera [*sic*]. Other black women appeared in the Café. Always women, in the beginning, on the arms of sallow-skinned men wearing gold jewellery and open-neck shirts. Continentals and Slavs, men with overstuffed wallets and easy habits [...]. (RS, 131)

One of the ironies of Tearle's attitude lies in the paradox that he is the one who is "averting the eyes if not turning a blind one" and that it is he who is unable to shift his perspective. His South Africa of good morals and old values, of law and order, has become the playing ground for Black Africans and Eastern European communists. His home has become so altered that he is desperate to find parameters to identify with. Merle's advice that "[y]ou have to change with the times or you get left behind" (RS, 131), makes him wonder: "And if you're left behind, is that such a bad thing? Is the past such a terrible place to be?" (RS, 132)

However, the past is not a place that can be visited, time is irreversible and thus enforces Tearle's feeling of loss and displacement. Nostalgia, the yearning for the lost place of the past – apartheid South Africa – is Tearle's escape from reality. Nostalgia enables him to resist changing with the times by creating his own imagined community and his utopian world in the form of the Proofreader's Society and the world of Alibia respectively, two imaginary places which will be scrutinised in Section 5.5. Tearle's resistance to change and to accept development, his urge to restore the past, slowly but surely turn him into an outsider in his own home and leave him lonely and isolated.

5.2.2.2 Othering Continued – Eastern Europeans

The fear of invasion is further enforced by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the global collapse of the old order. The tearing down of the Berlin Wall is symbolic of the breaking down of borders around the globe. As borders and clear categories are the source of security and identity, the collapse of the Berlin Wall and hence the Soviet Bloc (which also contributed to the dismantling of apartheid) poses an immense threat to Tearle. Generally, this feeling of insecurity seems symptomatic for times of transition and arouses the fear of chaos and anarchy. Resisting assimilation to the shifting societal parameters, he is "stuffed with change, like a piggy bank or a parking meter" (RS, 54). The collapse of the Berlin Wall and consequently of the Soviet Union has led to increasing immigration from the Eastern bloc. When Tearle remembers Herr Toppelmann from the Wurstbude, who offers "civilised" Currywurst, telling him that "communism is kaput," his fear is affirmed: "From Germany out *und so weiter*. Hungarians, Italians,

Scots. Immigrants. Foul-feather friends” (RS, 53–54). Tearle is as suspicious of Eastern Europeans as he is of Africans. However, Tearle confuses and homogenises the former Soviet bloc, denoting Scots and Italians as Eastern Europeans and thereby again confirms his unreliability.

The juxtaposition of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of apartheid, of Eastern Europeans and Africans works on different levels. Within the stereotyped discourse, both groups are associated with social problems, dirt, bad hygiene and seen as the scum of society.²⁰ Arguing in line with Monica Popescu, Eastern Europe becomes, for Tearle, “the paradigm of the corruption on the old continent” (2005, 207):

I was glad as anyone to see the Iron Curtain fall. But hadn't the East always been a source of conflict and corruption in Europe? Wasn't there a crooked line between that infamous Bosnian Gavrilo Princip and the Slobodan Boguslavices of the world? A line drawn in blood and therefore indelible. One hoped this German business didn't lead to a licentious collapsing of borders everywhere. (RS, 159–160)

Accordingly Eastern Europe becomes symbolic of the “Africa of Europe” and is associated with chaos, decline of language into barbaric bubble (Chapter 5.2.3.2) and dispersal of rules and order (see Popescu 2005, 175).²¹ Tearle essentialises his negative lingo about the Other, Africans and Eastern Europeans respectively, by seeing their negatively connoted attitudes as ineradicable.

As has been illustrated, Tearle can clearly be identified as a restorative, conservative nostalgic who is unable to see things from different perspectives. Svetlana Boym connects these kind of people to fundamentalist movements who believe in their project as the only truth and, occasionally, in order to defend their community, engage in swapping conspiracy theories (see Chapter 2.2.4.1). Boym understands conspiracy theories as “a subversive kinship to others, an imagined community based on exclusion more than affection, a union of those who are not with us but against us” (2001, 43). She explains that this kind of conspiracy is based on an “inversion of cause and result” and the clear designation of “us” versus “them.” Due to a feeling of insecurity the conspiracy theorists search for and find a scapegoat for their present misery or state of alienation. These scapegoats, be they Jews, communists or Blacks are then turned into the agents of

²⁰ As Popescu points out, there is a typical colonial and Western lingo about the Third World: social problems, health, hygiene, sanitation (2005, 206).

²¹ Popescu points out the terminology used for the conflict between the ANC and the Inkatha Freedom Party in the early 1990s borrowed from the political events in Eastern Europe's use of such terms as “to balkanize” (Popescu 2005, 175).

plotting a conspiracy against the imagined community. With regard to Tearle, his imagined White English-speaking community – which, ironically, consists only of him – needs to defend itself against the “black hordes” and against “the communists” and to restore the old order and tradition against “their,” that is the Others’ conspiracy. Thereby Blacks and Eastern Europeans become not only the Other, but an enemy who tries to destroy order. Hence, Tearle takes on a war lingo and goes into “battle” (RS, 82) to defend his imagined community from the conspirators. This will become even more obvious in Tearle’s imagined past world of Alibia where a secret society fights the enemies, who are represented as errors.

While this section scrutinised Tearle’s fear of racial, cultural and culinary mixing and his static position within a colonialist/apartheid discourse, the next chapter shifts the focus towards Tearle’s and Bogey’s different approaches to the past and discusses matters of commercialising the recent past by means of nostalgia.

5.2.3 Nostalgia and the Fear of Mixing

While the last section examined Tearle’s restorative sense of community and his nostalgia for the apartheid regulations of “group areas,” the next chapter shifts the focus towards Tearle’s “civilising mission” to correct the incorrect and to linguistically restore the old times in his neighbourhood of Hillbrow.

5.2.3.1 Nostalgic Distaste – The Representation of Culinary Conservatism

Aubrey Tearle responds to the transitory times and the “invasions” he encounters with a missionary tour through his district attempting to correct the increasing misspellings and mis-usages of the English language and thereby to correct the social errors in society. Convinced of being the linguistic and social saviour of his neighbourhood, Tearle ventures out and finds a well full of mistakes in the local foreign food business. The first place to correct and to impose “linguistic order” is the Haifa Hebrew Restaurant. Contrary to his expectation of typical Hebrew food such as “smoked salmon or gefilte fish” (RS, 81), which he knows from hotel restaurants, the Haifa restaurant offers

things called *schwarmas*: The lamp, piled up into a tower on an electric spit, was suffered to gyrate crazily before red-hot elements, while a signed onion and a deflating tomato, skewered at the top of the tower, dribbled their juices down its length. (RS, 81)

In a manner of Othering Tearle expresses his dislike of the strange procedure of preparing the food.²² What has brought him to the Haifa Restaurant in the first place, however, was not the unorthodox way of preparing the food but rather a Mediterranean blue sign advertising not only “schwarma” but also “pita” and “tehini.” The worst to him is displayed by the word “humus.” Tearle, in his mission to save the civilised and fight the erroneous, enters the restaurant, “equipped for battle” (RS, 82) and orders a “schwarma” as a way to establish contact with the manager Shlomo:

‘Forgive me if I speak frankly’, I said after the pleasantries, ‘but you do not want to put “humus” on the mutton.’

‘Hey? What you?’ and so forth.

“‘Humus” is in the ground. Decomposing vegetable matter in the soil. Leaves, peelings, biodegradable stuff. What you want is ‘hummus’. Two ‘m’s.’

‘Two humus fifty cent extra’, said Shlomo, whose intellectual apparatus really did seem to be in slow motion [...].’ (RS, 82)

But Tearle has come prepared. To prove his linguistic authority, Tearle has brought the seventh edition of the *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, which was the first to record “hummus” with double “m.” And so he shows it to Shlomo: “‘Look – two m’s. Em-em”” (RS, 82). The comic situation is established as Tearle wants to exercise linguistic power over the foreign Other who is incapable of proper English. His authority is, however, subverted by the misunderstanding on Shlomo’s part. This is further supported by Shlomo’s answer “English not so good” (RS, 82) uttered with a sympathetic grin. Only then does Tearle discover in the dictionary that the derivation of the English “hummus” derives from the Turkish “humus” and thus is an equally correct form. However, Tearle prevents this embarrassing revelation by denying Shlomo access to the dictionary. The situation becomes even more absurd when Tearle tries to explain that hummus in the English version is spelled with two “m’s.” When Shlomo does not seem to understand him he says, "duo, tuo, twain" (other versions for two), and finally he uses the Latin version "bi, bi" (also meaning two) (RS, 83)²³, just to be subverted again – this time by

²² The dislike of foreign food is coupled with the disdain for fast-food, which becomes obvious in the juxtaposition of the civilised hotel restaurant in the old times and the modern, globalised form of fast-food.

²³ Since Bibi is the nickname of Benjamin Netanyahu, “bi, bi” can also be interpreted as a play on the current Prime Minister and his separatist, excluding politics. Parallels between Israel and apartheid South Africa are not unusual since conservative branches within both states propagate a settler community.

Shlomo's lady friend who, about to leave, replies with a very English "Bye-bye" (RS, 83).

The irony of the situation lies in the misunderstanding of the two speech partners. In his satirical tone, the implied author presents Tearle as the self-proclaimed holder of correctness on his mission to correct the social errors around him. In the encounter with Shlomo and his lady friend, however, Tearle's linguistic authority is subverted in the very process of linguistic colonisation. The misunderstanding is caused by the encounter of the two utterances which brings about, according to Mikael Bakhtin, an "illumination of one language by means of another, the carving-out of a living image of another language" (1981, 361), the Other language being a hybridised English. The dialogic nature of language, that is, the idea of various languages illuminating each other, rejects the idea of pure languages. Following Bakhtin's argumentation, Shlomo's utterance is not dominated by Tearle but set against Tearle's. Thus Shlomo's utterance unmasks Tearle's attempt to exercise power over him. On the social level, Tearle's process of domination is reversed through disavowal (Bhabha 1994, 112).²⁴

According to the critic Shane Graham, Tearle's methods of imposing order resemble those the apartheid state used to ensure social control (Graham 2007, 81). Tearle's longing for the past order represented by the systems of colonialism and apartheid and his attempts to restore this old order by way of linguistic and social proofreading, (again) reveal him to be a restorative nostalgist. As Svetlana Boym says, restorative nostalgists "believe that their project is about truth" (2001, 41). What is crucial in this context is the sense of belonging and the image of home. According to Morley and Robins, "[t]o belong [...] is to protect exclusive, and therefore, excluding identities against those who are seen as aliens and 'foreigners'" (1993, 8). The nostalgic longing for a pure home, explicit in Tearle's mission to "correct" the translocal foodstalls, uses the discourse of Othering as a means to re-building the old borders. "The 'other,'" according to Morley and Robins, "is always and continuously a threat to the security and integrity of those who share a common home. Xenophobia and fundamentalism are opposite sides of the same coin" (Morley and Robins 1993, 8). Tearle's resistance to change and his

²⁴ In colonial terms, the authority of the coloniser, represented by Tearle, is challenged since his "single voice" becomes "double-voiced" in the interaction with the Other, represented by the foreigner Shlomo and his incapability of speaking the "pure" colonial language. This form of hybridisation, so writes Bhabha, "enables a form of subversion, founded on the undecidability that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention" (1994, 112).

“intolerance of difference” are an expression of his fear of the Other “which is at the heart of racism and xenophobia” (Morley and Robins 1993, 26).

Once more in an extremely Orientalist fashion, Tearle tries to establish himself as the holder of knowledge and wants to exercise power over his erroneous fellow men.²⁵ Said reminds us that, “Orientals were rarely seen or looked at: they were seen through, analyzed not as citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved” (Said 2003, 207). By way of his “orientalising proofreading,” Tearle reads his fellow citizens as “problems to be solved” – and fails. He wants to render language, and by extension culture, static and keep a state of purity, thereby continuing the colonial mission.

5.2.4 The Commercialisation of History

As a consequence of increasing globalisation and consumer culture, South Africa’s recent past has increasingly been turned into commodities. With the introduction of the character Boguslavic/Bogey, the implied author plays with the concepts of truth and authenticity (and perhaps also with his own Eastern European background and heritage). This already becomes explicit with the name; the stem bogus means: “Counterfeit, spurious, fictitious, sham: ‘originally applied to counterfeit coin’ (*OED* 2nd ed., s.v. “Bogus”). Bogy or bogey is defined first “[a]s quasi-proper name: The evil one, the devil,” and second as [a] bogle or goblin; a person much dreaded” (*OED* 2nd ed., s.v. “Bogy, Bogey”). Much dreaded by Tearle, Bogey stands for the glorification and marketing of a historical moment he so much despises as, to him, it symbolises the breakdown of total order.²⁶

During one of their afternoons at the Café Europa, Bogey enlightens Tearle about his new trade idea – he wants to sell bricks from the Berlin Wall to the people in South Africa:

One of Bogey’s country cousins arrived with a piece of it in his luggage, a bit of brick and a layer of paint-smear plaster. Muggins had paid fifteen marks for it, according to the cardboard container, which also had a picture purporting to show that the paint was a scrap of the garish babble with which the entire wall had been coated. (RS, 160)

²⁵ This is already alluded to in his name Aubrey, which derives from the Germanic Alberic meaning (“*alb* ‘elf, supernatural being’ + *ric* ‘power’”); “King of the Elves” (Hanks et.al. 2006, s.v. “Aubrey”). Not the ruler of elves, Aubrey Tearle wants to be the ruler of linguistic and by extension of social order.

²⁶ The tearing down of the Berlin Wall is symbolic of the breaking down of borders around the globe. As borders and clear categories are the source of security and identity, the collapse of the Berlin Wall and hence the Soviet Union (which also contributed to the dismantling of apartheid) poses an immense threat to Tearle, also because it has led to increasing immigration from the Eastern Bloc.

Inspired by the commercial market for nostalgia, particularly for grand revolutionary moments in recent history, a market which has been booming in Eastern Europe since the fall of the Soviet Union, Bogey intends to focus on the “domestic market” of South Africa.²⁷ Thereby, however, he does not intend to sell the “real,” authentic pieces of the Berlin Wall but, “[h]alf of Johannesburg was in ruins. He [Bogey] would scavenge his merchandise at the Civic Theatre. Half a city [...]: Berlin? Beirut? Joburg” (RS, 160–161). Through the play with authenticity, the implied author criticises dealing with the past by materialising and treating it as empty and false objects and thus challenges the truth claim of historiography.

Possessing a piece of the Berlin Wall gives the illusion of owning and thereby of partaking in a piece of world history. Expressed in the objectification of history (and likewise the obsession with monuments as already discussed in *The Whale Caller*) is also the desire to archive history. According to Monica Popescu, the trade of historical objects from a different place speaks to the desire to be in touch with and preserve history (2005, 183). The possession alone, however, is revealed as an empty farce, a claim of authority over something because it is fashionable not, however, because of what it signifies: “The dust had hardly settled in Germany before the rubble of the Berlin Wall was up for sale” (RS, 160). Before having the time to reflect upon and digest recent history and its meaning also for the present and future, it has been turned into consumer products. Informed by his own history and its commercialisation, Bogey senses his financial profit in exploiting people’s desire to wallow in the past and to participate in great moments of time.²⁸ By introducing Bogey’s controversial attitude towards history, the narrative raises crucial questions about the exploitation and manipulation of history and presents the construction of certain historical moments in time as yet another dominant narrative of struggle and peaceful revolution.

²⁷ The irony, of course, is that while the countries in transition want to get rid of old and worthless state signifiers quickly, souvenir scavengers easily find their desired objects which they turn into worthy consumer artefacts.

²⁸ The objectification and the question of history’s truth-value are issues which Vladislavić also tackles in his previous writing, especially in *Propaganda by Monument* (1996). This collection of short stories plays on the easy substitution of one ideology by another, signified by the treatment of monuments and historical objects such as the *WHITES ONLY* bench. The superficial treatment of history as mere consumer goods which are fashionable at a certain moment in time also comes up again in Vladislavić’s later novel *The Exploded View* (2004) which will be discussed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

The paralleling of the Soviet/East German and apartheid histories functions on the basis that the two types of transitions accelerate the conversion process:

In *The Restless Supermarket*, Dan Boguslavic, convinced of the efficiency of Berlin Wall souvenirs, taps into the marketability of nostalgia by exploiting the charge of similar objects of South African provenance. (Popescu 2005, 184)

Accordingly, Bogey makes use of nostalgia and the desire to claim significant historical moments in the recent past of the anti-apartheid struggle: “‘Apartheid is yesterday’; Bogey was saying. ‘But things of apartheid is today. Many things, rememorabilia ... benches, papers, houses’” (RS, 251–252). The local South African history promises to sell well. Being a determined businessman, Bogey’s business card reads, “Dan Boguslavic. Apartheid memorabilia. Import/export” (RS, 252) and he is not short of a catalogue displaying his memorabilia goods:

Ostrich eggs with painting on them: Sharpeville Massacre. District Six, Forced Removals. Student Uprising, 1976. Stephan Bantu Biko. I thought ‘Bantu’ was outré? It didn’t end with eggs, either. There were all sorts of things for sale. Benches, whites only. Easy to assemble. Blankets, prison, grey. Books, reference. (RS, 252)

Bogey has expanded his business with a history people in South Africa can directly relate to but one which especially sells to tourists, who, in reverse, also want to take part in South Africa’s struggle to freedom. Writing about dark tourism, that is, the revisiting of traumatic sites, Peter Tarlow writes:

Tourism nostalgia has still another component: the commercial side. While the soul may seek the spiritual, tourism is business and its job is to attract others to experience what was or what will be. Dark tourism deals with the ‘horrors’ of the past, which becomes business of today. Thus in places where tragedies have occurred, today there are souvenir stands, politics are taboo and individual memory is replaced by collective memory. Tourism nostalgia, like restorative nostalgia, is both ‘a form of deep mourning that performs a labor of grief both through pondering pain and through play that points to the future’ (Boym 2001: 55). (2005, 52)

The past sells, especially a past which thrives on transitory, revolutionary moments laden with emotions and heroism. Also in South Africa, many of the struggle sites, items and symbols (Soweto, the clenched fist, the picture of Nelson Mandela) have become souvenir stands. The anti-apartheid struggle has turned into fashion. Not questioning the meaning or value the past conveys – the thousands of missed and dead freedom fighters and children, the traumatic effects of the forced removals, the humiliation of apartheid

laws – Bogey already and enthusiastically envisions his next target of marketing history via nostalgia and kitsch: “‘It’ll be Yugoslavia next’. [...] ‘Major turnover is rubble’” (RS, 252). Bogey profits from people’s emotions and desires by selling them an idea, a pure illusion of a past they associate with a certain time and place. The supposedly “real” and authentic thus becomes dissolved. The consumer, however, buys into the simulation and accepts the object’s inauthenticity as authenticity.

According to Jean Baudrillard, cultural consumption is defined as the time and place of the caricatural resurrection – the parodic evocation of what no longer exists. The recycling of the old, the original is no more than a simulation of the signs of the original. Because the simulation needs to answer the consumer’s taste, it has to change according to fashion or as Baudrillard formulates, it has to change functionally, like fashion. Thus, one glorification of a struggle-history substitutes another – as commodities. Of special interest here is the kitsch object defined as

one of that great army of ‘trashy’ objects, made of plaster of Paris [*stuc*] or some such imitation material: that gallery of cheap junk – accessories, folksy knickknacks, ‘souvenirs’, lampshades or fake African masks – which proliferates everywhere, with a preference for holiday resorts and places of leisure. Kitsch is the equivalent of the ‘cliché’ in speech. [...] It can best be defined as a pseudo-object or, in other words, as a simulation, a copy, an imitation, a stereotype, as a dearth of real signification and a superabundance of signs, of allegorical references, disparate connotations, as a glorification of the detail and a saturation by details. (Baudrillard 2004, 109–110)²⁹

Bogey’s consumer goods, which represent a heroic past, clearly qualify as objects of kitsch. They represent a version of the past cut off from its context and deeper meaning, laden, instead, with images, clichés and slogans. These nostalgic kitsch objects serve as a glorification of a very selective past to either suit a personal satisfaction of heroification or as a political tool to manipulate the masses by inspiring collective longing for a past time. This experienced or imagined past represents only the positive according to the ruling ideology and is thus simplified and distorted.³⁰

²⁹ The term “kitsch” is historically linked to art. The new bourgeoisie hoped to acquire a higher social class by imitating the upper classes and their aesthetics. Baudrillard sees kitsch as a product of consumer society and links it to social mobility. For more details see Baudrillard. 2004. *The Consumer Society. Myths & Structures*. London: Sage Publications.

³⁰ Allan et al. argue, by analysing the Election Broadcast “The Journey,” that nostalgia as a form of cultural discourse has a distinctive way of representing temporal and spatial practises. Past events are shaped by the present and hence memory and historical narratives are constantly being reshaped (Allan et al. 1995, 367). Nostalgia operates to re-appropriate the past so as to render legitimate preferred ways of negotiating time and space in the present. “The struggle” referring to the anti-apartheid struggle, in South Africa has significant historical implications. However, the

Bogey's "import/export of memorabilia" reflects the uncritical appropriation of the struggle and the heroes of the struggle by consumerism. Nostalgia coupled with kitsch proves to be a constant marketing profit precisely because it addresses human emotions, human longings and the desire to be part of something meaningful. The Berlin Wall stones, for instance, create the simulacrum of a peaceful revolution, of the fall of the Iron Curtain and of the unification of a once divided country. Similarly, the apartheid memorabilia tell of the struggle against racism and the victory of humanity and democracy.³¹ These souvenirs do not attempt to convey history, to tell about or to raise awareness about the past or about how to deal with the past in the present. They simply evoke an image of heroism, an image of victory people long for. Kitsch and the marketing of the past in the form of nostalgic reproductions trivialise and romanticise the past and disregard the pain and violence so many people suffered. The implied author strategically employs nostalgia in order to ask questions as to which ways the past can be represented and dealt with in the present.³²

Finally, Bogey's nostalgic objects stand in stark contrast to Tearle's nostalgia for totalitarian structures as both envision or long for opposing forces of the "same" historical moment. This illustrates the complexity of nostalgia and its uses and misuses or exploitations in the present. While this chapter on the whole focused on Tearle's world in transition, triggering his nostalgia, the next section will analyse Tearle's escapes to his imagined past world.

struggle has become a symbol for the liberation of the people and for the power of the people. Following any of the democratic party elections in South Africa one can see that this past and the implications it bears for the majority of people, has been used to serve political purposes. The anti-apartheid movement – its unity, its power, its potential – is being recalled nostalgically by focusing on the positive aspects in order to create unity in the present (the unity that elects the party). For more on the political (mis)use of nostalgia see: Allan, Stuart, Karen Atkinson, Martin Montgomery. 1995. "Time and the Politics of Nostalgia: An analysis of the Conservative Party Election Broadcast 'The Journey'". *Time Society* 4: 365–395.

³¹ It seems no coincidence that Bogey, an immigrant from the Eastern Bloc, represents the marketing of nostalgia. After all, postcommunism and postapartheid show striking parallels despite their different ideologies. Ironically, Tearle might have felt extremely comfortable in any of the communist countries as they were also based on totalitarianism and thus on clear order. According to Popescu also the era after or "post" the totalitarian regimes respectively share a certain tendency of treating the past: "Despite the different dominant ideologies in the past, post-communist and post-apartheid share a similar penchant for inventive use of fakes, reconfiguration of public memory, and condensation of a painful past into disembodied kitsch souvenirs" (2005, 185). See also the interview with Vladislavić in the appendix to this study.

³² Helen Kapstein in her 2007 article "A Culture of Tourism: Branding the Nation in a Global Market" mentions struggle sites as Robben Island and Soweto's Freedom Square as shrines also visited by apartheid supporters "who see in them an ode to a lost past" (2007, 112). She mentions Lionel Davis, an ex-prisoner on Robben Island who now guides tours on the museum island describing "Afrikaner visitors who 'come to weep' for the passing of Robben Island as the bastion that kept the *swart gevarde* at bay" (2007, 112).

5.3 Nostalgic Escapes

I had wandered off, as they say, which was not like me. (Aubrey Tearle, RS 150)

Alienated from past certainties such as his regular Café, his circle of acquaintances and the daily order of life, Tearle increasingly escapes to his positive, imagined memories of the past. At first, the simulacrum of the painted city of Alibia and its European landscape serve as his refuge from the outside world; he then turns this refuge into a written piece of nostalgic fiction, realised in the embedded narrative of the Proofreader's Derby. The following two chapters will first analyse Tearle's construction of Alibia as a nostalgic simulacrum which provides the opposite to his real world of a "new" or multiracial (and supposedly inclusive) South Africa; secondly, the embedded narrative of the Proofreader's Derby as the fictional realisation of his nostalgic longings will be discussed.

5.3.1 The world of Alibia

Covering a whole wall, Alibia is a mural in Tearle's favourite Café Europa. It displays a city which looks strikingly European:

In the foreground was a small harbour, with a profusion of fishing boats and yachts, and a curve of beach freckled with umbrellas. The palm-lined promenade cried out for women twirling parasols and old men nodding in Bath chairs with rugs over their knees. There were wharves and warehouses too, by no means quaint but necessarily somewhat Dickensian, and silos fat with grain, and tower cranes with their skinny shins in the water. Houses were heaped on the slopes behind, around narrow streets and squares. Despite the steepness of the terrain, there were canals thronged with barges, houseboats and gondolas. On one straight stretch of canal, evidently frozen over, one expected to see skaters in woollen caps racing to the tune of the barcarole. In the squares, there were outdoor cafes and neon signs advertising nightclubs; but in the windows of the houses up above, oil-lamps were burning. The baroque steeple of St Cloud's, intricately iced, measured itself against glazed office blocks of modest proportions, while in the east a clutch of onion domes had been harrowed from the black furrow of the horizon. (RS 2001, 19)

This description of the city evokes a conglomerate of different European stereotypes, as well as a juxtaposition of different time frames: the beach and the palm-lined promenade, the barges, houseboats and gondolas are reminiscent of Amsterdam or Italy, the frozen canal of Holland. The iced baroque steeple of St Cloud's hints at an English landscape and the clutch of onion domes at an Eastern European or Slavic culture. Alibia thus represents an image of a European city where, "[a] Slav would feel just as at home [...] as

a Dutchman” (RS, 19). Overall, the painting represents the opposite of Tearle’s real world marked by, according to Tearle, a general decline in standards: “Decline with a capital D” (RS, 81). Alibia is constructed of idealised images of the past. It denotes a place lost in time but imagined as an ideal landscape for the future.

Tearle appropriates the city by naming it Alibia. It is a projection of ideas about and of “imagined memories” of Europe. It can thus be interpreted as a city created by nostalgia for an imagined White, European community. The image that the painting inspires in Tearle offers him a trajectory to project into Alibia all that the present lacks. This projection reveals two things: first, Tearle laments the loss of the old order and longs for the clear categories that apartheid had secured for him and second, he sees his “mental” home in Europe. Not surprisingly then, Tearle wonders:

How could I have foreseen such an outcome, in the gold-flecked afternoons of my past, how imagined that I would become *a stranger in my home away from home*, beset on all sides by change and dissolution? (RS, 122; emphasis added)

The concept of nostalgia is central to the analysis of Tearle’s longing and construction of a European home and community. While nostalgia is mainly defined as a longing for a past time and space and thus as looking back, it also bears the potential for future visions (cf. Chapter 2.3.3; cf. Hutcheon 1998, Turner 154, Su 2005). According to Svetlana Boym, “fantasies of the past determined by needs of the present have a direct impact on realities of the future” (2001, 395). As argued in the theory chapter, nostalgic and utopian visions share a longing for another reality and social structure. Both create a world different from the existing and serve as necessary fictions that exile from a troubled present. The ideal world is thus projected onto the past and imagined as already having been lived.

In the case of protagonist Aubrey Tearle, his “utopian nostalgia” for an imagined homeland represented in Alibia takes on a frightening form. His longing for the past is a longing for totalitarian structures as had been, until recently, realised in the apartheid system. Alibia is thus a city which resembles racial order and fixed structures of inclusion and exclusion. Interestingly, there is no overt mention of race in Alibia, precisely because it already represents the idealised apartheid state devoid of any Otherness.³³ Tearle’s utopia then arouses uncomfortable feelings for the implied reader who is aware of its

³³ Tearle imagines his ideal European city as a pure Northern European community rejecting the fact that European cities are also hybrid places.

apartheid parallels and condemns the atrocities committed in its name. Hence, Tearle's imagined past city displays a dystopia rather than a utopia.³⁴ In an interview with Stacey Knecht, Vladislavić says:

Alibia is – I was going to say it's a kind of utopia, but it's not really. It's a kind of dystopia in some ways, too, a place where things really don't change. [...] I guess it's a projection, from Tearle – it parodies a South African sense of what Europe is: a jumble of quaint and ridiculous things that Europe represents for people who aren't there. (Knecht 2006)

The very name "Alibia," supports its utopian or dystopian dimension. While the parallel between Alibia and utopia is also suggested in the sounding of the last syllable "-bia/-pia," Alibia additionally resembles another wor(l)d³⁵: "alibi." The obvious word play is also taken up by Tearle when he considers that, "[i]t was a perfect *alibi*, a generous *elsewhere* in which the immigrant might find the landmarks he had left behind" (RS, 19; emphasis added). The city of Alibia becomes Tearle's utopian home; at the same time the name is a creation of the word "alibi," which derives from Latin meaning "somewhere else," "another place" (*OED* 2nd ed., s.v. "Alibi"). In this instance, alibi correlates with the meaning of utopia, "no place" (see *OED* 2nd ed., s.v. "Utopia", Greek ou-topos) in that they both imply a place different from the existing place, a place away from their existing reality where the ideal social structure – apartheid – can still be lived. Of course, as a man of the dictionary Tearle, like Vladislavić himself, is aware of the word play when he explains that: "It's nowhere in particular. Or rather anywhere in general. It's a composite.' Not Erewhon, but Erewhyna. Alibia. Did the name come to me on the spur of the moment?" (RS, 74)

The name Alibia is even more complex: it also evokes an association with Albion (Greek: 'Αλβιών) – the mythic/archaic, nostalgic name for the island of Great Britain (the oldest name; based on the Scottish Gaelic name for Scotland, Alba)³⁶. According to the *OED*, it is "a rhetorical expression for 'England', with reference to her alleged treacherous policy towards foreigners" (*OED* 2nd ed., s.v. "Albion"). Albion serves thus

³⁴ Utopia, according to the *OED* is "an imaginary island, depicted by Sir Thomas More as enjoying a perfect social, legal and political system"; "any imaginary, indefinitely-remote region, country, or locality"; "an impossibly ideal scheme, esp. for social improvement" (*OED* 2nd ed., s.v. "Utopia"). The inherent word play of utopia as found in the word eutopia, which was a play on Thomas More's novel, and denotes "no place" and "land of nowhere" (*OED* 2nd ed., s.v. "Eutopia"). Thereby utopia/eutopia hints at the impossibility of realising the perfect society and of the imaginative nature of utopias (Peters 2008).

³⁵ See Paul Wessels who used the version "wor(l)d" in "Instead of an Interview with Ivan Vladislavic."

³⁶ I am deeply indebted to Brent Reed for pointing that out to me.

as the geographical materialisation of Tearle's xenophobia. Incidentally, the word stem "albus" also means "white" in Latin. Hence Alibia as the utopian place somewhere else can also be located in an archaic, nostalgic English landscape characterised by its exclusive Whiteness.

The play on Europe as an alibi and thus as a place elsewhere, marked by exclusive Whiteness, parodies the nostalgic glorification of Europe by White settler communities trying to rebuild their immigrant society in the occupied territories. The imagined city of Alibia then represents the colonial dream of appropriating land and rebuilding an even better copy of the original city or "mother country." This connects again to Boym's definition of "restorative nostalgia," the attempt to rebuild the past as it was – thus ignoring the passage of time. Alibia represents what Tearle's real world, in which he perceives an increasing "Africanisation," "Balkanisation" and "Americanisation," is not. This juxtaposition connects to the juxtaposition of the past and the present in that way that the past is associated with Europe, civilisation and order, whereas the present identifies Africa with degeneration and dis-order.

Bryan Turner in his *Note on Nostalgia* (1987) singles out colonial settler societies as those cultures prone to nostalgia. The "motherland" becomes the idealised home. However, because the home is located in a lost place in a lost time, the idealised home assumes a utopian dimension, "since that home is free from the conflicts of multiculturalism, political pluralism and ethnic conflict" (Turner 1987, 154). Likewise, the imagined city of Alibia is lost in time and place and becomes Tearle's utopia. However, the utopian creation of Alibia is revealed as a place of pretence and denial; a place where White South Africans can pretend to be in their European surroundings and thereby devalue and deny any Africanness, distinguishing themselves as a superior community. This ties into the further definition of "alibi" as "an excuse, a pretext; a plea of innocence" (*OED* 2nd ed., s.v. "Alibi"). The representation of a European city alludes to the history of racial exclusion, which found its epitome in the homeland policy under apartheid. The policy of the Bantustans regulated the living spaces of Black and White people. Racial segregation was a planned rigid order of space, preserving around 87 % of the land for the minority of Whites and the rest for the majority of Blacks (Beck 2000, 134). The breakdown of apartheid obviously resulted in the free movement of all people regardless of their colour. Keeping that in mind, Alibia can be seen as a play on White South Africans who tried to create an alibi, an excuse, for themselves by pretending that Black people were foreigners in their own country.

Ironically, despite Tearle's denial, Alibia also bears African implications. This is taken up in a very isolated section that stands on its own and only consists of the following dialogue between Tearle and Floyd:

'What you call this spot again?'
'Alibia.'
'Isn't that where old Gadaffi hangs out?'
'You're thinking of Libya, Floyd. This is A-libia.'
'Pull the other one, Mr T. I can check it's only Cape Town.'
'What an absurd idea.'
'Look. Here's Khayelitsha.' (RS, 253)

Khayelitsha is the biggest township on the outskirts of Cape Town. By including a township perspective into the painting, Alibia is not only a mock of European clichés valued as an ideal, but it also reveals the hybridised nature of South Africa, which Tearle ignores. The fishing boats and yachts, the beach freckled with umbrellas, the palm-lined promenade of the painting (RS, 19) also represent a South African city like Cape Town with its colonial European architecture. And also the apartheid constructions of townships might be visible in the Dickensian and industrial parts of the painting where "outmoded" forms of living are a result of poverty. However, Tearle's Alibia is an ignorance and absence of overt Africanism, the thought that it could be a hybridised space where racial borders are being crossed is in Tearle's static view simply "absurd."

Tearle's strong identification with the city of Alibia happens one day when he discovers that his bold head matches the shape of the hill in the painting perfectly:

A shadow, which matched the hill in every particular, although it was marginally smaller, lay upon the painted surface; and turning slightly, I saw that it was the shadow of my own head. At one special angle – if I gazed into the corner where Mrs Mavrocordatos sat behind her till, keeping watch over the dainties and a growing array of bottles – the silhouettes were identical. [...] I wagged my head, so that the shadow elongated and contracted, again and again, returning always to the point at which its shape echoed the hill's perfectly. (RS, 150)

The obvious play on Alibia's resemblance to Tearle's head emphasises his identification with the city of Alibia or what he imagines it to be. Although he is, at first, very conscious and anxious that somebody would detect the similarity between his head and the hill of Alibia, he then becomes aware of his authority over the city; he sees it as his responsibility to protect it as expressed in his war vocabulary: "But more than ever, I began to see Alibia as *my territory*, which it was up to me to *defend*" (RS, 151–152;

emphasis added). The consciousness of his power over Alibia and the identification of the city and his head mark the trajectory for his imaginative journeys into his utopian society.

Afterwards, when one of the others cast a shadow on my head-shaped hill, my capital, it was as if they were *inside* my head. My head was in the city, a part of it, as solid as the earth beneath my feet. And Wessels and the others were in my head, flitting through it like migrant workers without the proper papers, as insubstantial as shadows. (RS, 152)

What is striking in this statement of recognition is also something else: Tearle draws a clear parallel between the apartheid policies and the policies of Alibia. By way of mentioning migrant workers without papers, Tearle might also allude to the rigid and hated apartheid pass laws in the textual present. People who do not fit into his desired community, like Black people, foreigners and unmoral youngsters, who he calls “hooligans,” would be excluded from participating in Tearle’s daily ordered life. While this was possible under apartheid laws, Tearle feels threatened by precisely these people whom he sees as invading his place in the present. The subtext of Alibia expresses Tearle’s continuing deep racism. In order to “keep the hordes at bay,” it is Tearle’s duty to defend his White space. The hordes being anybody who is not keeping order, “insubstantial as shadows” – people without identity.

A City of Clichés

The city which the painting represents is a city reproducing mere images and stereotypes of Europe. Café Europa and even more so the city of Alibia become worlds constructed out of clichés which have no referent or ground in any reality except their own. The referent of the two places, Café Europa and Alibia, is Europe. However, since Europe (in the settler cultures) is often just a set of ideas and clichés, it displays a product of the imagination inspired by White settler glorification of the “motherland.”³⁷ As part of the colonial mission, Europe has been created as an ideal and superior place in contrast to Africa.³⁸ In a form of mimicry the settlers attempted to rebuild the original, their European motherland, in an even better version. While the painting and the Café Europa

³⁷ Since the White citizens of South Africa are a heterogeneous group mainly of Dutch, French, German and English decent, the motherland is covered by the more general term “Europe.”

³⁸ South African critic Dennis Walder says about the myth of a dream land created by his English/European heritage, which for him is connected to the painter Rousseau: “My remembered Rousseau has gradually become a lasting image of memory, loss and desire, representing the world I once knew, the long empty beach, the distant mountains cutting the Cape off from Africa; while hinting at another world beyond, a mysterious dream world towards which I used to yearn, with a yearning produced by my ancestry and upbringing, all of which created a confused sense of who I was meant to become. Later yet it connected, and still connects, me with a past I have often preferred to forget” (2005, 427).

pretend to be European they are, in fact, copies of images and clichés.³⁹ Hence, precisely in its lack of any Africanness these supposedly European places become African – or more precisely, (hybridised) White South African. This resembles the irony of the colonial myth of empty land, and the attempt to appropriate territories by copying the original. A copy however, can never be the original and is informed by its very situatedness. Thus, Alibia is the image of the very failure of the colonial mission to build a utopia on the basis of exploitation, expulsion and violence.

5.3.2 Ways of Becoming Nostalgic

Having a closer look at the moments when Tearle is apt to drift into his nostalgic world, a pattern becomes visible: Tearle is likely to escape reality when the disorder of the day invades his space. Furthermore, his increasing isolation from the new community of the Café Europa and the feeling of being left out and of not belonging there any longer, take him to the world of his dreams and desires.⁴⁰ The passages when he imagines Alibian life show a strikingly similar structure describing the movement of his eyes. It seems that his eyes are the gateways to his utopian past world:

My eyes turned to the streets of Alibia, roaming from quays lapped by a dirty vinaigrette of engine-oil and brine, along cobbled ways past factories and boarding houses, to the staircases of the hills, and to one hill in particular, thrusting up through a greasy thundercloud the residue of Bogey's hairdo, which he would rest against the wall, although Mrs Mavrokordatos had asked him not to. (150; emphasis added)

In another instance, after a barbarous intrusion of the café by a “gang” of youngsters who “‘rolled up’ and ‘parked in’, as if they were motor vehicles” (RS, 175), obscenely playing around with a stolen miniature of the Hillbrow Tower, Tearle, again, unconsciously escapes to the seductions of Alibia: “*My eyes* kept wandering to Alibia, and I saw myself there, in a houndstooth overcoat, bending my steps to a fogbound wynd” (RS, 120–121; emphasis added). When he imagines the dinner dancing days of the Hillbrow Tower in the old days, his eyes once more function as a signifier for his drifting into his imagined utopian past:

³⁹ Regarding the painting of Alibia, the Café and Bogey's nostalgia artefacts one can imagine that “[t]here is no longer a realm of the ‘real’ versus that of ‘imitation’ or ‘mimicry’ but rather a level in which there are only simulations” (Baudrillard 2004, 164).

⁴⁰ One such moment, for instance, happens when Tearle hears a secretive mumbling between Wessels and Bogey and already detects a complot against him.

I shall lift up *mine eyes*. At least the Hillbrow Tower was still there, the real thing I mean, ugly as it is. It was a shame one couldn't go up there any more. Dinner dancing, and so on. Cheek to cheek, with the world at one's feet. Or if not the world, at least the most densely populated residential area in the southern hemisphere. (RS, 122; emphasis added)

The Hillbrow Tower stands out as a marker of stability in the instable times of the transition. It was the Hillbrow Tower which saw Tearle's birth (RS, 19) and it is the Hillbrow Tower which he sees at the closing of the novel. Again working with a juxtaposition of how good it was "in those golden days" (RS, 93), "in the gold-flecked afternoons of [his] past" (RS, 122) and how bad it is now, the Hillbrow Tower resembles the glorious past of Parisian ambience and cultured events. This passage also reveals Tearle's unreliability: the Hillbrow Tower was built from 1968 to 1971 – as Tearle is retired he must have been born long before 1968.

Also at the Goodbye-Bash – the farewell party for the Café Europa which is closing at the dawn of 1994, Tearle feels uncomfortable and left out (by way of self-exclusion) because he dislikes the modern form of "parties" which again stand in opposition to the "dinner dancing" of the old days. He once more drifts to his imagined past:

I *looked in* on Alibia, where it was still broad daylight, where this evening had not yet begun, and made straight for St Cloud's Square to buy a buttonhole for the long-awaited dinner. (RS, 258; emphasis added)

Apart from the parallel structure indicating his escapist moments, these passages reveal that Tearle sees himself inside an imagined past world. He becomes the audience of his own desired past life, which he wishes to become "real" ("again") in the textual present and future. Simultaneously, his escapism enforces his resistance to assimilating to the present realities and his inability to shift perspective. The passages also show an interesting tension between two kinds of languages Tearle uses for the past and for the present. According to Vladislavić:

Maybe this is not as obvious to anyone else as it is to me, but the language he uses when he's dealing with his memories of the café and how it used to be more stable and refined than the language he uses to talk about the present. In the present, the sentences are often shorter, he's got a harder edge and he's quite insinuating, and so on. And then, when he switches back to talk about the past, he uses a slightly different register and pace. (Marais, Blackström 2002, 126)

The language referring to the past dwells in lyricism and longer sentences as if he wants to spend more time in the past by using a slower pace (“houndstooth overcoat”, “bending my steps to a fogbound wynd”). His fondness of and affection for the old days of the Café Europa is further expressed in his usage of adjectives and his picturesque descriptions of the city’s particularities.

Furthermore, these passages show an interesting merging of the textual real and the imagined world, which reveal Tearle’s growing confusion and his alienation from the world he knows. Alibia has conquered Tearle’s mind and it gets more and more difficult for him as for the reader to distinguish between the imaginary past and the present narrative real world. This also becomes visible on the formal level of the novel: towards the end of his retrospective narrative his growing confusion becomes visible in increasingly disrupted passages. His utter confusion is also expressed through his juxtaposition of the changes around him and his use of slang, which becomes obvious in the following passage (which is worth quoting in length):

I erupted. I gave them a mouthful, the Amadoda and Abafazi, the shithouses (excuse my Anglo-Saxon) of the holey city of Joburg, the Rotary Anns, the Pump-action Bradleys, Mr Frosty and Mrs Sauce, the Bushbuck Rangers and the Crystal Brains, the bobbers, the peddlers, the stinkers. I poured out upon them, the printer’s pie, the liquid lunch, the hasty pudding, the swill of tittles and jots, the gaudy Gouda, the Infamous Grouse, the Jiffywrap, The Oatso Easy, the Buddywipes, the Wunderbuddles. Items, one-eared: Vincent van Gogh [...] I was not in the habit of speaking in this fashion, of seeing, of saying disorder, of chaos, of coarseness, but *I had lost my tone*. Where were my cadences, my measures? *My pages were out of order*. To be Papenfus or not to be Papenfus? What do you call a man under a shroud? Paul. Names for dogs should I ever acquire one: Riley ...Puccini ... Houdini. Down ~ down ~ down. The beast would outlive me. It was past my bedtime. (RS, 273; emphasis added)

This almost nonsense passage which expresses Tearle’s transition to delirium (his pink elephant) is caused by the breaking of borders around him and the hybridisation of his formerly well-segregated home: “Black and white and red all over” (RS, 275). Tearle has lost his voice in the new dispensation and he fails to find new order and adjust to the new system.

Overall, Alibia can be interpreted as an imagined past world into which Tearle increasingly escapes to moments in which he is not in an “ordered” position of superiority. Alibia, it becomes obvious throughout the novel, becomes Tearle’s refuge, his imaginary homeland in the times of trouble and political turmoil. His retrospective

journeys to the imagined world of Alibia are characterised by a deep nostalgia for the past order which secured him a White community. Hence, Alibia can be interpreted as the representation of the totalitarian structures of apartheid South Africa. The irony of Alibia develops through the fact that Tearle himself has never set foot onto European soil. Rather it is a homeland which exists only in his mind and imagination. Alibia represents what his neighbourhood is not: order, Europeanness, Whiteness. It suggests, to take up Tearle's quote again, his desired home away from home. Alibia becomes Tearle's nostalgic utopia and his alibi: an ideal place somewhere else – a projection which leaves him space to imagine his desired community and to continue to resist dealing with the present.

5.3.3 The Proofreader's Derby

As has become clear, the painting of Alibia is brought to life in Tearle's imagination by his longing desire for totalitarian structures and his imagined community. Over the years, Tearle has been collecting "corrigenda," "accidents of carelessness or ignorance, designated as such, and held up for scrutiny. The perpetrators had no evil intent" (RS, 101). Encouraged by Merle to use his collected corrigenda, his so-called "System of Records," and make it available to other proofreaders, Tearle decides, after first hesitating, to write the "Proofreader's Derby":

'It's possible, a story of some kind, with all my corrigenda, my "things to be corrected" woven in to it. But where will I put the correct versions, my "things corrected"? Weaving them in too will be an impossible task. It will spoil the story'. 'Leave them out. Make it more interesting for whoever reads it. That will be the fun of it, as always: *inventing order*. Not extracting it, mind you, like a lemon-squeezer, but creating it.' (RS, 101; emphasis added)

The Proofreader's Derby stands out as an embedded narrative created by Tearle's imagination and informed by his nostalgia. Told by a third person heterodiegetic narrator, it is Tearle's animation of Alibia. The main protagonist, Aubrey Fluxman, is a devoted proofreader and restorer of standards, who is unmistakably Aubrey Tearle's alter ego. Tearle's imaginative journey narrates the heroic rescue of the city Alibia from complete chaos and apocalyptic disorder. The narrative real world in the Proofreader Derby's Alibia becomes unsettled and turns into a textual reality full of errors and in need of

proofreading.⁴¹ The reader, however, as already explained in Chapter 5.1 does not encounter the linguistic errors on the textual level but is presented with the corrected version of the *The Proofreader's Derby*.⁴²

The animated world of Alibia is marked by magic realist elements and functions according to its own reality and logic. The narrative's world can be read as a world as text in which objects can be deleted or shifted around with the help of a pencil or computer keyboard. Aubrey Fluxman's blue pencil, for instance, has the powers of a magic wand. He and his colleagues form a secretive society, called the Proofreader's Society, whose members have magic powers and become "superhumans" with godlike abilities. Within the *Proofreader's Derby* neither the proofreaders' "superpowers" (Peters 2008) nor the shifting and moving of words as objects or objects as words are questioned. According to Monica Popescu, Alibia is "an imaginary city structured and landscaped by a language and which, therefore, can be controlled only through a strict syntax" (Popescu 2005, 189). Thus, Tearle embodies his nostalgia for clear, totalitarian structures in a narrative that is the corrected version of an erroneous world. The corrected version, of which only one copy exists, can thus be seen as his textually realised utopia. Luckily for the implied reader, Tearle loses the corrected version, which leaves the world in "erroneous" and "apocalyptic" conditions or, depending upon the perspective – in conditions that are constantly developing and moving forward, continuously striving for improvement. To the implied reader, the loss of the blueprint for a totalitarian society is a relief.

Shifting Boundaries

Similar to the frame narrative, the imbedded narrative starts with a surreal event. Fluxman wakes up one morning to find the geography around him turned upside down:

Where his front lawn had been – just last night, as he shut the window before bed, he'd reminded himself that it needed mowing – lay a vast reach of mud-brown water, fringed to the left by bulrushes and the right by palms, and dammed up in the distance ahead by a sheer cement quay topped by a metal railing. [...] The scene was idyllic, if somewhat contrived, and oddly familiar. (RS, 185–186)

⁴¹ Fred de Vries argues that Alibia is, "a city waiting to happen, a virtual city. Just like the wor(l)d, it exists only in a manner of speaking, and then with some difficulty. To overcome these inherent obstacles to sense, an abstraction or simulation is inserted: we get to read the corrected version, where everything has already happened" (Wessels). Monica Popescu (2005, 197) interprets this section of the novel as a syntactical reading of the city that is in need of proofreading due to increasing linguistic errors. Similarly, Shane Graham (2007, 88) reads the "disjointed city" of Alibia as a text that becomes entirely disordered and in need of order and proofreading.

⁴² In an interview with Marais and Blackström, Vladislavić reveals that he wrote the *Proofreader's Derby* in much the same way as Tearle did. He first wrote the uncorrected version and then proofread and corrected it.

The whole city of Alibia seems disjointed and in chaos. Nothing is as it used to be. Fluxman discovers, just as Tearle, the first “signs of unrest” in the telephone directory:

It began with an outbreak of error in the telephone directory, which was the great love and labour of his life. [...] Strange animals started creeping into his proofs, species of error he had never seen before – letters turned inside out, flares of coloured print in the gutters, numbers joined at the head or hip. (RS, 196)

At first he decides to keep the outbreak of errors to himself, hoping that the plague would subside on its own, still convinced that he is able to correct and stabilise order. However, the changes become alarming, and so he reveals to his colleagues the threatening invasion of errors.

Disorder and chaos in Alibia become visible through the movement of words, dots and dashes flying around on the page. The movements of words and punctuation signs directly affect the people living in the textual reality. The world has turned upside down without anybody caring any longer:

Men in dresses, women in bed-linen togas, winding-sheets and corsetry. [...] No matter how much care you took over your grooming, there was no telling if it would last. You might step out in a lounge suit and wind up in jodhpurs. (RS, 210)

Several buildings “had wandered away from their official locations” (RS, 200) and nothing stays as it was. The problem in Alibia is that

there was movement everywhere, not just in the outlying industrial zones, but in the heart of Alibia. Nothing would stay put. Structures were shifting closer together or further apart, skylines were rising and falling, streets were narrowing, views were opening up, cracks were appearing. (RS, 201)

The whole city is being relocated without obvious order.

In a highly satiric way, the implied author plays with the spatial (and by extension racial and social) borders of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. Creating a surreal reality, he visualises the changing and shifting borders not only by the migration of people but also by the migration of houses. Thus, the “fluxation” of words in Alibia cause the corrugated iron shacks, characteristic of South African townships, to move next to luxurious villas creating a comic, grotesque picture. Space becomes hybridised, mixed – and thus boundaries, which some people would rather leave erected, are crossed, which can be seen in the apartheid regulations of space and race and the postapartheid constructions of gated communities. Whole living areas turn upside down and people find

themselves living with the kind of people they have tried so hard to avoid. While it is amusing to imagine the goats walking around freely in the streets of a neat White suburb and gentlemen bumping into “tribesmen”, it also reminds the reader of the stark contrasts and extremes South African society is made up of. Tearle, according to Popescu, “connects this distorted and coercive linguistic vision with the development of spatial structures that imposed segregation and promoted as valid and aesthetically pleasing only the architectural tradition of the white minority” (2005, 189). The narrative reminds us of the cultural diversity of the country and hints at the difficulties and complexities the Rainbow Nation might bring – once the euphoria of the changes settle and the real changes need to be dealt with.

5.3.3.1 The Proofreader’s Society

In the old days, that is before the outbreak of errors, Fluxman was the master of the Proofreader’s Society, a traditional, secretive club of proofreaders who took it upon themselves to control and restore order in the city:

The Proofreader’s Society of Alibia was as old as the city itself. In every age, the Members of the Society had gone quietly about their business, maintaining order without making a fuss. This modest dedication found expression in the items displayed upon their escutcheon: a blue pencil, a dancing-master’s shoe, a cobbler’s nail (the emblem of St Cloud) and the freckled bloom of the tiger lily. (RS, 195)

The Proofreader’s Society is a conservative club of men consisting of the “sharp-eyed and open-hearted men” (RS, 195) Munnery, Wiederkehr, Levitas, Banes, Figg and of course Fluxman.⁴³ However, before the unsettling events in Alibia, the Society neglected their meetings as their duties were not appreciated by the City Fathers. Without Fluxman, within a year “[t]he city fell into ruins” (RS, 210). When Fluxman realises that there is no other way than telling his colleagues and friends about the spate of errors, he announces a special meeting where suddenly everyone confesses noticing “alarming changes in the records under their command” (RS, 197):

Everywhere the trends were the same: not just rashes of missing spaces or jutting hyphens or simple transpositions, but massive disturbances and transformations that seemed somehow wilful, that actually resisted correction. (RS, 198)

⁴³ The process of naming that Vladislavić is so aware of in postapartheid South Africa is also reflected in his ironic play on the characters’ names. Fluxman: restorer of flux, everything is in flux; Wiederkehr; errors come back and cannot be tamed; likewise the Proofreader’s society will come back should order be again disrupted.

As it turns out, each one of them was trying in vain to restore order and shamefully kept it to themselves: Fluxman tried to re-establish the telephone directory; Figg tried to alphabetically reorder the catalogues in the library; Munnery spent his night hours “drafting and redrafting the maps of the city centre, reattaching the numbers of the houses to the proper doors and gates, reorienting the points of the compass” (RS, 198). They decide to take it into their own hands and save Alibia: “They should sustain their efforts behind the scenes” (RS, 198), as proofreaders usually do.⁴⁴ In order to fight the invasion of disorder, the Society prepares for battle and each one of them is assigned a special duty: Fluxman is responsible for deletions and removals, Banes for reappropriation and commandeering statue books, Figg for insertions and Wiederkehr is the director of restoration. Thus, they unite in order to fight the incorrect and restore the old order.⁴⁵

Although the Proofreader’s Society is an old traditional club, it has already undergone some development and loosened its traditional rules: “The modern Members no longer found it necessary to employ pen-names and passwords, and willingly submitted themselves to scrutiny, in accordance with contemporary requirements” (RS, 195). They have made it their custom to hold bimonthly formal meetings at the Café Europa. His bastion of Whiteness – Café Europa – is the only item Tearle translates from his real into his imagined world of Alibia. While the narrative real world Europa before the invasion of errors serves as Tearle’s refuge, he becomes increasingly estranged from its clientele. The Alibian Café Europa, on the contrary, expresses what Tearle misses in his real world: social relations with people who share his attitude and his “sophistication”; people of his standard with whom he can discuss matters of conduct and “questions of craft” (RS, 195). The Society thus also expresses Tearle’s social longing to belong:

In the late hours, when the official business had been dealt with soberly, small glasses of sherry, and the thought that ordinary citizens were sleeping easily because good order was in the hands of responsible men, sweetened the camaraderie that bound them all to the professional cause. (RS, 196)

⁴⁴ Furthermore, the Secret Society raises itself to a kind of secret godlike police that guards over rule and order in the city. As proofreaders they operate beyond public recognition as it is the art of proofreading that their best work is unseen to the reader. Hence, the Secret Society’s guarding over order in Alibia is unknown to its inhabitants as “good order was in the hands of responsible men” and “ordinary citizens were sleeping easily” (RS, 196).

⁴⁵ Taking the allusion of Mr T into account (Chapter 5.3.1), the Proofreader’s Society can be seen as wanting to play the A-team and to come about as the heroes of rule and order. Mr T is the actor of B.A. as one of the four members of the A-Team, an American TV series of the 1980s. The team of four are ex-Army Special Forces who are on the run from the military for a crime they were not responsible for. As some kind of “modern Robin Hoods,” they fight on the good side for the oppressed. The irony, of course, is that Mr T the real-world actor is black and known for his “physical strength” and Mohawk hairstyle – and who thereby represents the absolute opposite to Tearle. The parallel between the Society and the A-Team, however, lies in their devotion to fight (supposed) “injustice” as a team.

The solidarity in proofreading and fighting for a common aim is precisely what is lacking in Tearle's present. He longs for both professional and social relationships. Due to his ghastly and excluding behaviour, however, Tearle excludes himself even from the small circle of acquaintances he once had and becomes increasingly isolated from his surroundings. Fluxman, on the contrary, is included in a circle of friends and colleagues who support each other and share the same values.

Alibia's Hill or Tearle's Bold Head

Becoming alarmed by the uncontrollable changes around him, Fluxman ventures out to his colleague and friend Munnery, "who had been known as the most fastidious of proofreaders, a stickler for sequence and consequence, a meticulous keeper of order" (RS, 215), to ask for advice. Munnery lives on a hill – Tearle's shaped head – and so Fluxman prepares for the journey and takes his alpenstock to hike up the hill: "He set off down the fairway with an unaccustomed spring in his step, swinging his alpenstock at the sprinkling of copper-bottomed pots and pans he espied in the rough" (RS, 191). The implied author creates the image of the Alps and the light-heartedness which is connected with the German and Swiss "Heimatbewegungen," their songs and traditions. The "pastoral idyll" (RS, 191) in which Fluxman finds himself on his way up the hill is supported by his singing of the German song: "I love to go a-wandering... [...] "valda-ree, valda-ra-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha..." (RS, 191–192). This easiness seems ironic since in the city below him chaos is beginning to break out. Moreover, the song, the pastoral idyll and the alpenstock are all allusions to the origins of nostalgia and the idyllic homeland so longed for. The image of the Alps and of hiking to remotes areas can be interpreted as a conscious play by the implied author on the idea of nostalgia, also known as the Swiss disease. Vladislavić is well aware of the origins of nostalgia:

Basically I've looked up the meaning of nostalgia. It comes from the Greek word nostos, meaning to 'return home'. I think that my book is about that question. How do you feel at home? [...] I imagine that nostalgia will be part of any attempt to affirm the sense of belonging to a place that 'home' implies. (Vladislavić quoted in de Vries 2007)

The surrounding nature of the hill remind Fluxman (alias Tearle) of his youth, taking him back to the time when,

it had been his pleasure to go out into the world to find respite from the imperfections of the page, to rest the rods and cones. I spy with my little eye ... How things had changed. The world had become a perilous place, full of pitfalls and eyesores. (RS, 191–192)

However, on Fluxman's way up the hill the light-heartedness is disrupted by a strange encounter with a beggar:

A bandit crashed out of the undergrowth. A thickset man in a bottle-green suit, tattered at turn-up and cuff, muddied at elbow and knee, shoes scuffed to rawhide, belly wobbling between the ripped tails of his shirt. (RS, 192)

As in the description of the painting, the narrative leaves out any mention of “race” or “skin colour”. It is, however, the whole scene of encounter, the way of speaking to each other, which is reminiscent of a South African “baas” (master-servant) relationship. Not only does the beggar call him “master” (RS, 193) but he also offers his services: “I can carry the master's bag” (RS, 193). The unquestioned use of the word “master” by the fictional narrator Fluxman supports the image that Alibia is based on a nostalgia for apartheid structures.⁴⁶ At the same time it displays an allusion to contemporary South Africa where poor, usually Black, people wander around in search of whatever job they can do to earn money. The use of the word “master” in contemporary society suggests a continuation of apartheid's legacy and the long process it will take to overcome the legacies of excluding and racist thinking.

Vladislavić does not answer the reader's implied question as to the beggar's assumed Blackness and thus plays with his or her perception. Fluxman describes the beggar (ethnographically) as an (“indigenous”) monster, who “like some *animate guy* escaped from the bonfire, grass sticking out of his collar and cuffs, greasy hair standing on end. Close kin to the *monstrous bobber* from the lake” (RS, 192; emphasis added). Seeing him as the absolute degenerate Other, as a non-human and thus expecting the worst, Fluxman wishes to simply “delete” him with his magic blue pencil. Maintaining the binary of “us” versus “them,” the beggar is treated as the inferior Other, whereas Fluxman lifts himself into a godlike position. He plays out his authority of being able to decide upon life and death and thus to extinguish from society those regarded as Others. Tearle's authority to

⁴⁶ In the South African context, “master” would have, most likely, been substituted by the word “baas.”

decide upon life and death is reminiscent of a eugenic subtext – to simply delete what is not desired. Especially due to the use of eugenics by Hitler and his Nazi ideology, eugenics has come to be associated with the extermination of undesired population groups. That such totalitarian systems are not just dystopian constructs but can turn into horrific reality has been proven by numerous genocides and ethnic cleansings and most horrifically by Nazi-Germany, which unsurprisingly served as an ideal for apartheid architecture.

Further racist undertones can also be found in Fluxman's proofreading of people when, still on his way up the hill (Tearle's head), he comes to an alley which opens to a Parisian avenue, "[a] broad boulevard with plane trees and pavement cafes, gleaming shopfronts full of mohair jerseys, potted meats and cans of petits pois, lamp-posts in the shape of lighthouses, benches in bus shelters like scalloped band-shells" (RS, 194). The implied author plays with the typical romantic European images; first he evokes a French flair of the place and then he shifts to an Italian one when Fluxman sits down at Al Fresco's and orders an espresso. The Parisian scenery and café culture remind Fluxman, alias Tearle, of "the Alibia of yesteryear" (RS, 195). In his "correct," hence perfect urban surrounding which resembles French city life and café ambience (just like the Café Europa of the frame narrative):

[e]verything was running along so smoothly, so perfectly punctuated by parking meters and kiosks, so elegantly phrased into blocks and squares and loading zones, so idiomatically proper, that tears started to his eyes. [...] everything seemed to be in order. (RS, 194)

When Fluxman begins proofreading the citizens, they are clearly recognizable as White Europeans, which he judges to be "normal":

Normal, well-proportioned faces met his gaze, eyes the recommended distance apart, brows smooth, noses straight, lips finely moulded, ears in pairs, perfect for supporting spectacles. (RS, 194; emphasis added)

His version of "normal" is highly problematic as he equates "normal" with White European – hence Blackness is defined as deviation, an abnormality from the standard and thus subject to be deleted. Once more, Tearle's utopic Alibia supports his apartheid ideology – the old order where European features were upheld as the standard for categorising people as "normal" and "abnormal." These two different sceneries and encounters of Fluxman on his way up the hill also reflect contemporary South Africa,

which is characterised by extremes. While there are the ugly realities of human poverty there is, just around the corner but clearly separated, the luxurious “European” society.

The Saviours

In the end, the super team of proofreaders with their magic pens manage to restore the old order: “Through it all, the Proofreaders did what they could to preserve the proper boundaries between things” (RS, 209). Due to their great work, “[t]he city pulled itself together. Slowly, the recognizable outlines of Alibia reappeared, as street after street and block after block was knocked back into its familiar, ordinary shape” (RS, 226). Later on, in the restructuring phase of the city, Fluxman, as well as the others, take the chance to clear the city, simply by deleting the “human detritus he found in the margins of the city, the erroneous ones, the slips of the hand, the tramps, the fools, the congenitally stupid, the insufferably ugly” (RS, 226). In the restructuring and re-planning of the city, called for by the unsettling movements of things, Fluxman sees the potential for rethinking order and for establishing his utopian version of city life:

When it was time for a bit of town planning, Fluxman’s interest quickened. [...] The displaced masses of Alibia had flung down their makeshift houses in the buffer zones: now the appropriate *social distance* could be *restored* between the haves and the have-nots, the unsightlier settlements shifted to the peripheries where they would not upset the balance, the grand estates returned to the centre where they belonged. (RS, 225–226; emphasis added)

The new border of the supposedly inclusive South Africa becomes explicit in the binary of the haves and the have-nots. Within a non-racial South Africa the scum, the errors of society become the have-nots, who are, as a result of exclusion from the economic world, mostly Black people.

Once more, Fluxman, with the help of his magic blue pencil, plays God as he raises himself to a position where he is the one who decides about the standards and the norms. It becomes obvious that he not only wants to restore the apartheid order but that he wants to optimise the old order by finally really extinguishing those deviant from his defined standard. Fluxman finds support amongst most of his colleagues who agree that “[i]n certain areas of Alibian life [...] there was simply no point in returning to the past. [...] In time, everything was returned to its proper place, which sometimes was not the place it had started out, but the place it *deserved* to end” (RS, 227; emphasis added). Again, the subtexts of cleansing is made explicit, where everything and everyone who

looks and thinks differently does not fit into the ordered system and falls outside the norm.

The only one, who does not agree with this form of social “improvement” is Banes, who initiates his own public-spirited campaign, addressing the “human detritus” (and thereby rendering the city imperfect in the eyes of the other proofreaders): “He reappropriated mansions for the homeless, he reassembled the Royal Alibian Golf Course in the wilderness [...], he reunited families who had been separated by the upheavals” (RS, 227). Banes, thus, is the only one who cares for a future Alibia which consists of Otherness and the human right to be imperfect. In the end, Banes becomes a Samaritan and the Society reconciled with the fact that not everything can be perfect and so “[t]he streets were littered with *crutchers*, *rhinocerous* products, *muslin* fundamentalists, *celeried* employees and their *pardners*, bonsai, baobabs, *dawgs*” (RS, 227, errors in original; emphasis added). The imperfections of life are mockingly expressed through Vladislavić’s deliberately left “corrigenda.” At the same time the “corrigenda,” as already argued, hint at Tearle, the narrator, as unreliable and in fact, imperfect. The Society is afforded a victory parade; their reputation restored and even improved – just as the social landscape. Only Fluxman, despite their victory, constantly strives for perfection, “sweeping the last of the delenda up from the gutters with his hoop and stuffing them into his bag” (RS, 228). Tearle’s utopia ends with an ever-busy Fluxman who, just like Tearle, cannot reconcile with the fact that “one error on five pages [is] acceptable” (RS, 228) and takes it as his task to sweep the streets. This echoes Tearle’s words about the social disorder in his real world: “One beggar at the banquet might be tolerated – but a whole crowd of them?” (RS, 270)

According to Marais, Fluxman’s ability to restore order in Alibia reflects Tearle’s desires and wishes and at the same time inability to restore linguistic and social order, “the success of Tearle’s significantly named alter ego, Fluxman, in restoring order in Alibia, in “The Proofreader’s Derby,” merely underscores Tearle’s failure to do so in Hillbrow” (Marais 2002b, 106). Not only does the Secret Society manage to restore the old order – one that he fails to restore in his Hillbrow environment – but Fluxman also has companions, associates, people who share his ideals and his sense of order. In his Hillbrow café society, Tearle and his views on and of the world remain isolated. He might find sympathy in Spilkin and Merle, at the beginning, but he is left disappointed by both. Tearle’s nostalgic desires projected into the Proofreader’s Derby function as a safety valve where he alias Fluxman manages to restore the old order and where his

proofreading is appreciated and wanted. Tearle projects onto Fluxman his unfulfilled desires and corrects his missed and failed opportunity to prevent and fight the changes in Johannesburg.

In the narrative real world, the frame narrative, Tearle loses the only corrected version of the Proofreader's Derby in an apocalyptic scene of party-disorder during the Café Europa's goodbye-bash. The novel ends with Tearle's inner restlessness in preparing a corrected version of the Proofreader's Derby realising that he is the only one able to correct the world: "The urgency of preparing a corrected version pressed in on me. But the world was so full of errors as it was" (RS, 303). Tearle realises that he cannot halt development, that he, unlike Fluxman, does not have a magic wand to clean up the decaying dirt. Hence, the novel closes with Tearle isolated and alone, watching over his dying city. Despite some instances of a slight development toward more openness, Tearle remains an overall static character; his voice is no longer heard and disappears into the polyphony of voices that mark a democratic South Africa – and this displays the ultimate optimism of the novel.

In sum, inspired by the mural Alibia, *The Proofreader's Derby* is a creation of Tearle's mind. In order to escape the unbearable surrealness of present day South Africa, Tearle creates a virtual world that is strikingly composed of an idealised past reminiscent of apartheid. Tearle projects onto Fluxman his unfulfilled desires and corrects his missed and failed opportunity to prevent and fight the changes in Johannesburg. *The Proofreader's Derby* can be read as Tearle's nostalgic mind – he corrects everything he has failed to correct in the past and thus creates a utopian parallel reality. Just as the mural of Alibia suggests, the textual reality of *The Proofreader's Derby* is devoid of any Blacks and, thus, represents apartheid's fulfilment of a White South African nation. Alibia and *The Proofreader's Derby* are necessary fictions for Tearle to compensate for the present. Hence, *The Proofreader's Derby* can be read as an example of successful restorative apartheid nostalgia.

5.4 Conclusion

As has been demonstrated with various examples, the protagonist Aubrey Tearle is a strong proponent of order and rule, he holds onto the racist structures of the colonial and apartheid discourse in order to make sense of the world around him and to define his position within society. Hence, the overthrow of apartheid and thereby the destruction of the discourse he believes in confront Tearle with the loss of change on all sides. Unable to shift his perspective and to accept the transformations and becoming increasingly isolated from his surroundings because of his obsessive ordering and racist attitude, he escapes into and creates his own world – a world which feeds on structures of old. As illustrated, Tearle’s resistance to change, his rigid belief in apartheid as the only truth and his unremitting attempts to restore the old order mark him as a restorative nostalgist. Restorative nostalgia, as argued, is a dangerous form of nostalgia that lives on exclusion and fundamentalism.

Overall, Tearle is drawn as a character who takes himself a bit too serious. Thus, instead of enjoying his retirement, he continues his professional skills by proofreading his social surroundings. His proofreading of the culinary landscape reveals his fear of mixing and development. By treating the Other, represented by foreign food and the staff of foreign food stalls, as errors or “problems to be solved” and by imposing himself as the linguistic and social ideal, he reveals his disdain of the political and social transformations around him.

By introducing such a racist and irritating character as Aubrey Tearle, Vladislavić breaks boundaries which have stipulated the issues to be spoken of in society, of what can and what cannot be said in a postapartheid South Africa. In an interview he confesses:

I was tempted, when I finally had a draft of this book, which took a ridiculous amount of time to write, to begin ‘cleaning it up’ a bit and making it more comfortable. There were things I had cold feet about. I would think, “I can’t actually have him say that. This is insensitive. Or this is too difficult.” But, in the end, I almost used these reactions of mine as a touchstone, as a reason for saying, “No, I actually have to leave this. If I make the book comfortable for myself, then I will make it that much more comfortable for the reader, and that will be to defeat the purpose. (Marais, Backström 2002, 122)

Thus instead of representing a sympathetic voice dealing with the past, Vladislavić offers a more complicated voice. The narrative leaves silences and uncertainties caused by the discomfort of identifying with the protagonist’s monologic voice. Much unlike the

contemporary narratives celebrating the Rainbow Nation and the inclusive attitude of a “new” South Africa, Tearle confronts and disturbs the implied reader with his continuing deep racism, his colonial and apartheid mannerism and his feeling of alienation in the heydays of the transition. Here, we have a personalised story of someone who views the times of change not as euphoric but as chaotic and degenerating. Here, we have a voice which laments the old order and structure and ventures out on his personal mission to restore the old order. Thereby, the narrative provokes and reminds one of the recent past and its continuation in the present. Nostalgia thus serves as a tool for the implied author to ask questions about the past in the present and to address attitudes – racist and excluding – which are still prevalent, also in the acclaimed “new” South Africa. Through narrative techniques of irony and satire the implied author distances himself from the racist and restorative nostalgic views his protagonist. The past, it seems, is for the implied author and – as the cited interview passages with Vladislavić suggest – for the real author a difficult and ambiguous terrain. Contrary to Mda, who mainly uses the (lost) past as a source for the present, Vladislavić confronts the reader as much as himself with the legacies of the apartheid mind. Therefore, nostalgia, the extremely personal narrative of the past, is a way of dealing with the present and demonstrates that these structures and ways of thinking cannot be destroyed easily. The novel ultimately leaves the reader to question her or his own values, morals and attitudes.

6 Ivan Vladislavić's *The Exploded View*

Synopsis

Dislocation, disorientation and alienation as well as the pressing question of home and belonging also lie at the heart of Ivan Vladislavić's novel *The Exploded View* (2004).¹ The narrative is composed of four episodes, three of which have their own White male middle-aged protagonist, and one which features a Black protagonist.

An "exploded view" is a technical term defined as a representative picture that illustrates the components of an object slightly separated by distance, "showing all the separate components as if 'exploded' from the complete unit but retaining their relative positions" (OED 1989, 573). It is a perspective which shows the whole set up by its single parts. Taking this as a metaphor, Vladislavić explodes not only the conventional structure of the novel but also explores facets of contemporary South Africa in an urban explosion of social and physical places. In order to provide insight into the daily realities, struggles and frustrations of the four characters, Budlender, Egan, Simeon and Gordon, Vladislavić chooses the urban fabric of Johannesburg. Through their occupations, they are confronted with the redefinitions and formation of the new socio-spatial setup. With the characters, the reader moves into the different spaces that make up contemporary, postapartheid South Africa: gated communities, townships, bohemian bars, as well as construction sites, allowing a glimpse into the planning of a future South Africa. As Shane Graham notes, "each character's perspective allows us to see different facets of the complex cultural and material processes that make everyday life in the city possible" (2006, 54).

Budlender, the protagonist of the first episode, "Villa Toscana," works as a statistician for the national census, helping to develop questionnaires which match the new social setup and categories of the transforming society. By introducing this character, the episode enters the "gated communities" of Johannesburg – microcosms of urban South Africa – that take on a simulacric identity quoting variously from European, American or ethnic African places and architectures.

In contrast to the luxurious gated communities, the protagonist of the second episode "Afritude Sauce," Egan, introduces the reader to the world of townships. Egan is a sanitary engineer working for the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) projects. He enters one of the townships around Johannesburg in order to inspect the

¹ Vladislavić wrote the novel in response to artworks by Joachim Schönfeldt. Extracts from the text were exhibited with Schönfeldt's images under the title *The Model Men* (2004) (van Heerden 2005; Graham 2007, 73).

proceedings on a construction site. Talking to the local officials, he suddenly finds himself being the only White person – a new, disturbing and alienating experience for him.

Vladislavić's third story, "Curiouser," introduces the only Black protagonist of this collection. Simeon is a bourgeois artist and the only character that belongs to South Africa's "new" affluent class. His artworks are ethically controversial as he exploits other people's suffering and work to make his own profit. In his installation art he uses "leftovers" from genocides as well as curiosities, brought into the country in a suspicious way, and takes these as raw materials to construct new artworks.

Gordon Duffy, the protagonist of the fourth narrative "Crocodile Lodge," puts up billboards which announce the development of new gated communities. Gordon is the most overtly nostalgic character longing for an imagined place in the past. Triggered by the world of media images around him, he increasingly withdraws to his own (nostalgic as well as anti-nostalgic) dream worlds, which leads to his growing confusion and blurring of reality, dream and illusion. Ironically, the construction site for which he puts up billboards announcing wonderful and secure living places becomes the site of his fatal destiny when he falls victim to an act of violence and physically experiences the exploded view.

Following these four characters, the implied author reflects upon the progressions and cul-de-sac developments of contemporary urban South Africa. The unsettling experiences of the transition caused immense difficulties for many South Africans, and *The Exploded View* depicts characters that have to continue with everyday life and struggle with their new role in a democratic and "non-racial"² society. Vladislavić's focus thereby lies in the portrayal of White South African men trying to make sense of their roles within the new dispensation. What they share with the Black protagonist is a feeling of loneliness and disorientation as well as an incapability of grasping the transforming society.

² I put this term in inverted commas in order to emphasise that it is still a long process to come close to what one could call a "non-racial" society.

Introduction

Ivan Vladislavić's composition of four loosely linked episodes dislocates the sense of home and belonging in the metropolis of Johannesburg in various ways: on the discourse level Vladislavić breaks the chronological order of the novel with an episodic, discontinuous structure. A careful reading, however, discloses that the individual characters are connected by the fact that they share the same physical and social space of postapartheid South Africa. Moreover, the analeptic time structures also support a sense of dislocation: each episode captures the period of an ordinary working day told in retrospect, interrupted by analepses to earlier events in their lives. The individual episodes are told by a heterodiegetic narrator who is interrupted by sequences of interior monologue, at times only a line, at other times a longer passage.

Furthermore, *The Exploded View* disrupts the clear categories of fiction. Due to its composition and non-fictional elements, *The Exploded View* was disqualified from the Sunday Times Fiction Prize in 2005 as it was thought not to follow the conventions of a novel.³ Although not joining the debate about fictional or non-fictional categorisations at the time, Vladislavić commented on the paradox of such a categorisation as “literary non-fiction” in his Alan Paton Award speech of his collection of short texts *Portrait with Keys*:

Having grown up in the wide open spaces of fiction I find myself an illegal alien on the other side of the fence. [...] If you put something into a novel, readers assume that it really happened if you put it into a non-fiction book they assume you made it up (Vladislavić, 2007).

Moving between fiction and non-fiction, *The Exploded View* provides a pointed social commentary on urban developments in contemporary South Africa.⁴ His episodic work not only sabotages the conventions of the “traditional novel” but also opens up old borders and is therefore able to transport Vladislavić's delicate call for opening up spaces instead of withdrawing behind walls and electrified fences.

³ *Portrait with Keys* (2008) is his series of 138 short texts on Johannesburg which won the Alan Paton Non-Fiction Award. For more information on *The Exploded View*'s disqualification see the Sunday Times article “Fiction Award,” July 10, 2005.

⁴ “I can no longer draw such a clear line between realist forms and the alternatives, or between fiction and non-fiction. The problem, if that's what it is, seems to be widespread. I suppose that's why the category of 'literary non-fiction' has arisen” (Vladislavić in Miller 2007, 143).

Chapter 6.1 will examine the lives of the four protagonists and illuminate their triggers for nostalgia. While all four protagonists are characterised by a sense of yearning for something lost, Gordon Duffy is the character expressing the deepest nostalgia for an imagined childhood and place. Chapter 6.2 will investigate the urban development of gated communities, which incorporate nostalgic images of a lost European heritage. Such simulacra of other places express a yearning for a different place called home. This chapter analyses these urban developments as a result of an insecure home and as the desire to restore a sense of a secure home by nostalgically looking to a distant heritage. Simultaneously, these secured living spaces also express a desire for a global, American affluent lifestyle. In two of the four episodes (which interestingly open and close the “gates” to the novel,) Vladislavić’s protagonists enter the simulacric worlds of gated communities. These attempts at restoring home and community reproduce colonial and apartheid binary structures, clearly defining parameters of “us” versus “them.”

The last chapter (6.3) will move into commercially restored shebeens – the formerly illegal taverns which have come to symbolise Black life and culture, resistance and socialising during the anti-apartheid struggle. The gentrification of these spaces is ambiguous as they idealise Black township life under apartheid while, simultaneously, the shebeens remain the only locality where the majority of poor people in a common township can spend leisure time.

6.1 Home and Be-longing – Ways of Making Sense

How can one be homesick for a home that one never had? (Boym 2001, xiii)

The questions of home and be-longing (in the sense of longing to belong) are central in Ivan Vladislavić’s exploded view of contemporary society. The four characters are all involved, in different ways, in developing, restructuring and capturing the urban reality of Johannesburg and are thus, on a micro level, involved in the process of “nation-building.” Artist Tony Morphet says that, “Johannesburg is his [Vladislavić’s] special score, but the music he makes sounds in every big city. It’s the sound of dislocation and bursting energy; of lost places and sudden new encounters” (cited in Jooste 2004, 15). Besides the physical places, the four protagonists share a feeling of being disoriented and they all search unconsciously for parameters of familiarity and belonging in the new dispensation after the first euphoria of the Rainbow Nation has died down. They have to find their place in society anew and try to understand the new make-up of a transforming city. Statistics and plans become, at least for three of them, a source of help as this promises a

degree of stability and a way to gain control over a general feeling of alienation and being lost.

Even though the characters of *The Exploded View* are not nostalgic for the recent apartheid past, as their fictional predecessor Aubrey Tearle, they, with the exception of Simeon, express a similar though less obsessive longing for order and clear structures as expressed by the metaphor of the exploded view. Disorientation is caused precisely by the lack of a clear view of how society is constructed and how the individual fits into the overall structure. Unlike Tearle's restorative nostalgia for the apartheid order, the characters in *The Exploded View* do not wish to return to the authoritatively ruled apartheid structures. Their respective nostalgia is more subtle, implicit and, in a postmodern understanding, not directed at a specific time or place. *Nostos* – the return home – presupposes some kind of departure, dislocation or exile. However, the protagonists in *The Exploded View* have not left their place of origin – yet they display a deep yearning for a lost home somewhere else. These dreams of other places become visual in the construction of toy-like gated communities named “Villa Toscana” or “Crocodile Lodge” as well as in idealisations of township life during the days of the struggle against apartheid. All four protagonists experience the present as fragmented to the extent that particularly Budlender and Gordon increasingly drift into hallucinatory states of mind. The following will look at personal ways the four protagonists experience alienation and attempt to make sense of their surroundings.

6.1.1 Budlender and Statistics – Racial Nervousness

Budlender, the protagonist of the first episode, is employed as a demographer working on South Africa's first non-racial census. As such, he is “engaged in some faintly disturbing version of the kind of taxonomic enterprise that is based on the physical characteristics of race associated with apartheid” (van Zyl 2006a, 264). The heterodiegetic narrator recalls Budlender's last five visits to Villa Toscana, (the gated community which will be at the centre of discussion in Chapter 6.2) for the purpose of interviewing one of his respondents for the questionnaire, Iris du Plooy, to whom he is secretly attracted.

Similar to Tearle's obsession with English words and syntax, is Budlender's preoccupation with numbers and statistics, which exceeds his occupational need for documentation. It provides him with a rationality which helps him maintain a sense of control over a world that has lost its old, clearly marked structures and orders. The restructuring of society as it is mirrored in the demographic questionnaires is vexing it

reveals a deep insecurity about the ways in which the alleged new social fabric and in line with the democratic constitution of a non-racial, non-sexist, non-discriminatory society are dealt with:

They had gone through the third draft of the revised questionnaire, lingering over the meaning of ‘population group’ – the question about race had been the most difficult one of all to formulate; and the definition of a household head – ‘The head or acting head of the household is the main decision-maker.’ (EV, 34)

The inability or uncertainty associated with finding words and speaking the language of the new South Africa becomes further striking when Budlender chats with a friend about racial characteristics and diversity amongst Black people. In response, his friend gives him a crash course in ethnography – which is intended to serve as a tool for capturing and grasping the new social surroundings:

Since he had been made aware of the characteristics – a particular curl to the hair or a shade to the skin, the angle of a cheekbone or jawline, the ridge of a lip, the slant of an eye, the size of an ear – it seemed to him that there were Nigerians everywhere. He had started to see Mozambicans too, and Somalis. It was the opposite of the old stereotype: they all looked different to him. Foreigners on every side. Could the aliens have outstripped the indigenes? Was it possible? There were no reliable statistics. (EV, 5)

Presented in free indirect discourse and using the jargon of a military invasion, it becomes obvious that Budlender experiences the migratory development as a threat. While during apartheid, racial categorisations determined typical characteristics for homogenous groups of White, Black, Coloured and Asian/Indian, the distinction between Black South Africans and other Africans has become a new framework for Othering. The jargon of the new society has only changed on the surface; meanwhile, the structures of thinking in clearly defined stereotypical, racial categories and binaries continues. Hence, Budlender’s thought that “[i]t was time to learn the signs” (EV, 4) resounds with a sarcastic tone considering that the new is reappearing in the guise of the old and that apartheid is giving way to xenophobia.⁵ Budlender’s notion though that “[t]here were no reliable statistics” (EV, 5) indicates a lack of control and order as well as the awareness that things are more complex and diverse than the old regime admitted: if statistics gave him a sense of stability and meaning, a lack thereof suggests his and the state’s failure to make the world

⁵ As already mentioned in the previous chapters of Part II, the influx of African foreigners to South Africa since the demise of apartheid has caused increasing xenophobic resentments (sentiments). The fear of being overrun by other Africans who offer their labour much cheaper and who therefore fill the position of scapegoats has especially risen in the poorest urban areas of South Africa, i.e. townships.

meaningful.⁶ According to Titlestad and Kissack, “these statistical pronouncements present Budlender with the promise of a legible reality, the order or disorder of which can be ascertained, measured and recorded” (2006, 13). The shift from the apartheid authorial voice to a democratic one, which allows a polyphony of voices and perspectives, challenges the dominance of a single narrative and renders the “old” binarising apartheid discourse unreliable. As soon as more perspectives are allowed, Budlender’s statistics fail, and what seemed to be stable becomes fragile and questionable.

Unreliable Statistics

Budlender displays a general insecurity about his former place of familiarity, i.e. his home. In order to move above things and to get a statistical view over his surroundings, he gets on top of a petrol station (Star Shop Egoli) to “a perch made for a statistician” (EV, 15). The movement and types of cars which he tries to document turn out to be a mirror of the social stratification of his society. However, despite his elevated position, Budlender is not yet able to read the signs of his transforming society which are spelled out by the demographic flow of cars below him:

Entire lifestyles, dissolved in the flow like some troubling additive, like statistical fluoride, became perceptible to his trained eye. [...] Were the roads full of old cars or new cars? There was a lesson in this, which only a statistician seemed capable of learning. As soon as you took account of what people were saying, you lost track of what was actually happening. (EV, 16)

What becomes striking by observing the cars is the gap between the rich and the poor, rather than between Black and White. The once defining authority, which prescribed the sense of social spaces and movements, has disappeared. Budlender represents the continuing “biopolitical cast of mind” (van Zyl 2006, 264) – transforming his world into manageable statistics. He thus can be defined as being nostalgic for the social stability – similar to Aubrey Tearle though much milder – once represented by demographic statistics. At the same time, however, Budlender’s attempt to move above things for a better view can be interpreted as an escape from reality; the physical distance can represent his inability to personally engage in the changes of everyday life.

Moreover, Budlender’s bird’s-eye perspective is also an explosion of contemporary South African urban society, which has turned cars – as status symbols –

⁶ In addition, the act of documenting, categorising and measuring people, as well as producing statistics on them, mirrors colonial/apartheid ways of exercising control and power over their (colonised) subjects (Hook and Vrdoljak 2002, 212; Appadurai cited in van Zyl 2006a, 264). However, demography is also a practice inseparable from the modern nation state (van Zyl 2006a, 265).

into material possessions that continue to demark lifestyles and social hierarchies just in more complex ways. The episode is pervaded with statistics which reveal the shift from a racially divided society to a class structured society, which is increasingly concerned with accumulating signs of wealth and global market products. The statistics also reveal a society marked by deep imbalances in which, “[o]nly 35 per cent of South Africans have access to a landline telephone. On the other hand, there are four and a half million cellphones in the country. There are more cellphones than fridges” (EV, 18). The irony of the significance of cellphones becomes dramatic at the end of the last episode when it is exactly a missing cellphone which brings Gordon into the fatal situation of being mugged and severely beaten up. Furthermore, the cellphone as a symbol for wealth and consumption outweighs the fridge as a symbol for nutrition and thus bluntly expresses the imbalance in a country characterised by a small proportion of rich people and masses of people living below the poverty line.⁷

Due to his job, which brings him to various places in and around Johannesburg, Budlender witnesses the immense discrepancy between the haves and the have-nots as displayed by people’s homes. On his return from one of the fancy neighbourhoods, Budlender takes a wrong turn and realises that:

A squatter camp had sprung up here in the last year on the open veld between this road and the freeway, directly opposite the new housing scheme. He had no idea what either place was called, but he had seen them from the freeway often enough, under a cloud of smog that drew no distinction between the formal and the informal, and he had passed between the two zones earlier that evening, an arrangement of little RDP houses on the one side and a clutter of corrugated-iron and board shacks on the other. (EV, 20)

South African reality is one between two zones, between the formal and the informal and between ridiculous exhibitions of wealth in fancy or theme-park-like enclosed neighbourhoods and the bare minimum to making oneself at home in corrugated iron and cardboard boxes.⁸ Seen through the dust, these homes look alike – an accumulation of people living together. However, on closer inspection, the two places could not be more different. Lost in the darkness and having a surreal encounter with a naked Black man

⁷ The imbalance and lack of shared commonalities are also expressed by the fact that “no more than 2 per cent of white South Africans speak an African language” (EV, 25).

⁸ In fact, these two zones are both “gated” because many predominantly White people (and sometimes even police) are too afraid of entering townships due to gansterism and crime – such places are often enclosed, one might argue, by “gates of fear” as well as by ignorance.

reclining in a tractor tyre on the edges of the township, Budlender is overcome by a moment of nervousness. The ignorance of the Other('s) space in addition to the sheer presence of the Black man prevent a true interest or engagement in bringing the two zones closer together. The encounter with the naked man, who personifies the ever-present misery of his society, leaves Budlender deeply disturbed and contributes to his growing confusion about his home which has changed into a home, i.e. a nation for all South Africans.

An Explosion of Images

Budlender's feeling of being lost in the new dispensation and his inability to grasp what is happening around him is mirrored in his experiences watching TV. Zapping through TV programmes, he experiences the absurdity of the globally desired world of images:

Why did everything have to happen so quickly? So incompletely? It was nothing but bits and pieces of things. [...] An endless jumble of body parts amid ruins, a gyrating hip, an enigmatic navel, a fossicking hand, a pointing finger, sign language form a secret alphabet, fragments of city streets, images flaring and fading, dissolving, detaching, floating in airtime, dwindling away into nothing. *Simunye, we are one*, the signature tune insisted. (EV; 24, emphasis in original)

The narrative plays with the meaning of the adjective "exploded": while exploded implies a sense of chaos and destruction, the "exploded view" is a well-organised and ordered perspective of the texture of things. Hence, Budlender's media experience reflects a failed exploded view whereby the adjective gains meaning: a chaotic jumble of images. Budlender longs for an "exploded view" and its harmonious order, yet what he experiences by watching TV is an explosion of images and signs into single parts without a meaningful order, thereby enforcing his feeling of disorder and fragmentation. This passage further expresses Budlender's longing for permanence and stability in sight of his existentialist fear. However, the TV programme ironically reassures the audience of a sense of belonging and communality. The signature tune echoes "*Simunye, we are one*," as if it is trying to convince the nation that it is unified. *Simunye*, a Zulu term is juxtaposed with an English expression – they are forced together for a glossed over, supposedly unproblematised effect of unity.⁹ The explosion of signs and the conglomeration of these experiences of instability have a hallucinatory effect on the protagonist and he enters the world of free-floating signs – where he, as an embodied sign

⁹ I am deeply indebted to Jennifer Rees for pointing that out time and for inspiring e-mail discussions.

himself floats through the jumble of signs which need yet to be defined. As Titlestad and Kissack suggest: “In a context in which he finds it increasingly difficult to read signs, the quantifiable holds out the promise of a nostalgic, almost talismanic, consolation; the promise of an ordered comprehension of a fluid context” (2006, 13).

Budlender has another surreal experience during one of his visits to Iris du Plooy, when he voyeuristically examines her toiletries and becomes lost in her world of perfumes: bottles which built their own city with towers in different size and shape – a city that, in contrast to his surroundings, shines in perfect colours: “*The Perfumed City*” (EV, 34; emphasis in original). Just as Iris maintains a perfect mask with an ever-present continuity-announcer-smile, the perfumed city resembles a toy-like city offering escape from the real¹⁰:

One night not long afterwards, he dreamt that he was walking in a foreign city, down avenues lined with skyscrapers. The buildings were like bars in a gigantic graph, but they were also perfume bottles, glass towers filled with liquids coloured like honey and brandy. The air was so thickly scented he could hardly breathe. He began to run, over tiles of tortoiseshell and pewter, gathering momentum painfully, step by step, until his feet detached from the earth and he found himself falling, horizontally, through the perfumed streets. (EV, 46)

The opposing worlds of rationality and emotion, of statistics and consumer articles, the real and the illusionary throw Budlender into a delirious state. His surroundings are caught in signs he can no longer read and he increasingly fails to distinguish between reality and illusion. The hallucinatory space, the perfume-delirium that Budlender exposes himself to, reminiscent of Tearle’s hallucinatory state of mind at the beginning and end of *The Restless Supermarket*, can be interpreted as an expression of his inability to creatively negotiate new South African spaces (Goodman 2006, 39). He longs for familiarity as much as he longs to belong to a society where he can decipher the language and grasp the order.

Budlender does not idealise the past or wish the old system were back; yet, he yearns for the order of the old days because the present is unreliable, which is expressed by his surreal experiences. The images and signs in his surroundings do not make sense any longer, they are as if “exploded,” floating freely without their signifying counterparts (Titlestad and Kissack 2006, 12). Budlender’s alienation and growing inability to

¹⁰ The “Perfumed City” seems to resonate with some developments of the material cityscape of Johannesburg – superficially attractive and alluring

distinguish between the real and the surreal becomes most striking in his confrontation with the simulacric gated communities. Instead of offering a secure home, these communities tremendously increase Budlender's feeling of alienation, as will be discussed in Section 6.2.

6.1.2 Egan and Maps

In the second episode, "Afritude Sauce," the reader literally crosses the highway from the world of gated communities to the world of squatter camps and Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) housing. Egan, a sanitary engineer working for RDP projects, tries to capture the changing society, similar to Budlender, by rationalising it in the form of maps and plans. Told in retrospect, the heterodiegetic narrator recaps one day of work in Egan's life and adds further analepses in the form of memories.

In order to inspect the proceedings on the construction site Hani View,¹¹ an RDP project, and to talk to local officials, Egan moves beyond mere construction plans. Architectural maps and plans mirror a utopian, ideal vision as to how space is constructed and how it affects social life. "The ideal city exists only in architectural models [...]" Svetlana Boym (2001, 78) reminds us. However, once Egan sets foot onto a construction site, the utopian vision is torn apart. Recalling his first work on a low-budget housing project with a Black architect just after 1994, Egan has moved from naivety to pragmatism. On paper you can pretend to plan a pleasant place until you first set foot onto the real place and are forced to leave behind these illusions:

Sometimes it was disenchanting. You had convinced yourself, looking at the neatly inked blocks on the paper, at the street names, the community facilities, the cookie-cutter trees, that the place was rather pleasant. You imagined gardens, shady avenues and parks. And then you got there and found rows of impossibly small houses, not a leaf in sight, dust everywhere, shadowless walls, and the immense blue well of the sky, which reduced the earth to sediment. At other times, the contrast between the flat world of the plan and the angular world of the township galvanized him. It was a beginning, wasn't it? You couldn't expect everything to change overnight. That was half the problem – it was like the pop song – people wanted it all, wanted it now, for free. (EV, 57)

While Budlender accidentally enters a squatter camp and leaves it again within minutes, Egan crosses the threshold of this realm and experiences this Other reality beyond South

¹¹ The name obviously refers to Chris Hani, the former leader of the South African Communist Party and anti-apartheid activist who was assassinated on 10 April 1993.

Africa's comfort zones more frequently for job reasons. Entering a township – “although you weren't supposed to call them that any more” (EV, 61), Egan is made uncomfortable by the grotesqueness of the whole situation. Also, he enters the former alien terrain not without anxiety: “So long as the women and kids were in the majority, ridiculous though it was, he felt reassured” (EV, 60). Townships were no-go areas for Whites during apartheid and this seems to have been fixed in the minds of many White South Africans still largely ignoring those places. According to Vladislavić:

There is a huge legacy of fear, of entering black space. And that's what it is largely about – a legacy of absolute fear. I guess the sense that it was forbidden has carried over into the present, too. I think a lot is driven by fear. And the fact that South Africa is a dangerous place allows people to feel that they shouldn't make that effort because it would be reckless or it would be foolish to do that. (2008, 350)

The one-directional flow of Black people entering White space reveals the power of the past to continue shaping people's minds where Black spaces denote crime and poverty and White spaces privilege and civilisation.

During the day, when Egan visits the RDP houses, he is confronted with the farce of the new South Africa. In a comic description, the implied author expresses the irony of reconstruction and development: apart from the houses already falling apart due to bad planning, construction and cheap material, the people cannot afford water to use their toilets. In light of this, development and improvement are a vivid mockery of the sad realities. On the surface people claim to help in the name of reconciliation. However, apart from changing the obvious, such as introducing quick yet useless housing projects, nothing much has been done to improve the situation of the very poor. Rather, there is a lack of communication and understanding spurred by the political change. The transition has divided the country into beneficiaries and losers. This is illustrated in a conversation between Egan and a council official:

'Some of them say they don't want a stinking toilet in the house any more.'
'A little bit late in the day to change their minds, don't you think?' 'Very. Now, when they see the size of the water bill, they'd rather have a long drop in the yard. But when we offered them pit latrines to begin with, they were all up in arms. You remember the story: "I don't want a hole in the ground like a dog, I want a throne at the end of the passage." [...] 'People are never satisfied.' 'Exactly. "I want to shit in style and pull the chain, like the madam."' (EV, 54)

Surrounded by a crowd of people in front of one of the RDP houses, Egan feels increasingly awkward as he seems to be falling into the position of the old White authority. Immediately, he becomes aware of his position, first because a child “tugged at the clasp of the briefcase, as if Daddy was home from the office with some promised treat” (EV, 63). Hani View, one of the numerous townships surrounding Johannesburg, is a world unknown to Egan, which leaves him disturbed in a way similar to Budlender. It is such experiences where he is deprived of language, biting his tongue (EV, 59), swallowing his anger, “[e]ating shit again” (EV, 67). Egan feels like he has to take care of the people’s complaints and play the responsible authority which his Whiteness and position represent, all in the name of reconciliation: “A conversation stopper” (EV, 62). The discrepancy between the plan (the ideal) and the construction site (the real) exposes the inefficiency of development projects and the distance of those in power to the needs of the very people for whom they have to plan. It reveals that the expectations on both sides, the privileged and the poor, cling to utopian visions rather than facing reality.¹² For Egan, the illusion of spatial and social improvement, as suggested in maps and plans, provides a sort of foothold for him. However, the discrepancy between maps and reality also reveals the long process needed to “de-colonize the mind” (Ngugi 1981). Egan has to realise that maps and plans do not reflect real life, nor does social life change when plans are improved. As van Zyl notes, “[c]hanging a map may change other maps but it does not automatically change the territory; and wishing certainly does not make it so” (2006b, 79).

Becoming the Other

Later in the day, Egan experiences the binary structures of “us” versus “them” in a racially reversed form. After the disturbing and disillusioning confrontation with “real life” in Hani View, Egan is out for dinner with the local officials and finds himself to be the only White person present. Embarking on a “sensory safari” (EV, 81) offered by the menu, Egan is again faced with his inability to speak his companion’s language so that they patronisingly coax him into ordering what they think is good for him. Although Egan insists that he has eaten tripe before, the men laugh and tell him: ““You must not have the

¹² Moreover, the failure to move beyond maps illustrates the lack of communication between the officials as well as the ignorance of the rich, who ease their bad consciences with an attitude of well-meaning – which all too often fails to be equivalent to well-doing. The township dwellers, on the other hand, reveal a passive attitude and a general expectation that everything is being done for them, that now, as compensation, they are being served. The only thing people on the opposite sides seem to share is their eagerness for complaining, which recalls also Zakes Mda’s characterisation of the former exiles: “Moaning [...] The national sport” (EV, 71).

ulusu Iwegusha. [...] ‘It will make you sick.’ [...] ‘You must have the beef,’ Bhengu said. With the Afritude Sauce’, Mazibuko added” (EV, 82–83). The Afritude Sauce as the flavour of the “New South Africa” is “an exhilarating blend of earthy goodness and spicy sophistication” (EV, 83). The irony of the supposedly hybrid sauce becomes obvious when questioning what is actually so new when racially mixed groups are still an exception. This is what Egan has to realise when he looks around at the other guests in the restaurant. For a moment, he even feels proud to be the only White person in the company of five Black men. Again, similar to “*Simunye* – we are one,” it seems as if the term – the “New South Africa” – must come first, to convince people of hybridity and unity. It may facilitate a move toward this unity, but it is still false.¹³

From the beginning of the evening, Egan feels uncomfortable in his company and in the shebeen-style restaurant, always wishing for a secure point in the future from where he could look back at the whole evening with distance and ease. Still unfamiliar with the new code, Egan feels insecure interacting with the former Other – now he himself being the Other – and is extremely cautious to act according to the new politics, trying hard not to be offensive. The restaurant for which Simeon, the Black artist of the third episode, designed the décor, reflects Egan’s feeling of being threatened by the masks staring at him from all sides:

His eyes wandered from the faces of his companions to the masks on the walls. There seemed to be more and more of them. Multipliers. He felt surrounded. It was uncannily like a white South African nightmare, he thought. An old one. As if they were in a glass house, feasting, while the hordes outside pressed their hungry faces to the walls. (EV, 91)

Similar to Budlender’s fear of invasion, Egan’s anxiety is motivated by a legacy of Othering, subjugation and exclusion. For a moment, Egan also enters a hallucinatory state in which his and his White compatriot’s repressed fears of being overrun by the oppressed majority become true, emphasising the deep suspicions and prejudices still lingering in White South Africans’ unconscious.¹⁴ As Goodman rightfully points out, “[f]or Egan the restaurant becomes a site of struggle in which issues of power and social relations figure predominantly” (2006, 40). Egan gets caught in a zigzag tour of belonging and non-belonging, inclusion and exclusion. While at first he is even feeling “like one of the boys”

¹³ I owe this thought to Jennifer Rees.

¹⁴ As Rushdie once pointed out: “White South Africans have no need of dream-ogres: it is reality that they fear, and the something out there is the future” (1991, 187).

(EV, 85), he later on finds himself increasingly excluded from their conversation. Belonging to the ninety-eight percent of White South Africans who cannot speak any of the South African languages, Egan “began to suspect that *nothing* important was being discussed with him” (EV, 87; emphasis in original). His assurance of being accepted as an equal partner fades: “This unease he was feeling might just as well be insecurity, anxiety, even a guilty conscience. Why should he feel excluded? Wasn’t that a sign of weakness in itself?” (EV, 87) Egan represents a White, disoriented position which struggles with racial insecurities and has not yet found a way of interacting. He stands symbolically for the difficulty of decoding and negotiating cultural practices, the insecurity about the new and loss of the old structures.

Moreover, similar to Budlender, Egan can no longer decipher the new language or read the signs. Especially, the decoding of jokes creates extreme difficulties for him:

When a black associate called him ‘baas’, he got the joke, give or take. But when the same associate called *himself* ‘boy’ or ‘bushie’, Egan was never sure what was really going on. [...] This kind of racial humour, or was it interracial humour, made him uncomfortable. (EV, 54; emphasis in original)

Throughout the day, Egan is uncomfortably conscious of his racial position and unsure about how to act. Being confused in the midst of the “dissonant languages” (Titlestad and Kissack 2006, 22) around him, he swallows reasonable criticism in the name of reconciliation, as a way of adjusting to the changed society. The question, however, arises as to whether pleasing the new government is a misunderstood and dangerous form of reconciliation. With his fictional representation, the implied author reveals the danger of maintaining the old power structures by merely reversing the roles and substituting the old power relations with new forms of undemocratic interaction.

An “Unhomely” Home

The question of home and be-longing, informed by the discrepancy between the real and the utopian vision, continues to be a pressing one for Egan. When he finds himself back to the ordinariness of his hotel room at the end of the day, he looks at the customer satisfaction questionnaire filled out by a previous Dutch hotel guest. He realises that the shortcomings of the room (a broken lamp, worn bedclothes and carpet, old-fashioned décor, below standard) reflect his own shortcomings and his inability to turn utopia into reality. On another level, the hotel room (“Not up to standard”; “old-fashioned”, “depressing” EV, 96) also represents the country’s failures – a country he is becoming increasingly alienated from. As Titlestad and Kissack point out, Egan suddenly

experiences the hotel room as “fundamentally unhomely” (2006, 22). In Freud’s terminology the “unhomely” expresses the *unheimliche*,¹⁵ – the guilty conscious of being White in South Africa; the guilty conscious of belonging to the family of oppressors and the permanent fear of revenge by the Black majority in a liberated South Africa.¹⁶ The “unhomely” hotel room thus becomes a metaphor for the *unheimliche* country, which it represents to many White South Africans who try to escape its realities by immigrating to other “White” countries.

As Ralph Goodman points out, at the end of the episode, Egan is in a foetal position which suggests that he is not ready to face the changes (2006, 41): “Egan drew his knees up protectively and cupped his hands between his legs” (EV, 98). He is still in a position of defence – protecting himself – against the alienating circumstances he finds himself in. Furthermore, the foetal position expresses Egan’s longing for a lost secure and familiar home; for the lost warmth of the womb. This also conveys an escape from taking responsibility, making decisions and an active effort.¹⁷ In a more positive interpretation, this position could also signal the beginning of a new awareness. It then signifies the realisation that a long process toward developing a new society for all South Africans lies ahead. Although, it is too soon yet to speak of the new South Africa and although the new nation is yet to be born, it is already lingering in the womb, slowly maturing and preparing for the challenges of ordinary life. What this passage (read as a metaphor of the life to be born) then suggests is that people need to realise the difficult and long task of evolving into a new society and of developing into a common nation: learning the first steps, acquiring language and creating a sense of an emancipated identity. Although Egan grapples with the language and signs of the new dispensation and his position in it, he does not return to the past as a source of ease. Rather, he begins reflecting and philosophising about the meaning of past, present and future. However, while he tries to

¹⁵ The morphological structure of the German word expresses a negation of home, in the meaning of “not homely,” however the semantic meaning of the word translates as “uncanny” or “sinister.”

¹⁶ This fear is also expressed and mobilised by the far right-wing group, the “Suidlanders” spreading myths about Mandela’s death (which their leader announced in 2007) and a subsequent genocide of White South Africans in a mission called *uhuru*, also known as “Die nag van die lang messe” (The night of the long knives). It is the fear that Black people will suddenly take up arms and murder all White people – a myth which keeps coming up when something racially significant happens – more recently the murder of Eugene Terre’ Blanche incited this. See also Groenewald and Joubert. 2007. I am indebted to Jennifer Rees for pointing this out to me.

¹⁷ Egan feels a similar denial of responsibility when he sits in the back of the car on the way to the Bra Zama restaurant. He, “[f]or a moment, [...] felt like a child on a family outing” (EV, 76), which expresses his inability to face the new situation, his immaturity to come to terms with the new social fabric. Egan experiences a zigzag tour of emotions, of excitement, disillusionment and alienation, all adding up to his confusion about how to read the new South Africa.

find meaning in his maps, his experiences with their lived versions embitter him and leave him in a passive state – and being in need of protection himself.

6.1.3 Simeon the Artist

The character that stands out from the other three is the artist Simeon Majaran, protagonist of the third episode. He is the only character who takes a different approach to his transforming surroundings as well as to history and social injustice. Instead of relying on rationality, Simeon makes creative use of his imagination. While the others try to grasp the transformations logically, Simeon deals with the past in a more abstract and imaginative way, detached from the specific trauma of the South African history (Goodman 2006, 42).

Again told by a heterodiegetic narrator interrupted by sequences of interior monologues, the episode moves backward and forward between the narrative present and various layers of the past: from the braai-party which sets the narrative present, Simeon's trip to Nyanza, his exhibition on Genocide III, his deal with the crates of African curios (as his main material for the Bra Zama décor), to his university days when he was first confronted with the unequal power relations of economic production.

As an artist, Simeon has become famous through his series on genocide: "He had made his name - 'S. Majara' – with three shows on the theme of genocide" (EV, 104), comprising disturbing art works on the holocaust, Bosnia and Rwanda but keeping his own national history at a distance. Nostalgia does not feature in any of his genocide exhibitions – rather he approaches the past in order to deconstruct human violence and barbarism. Instead of searching for the familiar, he defamiliarises his surroundings, the mainstream approaches to history and dealing with the past in the present. He thus "explodes [...] comfortable views" (book cover) and confronts the viewer with the sinister and monstrous streaks in humanity.

Paradoxically, as it turns out, Simeon, while raising awareness for human destructive features, also participates in the system of exploitation himself. For his genocide series he profits from the death and horror of people. For his following art series, which develops in combination with the décor he was asked to create for the Bra Zama restaurant, he buys six crates full of African curios from a Malawian street vendor for only one thousand rand – thereby obviously dealing in stolen goods. The mass of tourist goods serves Simeon not only for the décor but also for a new art series, which he names "Curiouser" or "Curio-user," consciously playing with its ambiguous meaning.

Therefore, he takes wooden animal curios and massacres and realigns them – his whole new artwork is a combination of deconstruction and reconstruction, of destruction and creation, assembly and disassembly¹⁸:

[H]e could graft the parts of different animals into new species, the head of a lion, the horns of a buffalo, the legs of a hippopotamus, exquisite corpses, many-headed monsters for a contemporary bestiary. [...] The effects were uncanny – ‘spooky’ was the description he came to – the studio turned into a museum of unnatural history. (EV, 137–138)

Instead of searching for the familiar, he defamiliarises natural entities and thereby mocks the reliance on scientific authority and on the archival of authentic past. Similar to his genocide series, the museum of unnatural history preserves human perversity. “Curiouser,” however, is focused on the tourist perception and images of Africa. Thereby, Simeon appropriates Western views on Africa, views which are informed by a romantic and nostalgic image of an authentic Africa – the Africa of masks and animals, of safari and curio-sellers – and “transforms the touristy into the horrific” (Gaylard 2006, 72). The typical tourist images of Africa with its desired ethno-kitsch souvenirs, which are as fake as the image of Africa as a dark continent characterised by brutality, poverty and diseases, is thus transformed into another system of reading and seeing and challenges the viewer to reflect upon his or her own images of Africa. South African critic Gerald Gaylard interprets Majara’s art as “reformatting tourism” (2006, 70): by using the African image in its kitsch stereotype, “seizing on the obvious trappings of the tourist experience and trusting that in the end he would be able to turn them inside out, double them back on themselves, so that they meant something else” (EV, 106–107), Simeon reflects upon the processes of exploitation inherent in the tourist business. The episode can be read as a warning; just as Simeon creates new beasts by reconstructing the given, the creation of the new South Africa is in danger of creating another beast, a monstrous society, when reconstructing the given parts of society without critical reflection. The alleged loss of reflection is what Simeon seems to lament most in contemporary society:

¹⁸ In a way, Simeon’s method of creating art, the complex layers and processes of deconstructing, reconstructing, defamiliarisation, adding meaning, exploding views, reflects Vladislav’s own way of writing. As Gaylard (2006, 68) points out, defamiliarisation is a major function of postcolonial (and postmodern) writing.

The world was so loud, and no one took seriously a thing that didn't attract attention itself. There was no room for subtlety. Things were either visible or not, their qualities were either shouting from the surface or silent. This silence, the lull behind the noisy surface of objects, was difficult and dangerous. You never knew what it held, if anything. How were you to judge whether the voice you heard was a deeper meaning, whispering its secrets, or merely the distorted echo of your own babble? (EV, 123)

Simeon bemoans the loss of critical and reflective engagement with artworks, those which demand that one look beyond the obvious; likewise, he laments the loss of an intricate meaning of signs.

In an ironic turn and adopting a satirical tone, the narrator introduces American icon "I-make-the-world-a-better-place" Oprah Winfrey who addresses her audience to "Remember Your Spirit" (EV, 119). He, thereby, reveals a universal nostalgic tendency for old morals and values in the face of a socially declining (technological) world:

Grace was a concept he considered more and more important for negotiating the world. [...] Perhaps it was to be expected: the more vulgar everyday life became, and the more overwhelmed people were by craven impulses and base desires, greed and envy, gluttony and lust, the more they reached for the old ideals like generosity and grace. (EV, 119)

The televised call for more spirituality is clearly a mock on increasingly mediated and inauthentic experiences as well as Oprah's "moral" seems like a tacky, commercial "find-yourself" kind of generosity and grace. Nevertheless, this passage also suggests that nostalgia for genuine human interaction, for compassion and "grace" might be a valuable emotion in a transitory country. That cultural objects such as souvenirs or curios which are inherently nostalgic, do not qualify to arouse compassion and grace because they are still caught in a system of colonial and neo-colonial exploitations, is made blatantly clear in Simeon's museum of unnatural history. The installation of the African masks is, after all, not an innocent act.

By way of his deconstructive approach to the world, Simeon has moved one step ahead of Egan, Budlender and, as we will see in the following, Gordon. The other three protagonists have not yet moved to an active dealing with the gap between the real and the imagined but remain largely passive. Thereby, they, just as Amy, one of Simeon's guests who criticises Simeon for his abuse of unequal power relations, assume that one cannot change one's circumstances, "that there was nothing to be done" (EV, 149) disguised by a mask of liberal multiculturalism.

Instead of searching for wholeness and continuity, Simeon seems at home in fragmentation (Goodman 2004, 38). Using these fragments creatively and bringing out their potentials, in a way similar to Rushdie's broken pots of antiquity, Simeon lays bare alternative ways of approaching and dealing with history and human struggles. Despite his controversial morals as well as his questionable art, his work suggests that there is first a need for defamiliarisation and deconstruction in order to see the different layers of the past and the present which make up contemporary life. Contrary to Simeon's de/re-constructive processes, Gordon Duffy, protagonist of the fourth episode, longs for a world that can be constructed according to clear and comprehensible rules.

6.1.4 Gordon Duffy – The Dreams of Other Places

Gordon Duffy, is, compared to the other protagonists, the one who displays most obviously nostalgia for a specific time and place. This is caused mainly by his personal failures, which are not directly linked to the country's unsettling changes. Gordon Duffy shares with the characters Aubrey Tearle (RS), Budlender and Egan, a worldview based on rationality and clear structures. He relies on authorities, is "attentive to the rules and regulations and [is] willing to take instructions" (EV, 169). The narrative shifts from Gordon's interior monologues to heterodiegetic narration and from past to present tense thereby jumping from memories to the narrative's real world. The interior monologues reveal Gordon's attempt to cope with his inferiority complex and document his own growing confusion.

When he was a still a child, Gordon developed his dream of becoming a popular engineer, an idea he got from his father's American magazines, *Popular Mechanics*. However, in retrospect, he has failed to live up to his ideal and, instead, worked for contractors on small-scale building operations and the likes, the most enduring and successful being a framer of billboards. Thus, he already looks back at his life with dissatisfaction: "At thirty, with a family to support, he was not the success he wanted to be" (EV, 172). As part of his personal shortcomings, and in addition to the general spirit of societal disorientation, Gordon frequently drifts into his dream worlds inspired by memories of his childhood. These are composed of two different realms: one being his nostalgic imagination of the perfect world inspired by the nineteen-fifties editions of *Popular Mechanics*; the other being the repetitive return of a childhood trauma when he was humiliatingly beaten by another boy in a boxing fight. While he journeys to his yearned-for perfect world (of exploded views) in daydreams, his traumatic memories visit

him at night. He increasingly fails to balance these dream worlds with his real life. In his growing confusion between reality and dreams, he turns out to be the most unreliable character of the four.

Due to his occupation, Gordon Duffy is surrounded by simulacric promises of other worlds on a daily basis. He has made a living out of putting up billboards which announce fancy gated communities or security villages – worlds which he only has access to when they are construction sites. However, Gordon has established his own simulacric dream worlds. When he sees the walled town-house complexes of “Villa Toscana” and “Crocodile Lodge” developing around him, he is reminded of an American holiday house “on the cover of an issue from the mid-fifties” (EV, 175). As a child, he entered the world of the magazines and felt at home in these images that introduced a foreign, harmonious world:

It was an American world he entered there, its surfaces airbrushed to perfection, gleaming with old-fashioned optimism; and its inner working laid bare, frankly and practically, as the product of enterprise and effort. [...] he wanted to live in this world, passing effortlessly between its countersunk dimensions, where he felt he *belonged*. (EV, 171; emphasis added)

His father’s magazines represent microscopic worlds and lifestyles in their exploded views – worlds that are in perfect shape as “things were the sum of their parts” (EV, 171). Moreover, the images and ideas represented in his favourite magazines not only mimic an ideal American world but, thereby, also express nostalgia for past securities and an un-African environment. The perfection of the world represented in the exploded views of houses, gardens and objects does not so much lie in their image as in their perfect construction where “every element [was] named and numbered and accorded its god-given place. [...] Lost in his father’s America” Egan can “[take] things apart in his head, [put] things together again” (EV, 189) and indulge in the harmonious (re)construction of his desired world. Already as a child he developed “a surgical ability to see how things fitted together” (EV, 190). To him the exploded view conveys a purpose; all things have their place and belong to each other. The single parts form a harmonious whole. However, this world of clarity and perfection is a utopian world and stands in opposition to the “real

world” which is characterised by transitory insecurities and massive restructurings which elude any ordered exploded view of society.¹⁹

Thus, already as a child Gordon constructed his identity and his sense of home and belonging from the images projected by foreign media. “For the young Duffy,” according to Titlestad and Kissack, “this utopian dream of the harmony of parts is expressed as ‘America’ and it is for this imagined homeland that he longs” (2006, 18). But, and to appropriate Rushdie’s words “of course a dream-[America] is no more than a dream” (1991, 18). This is something that Gordon fails to admit: “Sometimes he thought the whole shape of his life was caught between those pages, *preserved* there as a kind of fate, like a timetable *left behind in the nineteen-fifties. A bookmark*” (EV, 170; emphasis added). The magazine becomes a space of nostalgic escape. Thereby, the implied author plays with the nostalgic idea of the American nineteen-fifties characterised by White middle-class values, harmonious family life, order and security. He is reminded of exactly this (nostalgic) ideal when framing a billboard announcing a gated community as a game lodge idyll, he is reminded of the perfect nineteen-fifties American idyll:

As Crocodile Lodge appeared, block by block, he found himself leafing again in memory through the pages of *Popular Mechanics*. He remembered a holiday house on the cover of an issue from the mid-fifties. Except for a chimney of stone, the place was made entirely of wood, in the American style, and stood at the edge of a lake [...]. There was a crazy-paving porch and a cindered drive with a Chevrolet parked in it. A slipway ran down to the water, where a Canadian canoe was moored to a jetty, and on the far shore was a stand of Douglas firs, reflected in the placid surface. (EV, 175)

His remembered mediated images express his nostalgia to enter the simulacric home of another place and time. The bookmark can be read as a signifier for stasis, permanence, and re-memory, as his longing to return to the moment of perfection. Moreover, Gordon’s thoughts reveal his own stagnation, remaining in the world of his dreams, relying on fate to take care of his life instead of proactively participating in his present surroundings.

Overall, his father’s *Popular Mechanics* magazines of the nineteen-fifties become the trigger for Gordon’s nostalgic image of a perfect world and arouse a feeling of homesickness for a place he has never been to. Yet, “[h]ow can one be homesick for a home that one never had?” (Boym 2001, xiii) A feeling of homesickness grows from a longing for a place one has been to or grew up in. Both the billboard villages, which he

¹⁹ Just as Tearle exercises his power and control over words and syntax in his nostalgic narrative of the Proofreader’s Derby, Gordon can rise to a godlike position and construct his own perfect world in the world of media images.

frames, as well as the magazine images are, however, anticipated homes, in Baudrillard's terminology "simulacra," places that appear as copies without an original.²⁰ Just as Gordon as a child tried to decipher the specific meaning of America in the shapes and shades of his "dream-house," the reader is now left trying to decipher the specific meaning of South Africa in the walled off, toy-like little European environments that are increasingly emerging on the outskirts of the cities.

Gordon's Anti-Nostalgic Nightmare

Contrary to the pleasant imagined memories inspired by Popular Magazines, and to a certain extent also by the billboards, Gordon represses memories reminding him of his failures; these come back in the form of nightmares. Gordon's antipodal dream world is embodied in his childhood boxing opponent Wilkie Pieterse. Just after Gordon picked up his wife from her new boxing lesson "his Wilkie Pieterse dream returned. Wilkie had done this before, stayed away for years and, until it seemed he'd retired for good, then unexpectedly made a comeback" (EV, 167). Gordon's father forced him as a child to do boxing exercises in order to become a "real man" and to thus live up to his father's ideal. However, the fight against Wilkie was too premature for Gordon and he failed to satisfy his father's expectations. Hence, his feeling of personal failure had already been nurtured in his childhood years.

In a shift from heterodiegetic narration to interior monologue, Gordon tells about his real-life boxing drama and of the inglorious defeat he is constantly reminded of in his dreams:

In my dream, Wilkie Pieterse batters me into submission after heroic resistance, bloodies my nose and sends me crashing through the ropes. In fact, in the harsh, sunlit reality of a Highveld afternoon, while storm clouds gathered behind the oaks and the pipes skirled in the dressing rooms under the stand where the band was preparing for their show, I finally fell over my own feet, swinging yet another roundhouse that missed, and burst out crying. (EV, 185–186)

²⁰ In Baudrillard's words: "[t]he real does not efface itself in favour of the imaginary; it effaces itself in favour of the more real than real: the hyperreal. The truer than true: this is simulation" (1990, 11).

However, Wilkie's comeback this time takes a surprising turn:

He'd been fighting Wilkie in his sleep now for forty years, on and off, ever since his final glimpse of that little twerp in the waking world, clanking through the turnstile behind the grandstand at the Caledonian Sport and Recreation Club. This was his first victory. It left him strangely dissatisfied. (EV, 168)

Striking in these quotes is the way in which the implied author plays with modes of narration: the key turn of Gordon's dream is told by the heterodiegetic narrator, giving the dream a more distanced and objective aura, whereas his nightmare, narrated in interior monologue, expresses his deep personal attachment and ongoing coping with the past situation. Even though Gordon finally manages to beat Wilkie in his dream, he is all the more reminded of the discrepancy between reality and dream and his failure to live up to his dreams, which leads to his increasing blurring between imaginary and real.

“A Global Detox”

Gordon's nostalgia reveals that he is aware of a declining world around him. He laments the disappearance of the “man-made-world” and the loss of morality and compassion in contemporary society: “These days it's every man for himself” (EV, 197). Given the ready-made world of modern societies, Gordon philosophises about how the world would recreate itself after an apocalypse. His suggestion for the reconstruction of society is a return to the basics:

The catastrophe was a blessing in disguise, an opportunity to purge the social body, to cut away the fatty excess of the last few centuries and return to the bony basics. A global detox. The true image of our times: the bedridden obese. The body that can only be removed by smashing down walls and hauling in cranes. (EV, 193)

This passage already foreshadows his own “detoxification” at the end of the novel and suggests the possibility of his own re-creation – and in an ironic way also insinuates the final birth of the new postapartheid identity – one which is able to face the challenges of a new society.

Despite his aversion to postmodern simulacric, “photographically real” images and signifiers, Gordon immerses himself into his imagined worlds. The narrative satirises living in images rather than facing reality further in the end of this episode when Gordon Duffy – the victorious boxer – is attacked by four, similar-looking men in a Wild West scene. In this final scene, the metaphor of the exploded view gains its most controversial potential:

He saw exactly what would happen. They would beat him and hammer him and drill him. He bobbed, and ducked, and refused to fall. They struck out, as if they were driving nails into him, and with every blow he felt more like himself. (EV, 201)

In one reading, Gordon gets beaten up and thereby explodes into his single parts; in another reading he is “exploded” in the literal sense, causing chaos and dissolution. However, an explosion would also result in a new beginning and a “return to the basics.” Taking Gordon Duffy himself as a metaphor for South Africa, the narrative can be read as a warning against clinging to utopian ideals and thereby failing to confront and cope with the real and everyday challenges of life in South Africa. It can also be read as a need for renewal in order to be able to reconstruct a new society out of a complicated and traumatic history. Perhaps it is healthier to accept the fragmented nature of society than to pretend that it is a unified whole. Instead of seeing the ending as absolutely bleak and negative there is, as Vladislavić himself notes, an element of humour in the clichéd Wild West scenery (Miller 2007, 140) which tells us not to fall prey to stereotypes.

In general, Gordon escapes the real world struggles by escaping to nostalgic idealisations of imagined past worlds, which reveals that he, similar to Egan, is not ready to face contemporary challenges. As Boym in her conclusion notes, “[s]ometimes it’s preferable [...] to leave dreams alone, let them be no more and no less than dreams, not guidelines for the future” (2001, 355). The character of Gordon Duffy suggests that the imbalance between nostalgic and media-inspired worlds, between dreams and reality, causes a withdrawal from public life and from engagement in the real de/reconstruction of society. Nostalgia thus functions as escapism. The ending eschews any clear interpretation as the implied author does not give his readers clear and obvious solutions, and this is one of the great pleasures of Vladislavić’s episodic novel.

In summary, Vladislavić’s characters, including Aubrey Tearle from *The Restless Supermarket*, move in a liminal space in-between the old and the new nation,²¹ unable to make sense of their present position in the new social spaces. The protagonists of each of the four episodes in *The Exploded View* share a feeling of dislocation, disorientation and alienation searching for meaning and familiarity in a transforming society. They therefore long to be in a time and place of familiarity, and they long for familiar structures, places and people. In contrast to Aubrey Tearle, however, this longing and belonging is not

²¹ This space can still signify the interregnum, as Nadine Gordimer famously called the time of the transition, since, as argued here, the transitory processes do not end with the formal introduction of democracy.

directed at the specific apartheid order, but it is rather a longing for a system of order and structures which provide orientation in a general atmosphere of fragmentation and disorder. Home and be-longing, the very basis of communal identification, have lost their stable meaning and seem as unambiguously floating as the characters themselves. On a personal and on a national level, the episodes illustrate a country in limbo which has not yet found a new identity and which is struggling to identify as a community. Nostalgia as a response to the state of uprootedness lies in the characters' yearning for old values and in their lamenting of decaying morals. Yet, none of the protagonists wishes to restore the old order. Rather, they are still unable to reflect upon the past and the present in a fruitful way. Only Simeon takes a meta-levelled approach to the workings of the past in the present by his poststructural/postmodern de/reconstructive artworks – his approach is, however, not without its controversies. Therefore, nostalgia is represented as neither a solution to the chaos nor is it turned into a reflective and productive form for the present and future.

6.2 Restoring a Sense of Home – Villa Toscana and the Development of Gated Communities

Home, after all is not a gated community. (Boym 2001, 354)

Having analysed the personal struggles the four protagonists have in defining home and be-longing in the previous chapter, this chapter will take a closer look at the different architectural constructions of desired homeplaces by returning to nostalgic simulations. Of particular interest will be how nostalgia contributes to the construction of an imagined home and community.

With reference to his exhibition *Appropriated Spaces* the photographer Santu Mofokeng said that, “[t]he notion of ‘home’ is a fiction we create out of a need to belong” (1998, B8). The fictions of a home increasingly mushrooming at the edges of urban landscapes, in particular in Johannesburg, are taking on the form of gated communities²² and carry a distinctly Euro-American face. As will be argued in the following, the rising

²² Karina Landman and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) in South Africa give the following definition: “Gated communities refer to a physical area that is fenced or walled off from its surroundings, either prohibiting or controlling access to these areas by means of gates or booms. In many cases the concept can refer to a residential area with restricted access so that normally public spaces are privatised or use is restricted. It does not, however, only refer to residential areas, but may also include controlled access villages for work (office blocks), commercial and/or recreational purposes. Gated communities can include both *enclosed neighbourhoods* and *security villages*” (2000, 2; emphasis in original). As gated community is the generic term, it will be used throughout the chapter.

interest in such stylised gated communities is a response to the insecure times of transition and its related breakdown of the old racial hierarchies, as well as the entry into the global capitalist market economy. In the face of alarming crime and murder rates which have created a nervous atmosphere, target hardening²³ measurements such as booms, electrified fences and walls are felt to offer a zone of safety. Generally, the increasing global development of gated communities can largely be seen as a response to global economic and technical changes as well as postmodern anxieties and alienation caused by rapid changes and social upheavals (Blakey and Snyder 1997; Landman 2000).²⁴ Simultaneously, gated communities have become an expression of an exclusive consumer lifestyle.

Furthermore, the simulations of European places are strategically used by developers and security companies that aim to evoke nostalgia for a distant, secure European heritage. While a pastoral and European imagery has always informed the South African urban landscape, the current fad for romantic, faraway places follows the American model of a consumerist upper-market lifestyle.²⁵ According to Lindsay Bremner (2004, 46), the new moneyed classes of the postapartheid find their desired middle class values such as the nuclear family, sport, leisure, security and status are best satisfied within the infrastructure of the security suburb. Moreover, as the adjective “gated” emphasises, these communities demarcate clear patterns of inclusion and exclusion. Thereby, as will be argued, they enforce urban fragmentation and uneven development in general and socio-spatial segregation reminiscent of apartheid urban planning in the particular context of South Africa. The growing new segregation, however, is not primarily based on race any longer but instead on class and/or socio-economic status.

The analysis focuses on the two protagonists Budlender and Gordon Duffy who both enter those spaces due to their occupation and reflect upon their ambiguous feelings

²³ “Target Hardening is the physical strengthening of building facades or boundary walls to reduce the attractiveness of potential targets. Walls around houses or burglar bars on windows are the most common examples” (CSIR 2007).

²⁴ Although gated communities are a worldwide phenomenon, they are much more common in countries with a stark imbalance between the rich and the poor. While gated communities share many similarities, there are also various differences especially between developing and developed countries, and this phenomenon remains under-researched (Landman 2000, 8).

²⁵ While these places are informed by the particular colonial South African history and its legacy of a racial infrastructure (apartheid was notoriously inscribed into the physical landscape), clichéd gated communities also follow a global American consumer trend whereby the affluent classes indulge in Euro-romantic as well as exotic fantasies of what a good home constitutes.

towards them. The gated community Villa Toscana tells the story of the fortification and protection of European images, while Crocodile Lodge focuses on the status and consumer aspect of gated communities.

6.2.1 Nostalgia for European Homes – Villa Toscana

With Budlender, the protagonist of the opening episode, the reader enters Villa Toscana, one of the affluent gated communities increasingly developing on the outskirts of Johannesburg where “new unimaginable atmospheres evolve” (EV, 6). Without much ado, the narrative confronts the reader with the absurdity of stylised gated communities posing as grandiose Old World architecture. The gated community which calls itself Villa Toscana keeps its promise – it looks like “a little prefabricated Italy in the veld, resting on the firebreak of red earth like a toy town on a picnic blanket” (EV, 3). Not only do such residences imitate a stereotypical image of European idyllic places but, paradoxically, they also make “everything around [...] look out of place” (EV, 3).

Villa Toscana’s simulated Tuscany represents one of the typical romantic images of “Old Europe” frequently used as thematic frames for gated communities, theme parks and shopping malls throughout the world. Not surprisingly,

[t]he architect had given the entrance [of Villa Toscana] the medieval treatment. Railway sleepers beneath the wheels of the car made the driveway rumble like a drawbridge, the wooden gates were heavy and dark, and studded with bolts and hinges, there were iron grilles in drystone walls. (EV, 7)

Places like Villa Toscana make use of the appeal that medieval architecture and the Mediterranean have especially to “New World” environments. In combining a prosperous lifestyle with security measurements against crime and urban decay, they have also become a desired form of housing in South Africa. The planning of such enclosed places in idyllic or exotic landscapes, thereby, is a consumerist market strategy which distracts from the paramilitary surveillance and security measures.

Fortress Villa Toscana

When Budlender approaches the gates of Villa Toscana, he is stopped by a security guard who monitors and documents the entry and exit of residents and guests. Thus, before gaining entry in order to interview one of his respondents, Budlender must go through the procedures of control and inspection. The intended Tuscan idyll turns out to be a fortified bastion, almost like a military post, where the security man at the front gate “gazed at him

through an embrasure in a fortified guardhouse” (EV, 7). This system of control and admission is also reminiscent of apartheid influx control (Landman 2000, Hook and Vrdoljak 2002), the control and regulation of Black South Africans entering and leaving urban areas, which was first enforced under the Native Urban Areas Act in 1923 and abolished under Botha in 1986.²⁶ While Budlender is filling in the details of his visit, the guard checks his number plates and finally prohibits him from entering because Budlender accidentally filled in the wrong number plates on the form. As a result, he has to wait for his interviewee to come to the gates, which gives him time to inspect the fortress of Villa Toscana more closely:

‘Villa Toscana’ was printed on a salmon-coloured wall to the left. Below each wrought-iron letter was a streak of rust like dried blood, as if a host of housebreakers had impaled themselves on the name. Would the defenders of this city-state pour down boiling oil if he ventured too close? (EV, 9)

The allusion to dried blood on the letters as well as the boiling oil enforce the impression of a war zone and give the gated community an overall military yet outdated character. Villa Toscana creates the impression of a walled-off village or castle in need of defence and thereby makes reference to early gated communities built by the Romans around 300 BC as well as to the medieval walled cities. Ironically the Roman defensive walls first served to prevent local villagers from turning on their master and (only) later to protect the villagers from invaders (CSIR 2007, 2).²⁷ The outdatedness of such fencing enhances the ambiguity of the “gatedness”: on the one hand, segregation seems obsolete in the light of the new, ideal democracy, on the other hand, however, it also hints at the ancient and contemporary need to defend oneself.²⁸ The authority and the grim surface of the very texture of Villa Toscana’s fortress are soon dismantled as a cheap fake. On second inspection, Budlender notices that “[t]he fortress-like atmosphere of the place dissipated. The tones and textures were passable, clumpy wooden beams, pastel plaster, flaking artfully, yellow stone. Prince Valiant of the Continent” (EV, 9). The imagery of “fortress Villa Toscana” in the middle of contemporary South Africa has surreal as well as absurd

²⁶ This system of residential segregation, first introduced under Smuts, allowed Black South Africans to enter urban areas only to work for Whites: “Domestic workers were allowed to live in town, the rest would be restricted to finding housing in townships on the outskirts. Legislation in 1937 restricted black African males to a window of 14 days in which to find employment or return to the reserves” (Boddy-Evans).

²⁷ While city or town walls were common, especially during the Middle Ages, the growth of urban landscapes and the changed forms of warfare made these defensive walls obsolete. While city walls had the purpose of protecting the unit of the whole community or city, gated communities fragment the unit of the city. As closed units, exchange within the gated community is only possible among the dwellers – unknown outsiders are prevented from entering.

²⁸ I owe this thought to Hanna Strass.

qualities and might indeed be part of a comic strip. The walls, beams and the guardhouse take on grotesque shapes and expose the Villa as a mere farce:

[T]he scales were all wrong. Things were either too big or too small. In the door of the guardhouse was a keyhole so enormous he could have put his finger through it, and just below it the brass disc of a conventional and presumably functional Yale lock. He wondered whether the beams jutting from the stone really extended through the walls. They had probably been screwed on afterwards. There was probably mortar in the 'drystone' walls. (EV, 9–10)

The oxymoronic combination of the gentrified and picturesque image of a Villa Toscana contradicts the image of blood and violence. It combines two worlds in one which do not fit together and thereby captures the absurdity of contemporary South Africa where luxurious gated communities dressed with a European, bucolic aesthetic exist next to the overcrowded, poverty-stricken townships and squatter camps.

Moreover, the walls are a clear marker of inclusion and exclusion. Access to the Villa Toscana is only allowed to selected people, whereas those who do not belong to the (en)closed community are fenced off. "[T]hese divisions," according to Derek Hook and Michele Vrdoljak, are largely due to "the structural socio-historical opportunities left behind by apartheid, and serve to reify inequality in the old terms of a privileged white minority and a dispossessed black majority" (2002, 205). The parallel to apartheid is easily detected. Coming back to Budlender it does thus not come as a surprise that, when talking to the guard to gain entry to Villa Toscana, he initially thinks that he is addressed as "Master" in line with apartheid forms of address. Soon he realises that he has misunderstood and was actually addressed as "Mister" (EV, 45).

Citadelisation and Nostalgia for Security

The nostalgic return to ancient and medieval ideas of defence reveals the desire to protect oneself from the outside world. For fear of crime, more and more people are escaping into the assumed safety of gated communities. The erection of walls, fences, borders, booms and gates do not only offer safety but also increase the feeling of belonging, intimacy and the connectedness of community (Blakely and Snyder 1999, 18–19).²⁹ Hence, faced with urban decay and a feeling of constant threat, the aura of an idealised past provides

²⁹ As one website of an American gated golf community tellingly announces: "Perhaps it's nostalgia. A yearning to go back to the neighborhoods of the 1950's where neighbors actually acted neighborly, homeowners took pride in their tidy yards of manicured grass, and colorful flower borders lined the walkways to their welcoming front doors" (Delaware Gated Golf Community 2008).

familiarity and stability, which in turn strengthens a feeling of security. Ironically, however, while gated communities create their own supposedly harmonious miniature worlds behind fences, community life in such communities, as the international review of gated communities states, is often all but harmonious.³⁰

As sociologist Kevin Fox Gotham also points out, “[n]ostalgia, romanticism, and search for community are responses to the chaos, fragmentation, discontinuity, and ephemerality of life in our metropolitan areas” (2007, 340). This is particularly true of the transformative processes in South Africa. These have led, especially among White South Africans, to drastic changes in their familiar places. The inner city and public spaces have been re-claimed by Black South Africans, who had been denied the free use of these spaces under apartheid. As Mbembe confirms, “[f]or blacks, especially, making oneself at home in the city takes on a peculiar urgency, if only because it has been the dominant site of their exclusion from modernity” (2004, 393). The fear of the Black underclass, associated with crime and murder, entering the city and the anxiety that also the private space of home is under threat, has led to a major urban migration of the middle and upper classes – still mostly White – to the edges of the city.³¹

Nostalgic Desires – The Past as a Safe Haven

The return to Old World imageries and designs expresses a nostalgic desire to live elsewhere. It discloses a longing for the values of a secure community and a gentrified life associated with a different time and place. Architectural pastiche in the form of pastoral, bucolic, European and exotic decorations is a typical marker of gated communities which spread from the US and Brazil especially to countries marked by a wide gap between rich and poor. The European imitations, especially in the US, represent a general nostalgia for village life, communal ties and (White) middle class values related to how things used to be – cleaner, more ordered and safer. These nostalgic desires advertised in South African stylised gated communities have similar yet significantly different historical implications – such as the gap between the rich and the poor and the

³⁰ According to the international review of gated communities: “A ‘sense of community’ cannot be created, purely by putting up a gate or boom. In some cases gates and fences can discourage a sense of community and cause ‘in-house’ fighting. This is exactly what is happening in certain cases in Johannesburg where tension and conflict has arisen between residents of the same neighbourhood. In these cases neighbourhood enclosures have caused a divide in the community and discouraged any attempt at community cohesion” (Landman 2000, 20).

³¹ In the US context this major migration has become known as “White flight.”

desire for consumer lifestyle on the one hand and specific colonial and apartheid radicalised history on the other hand – to their American models.

The concepts of home and community in South Africa are difficult. For White South Africans European versions of what a good home constitutes have prevailed ever since the founding of South African cities and villages. Since the breakdown of apartheid and South Africa's entry into the global market, American forms and ideas of lifestyle – and consumer culture – have been taking shape.³² Being aware of the lack of a local architectural identity, South African architect Peter Rich asks: “Why do we always have to look somewhere else?” If it is not Tuscany that is being imitated then it is often another Italian or French place or, according to the new fad, some exotic place like Bali. Rich's answer is that “we don't have a ready term of reference over here” (Carte Blanche 2005). To the same question Ora Joubert, Professor for Architecture, answers: “We are certainly unappreciative of our own. [...] It could well be,” the online text reads, “a design of an insecure community battling to come to terms with its past, present and future. Ignoring our vast Afro-pean heritage, we opt for the safety of imported styles” (2005). Hence, in the particular case of South Africa, the take-over of European or American ideas of home can be interpreted as a return to a stable past and a move away from the local traumas where nostalgia for idyllic White (farm) life arouses guilty, uncomfortable feelings. In that way, in South Africa, the past which provides a secure place is a borrowed past, a reclaimed European heritage. This return to a different past seems to be an escape from dealing with one's own past – it reveals a look forward to a global identity by way of amnesia.

According to Achille Mbembe's analysis of South African casinos and shopping malls, which work with the same kitsch images as the gated communities, these simulations reflect a form of “white nostalgia” allowing one “to hallucinate the presence of what has been irretrievably lost” (2004, 403). The retreat into little villages with palm-lined avenues, boulevards and fountains expresses a longing to remain in “the cocoon of familiar comforts” (2004, 403). He also sees this reflected in the architectural changes of Johannesburg and, with respect to postapartheid architecture, he points out:

³² As already addressed in *The Restless Supermarket* also this novel depicts the shift from a European cultural model toward American culture and consumerism.

Faced with the sudden estrangement from the familiar resulting from the collapse of the racial city, this architecture aims to return to the “archaic” as a way of *freezing rapid changes* in the temporal and political structure of the surrounding world. It is an architecture characterised by the attachment to a *lost object that used to provide comfort*. (2004, 403; emphasis added).

The lost object is reanimated in such simulated places as Villa Toscana. Such utopian European miniature worlds suggest an imaginative return to the myth of origin, i.e. the European homeland. Even though many White South Africans do not have any genuine ties to their motherland, the idea of the original homeland (especially for English South Africans) or the idea of being European (explicit in apartheid notions of European and non-European) remains strong.

According to Mbembe, city planning and architecture have been, to vast extents, forms of mimicry:

Like every colonial town, it [Johannesburg] found it hard to resist the temptation of *mimicry*, that is, of imagining itself as an English town and a pale reflection of forms born elsewhere. [...] To a large extent, this tradition of mimicry continues to determine if not the language of the city today, then at least part of its unconscious. (2004, 375)

Like their forerunners, the mimicked, miniature village worlds of gated communities such as Villa Toscana manage to be “almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha 1994, 86). Mimicry in Bhabha’s sense has subversive power, whereby the colonised gain the advantage of a “double vision” due to the conscious imitation of the coloniser. This menace of mimicry is, however, not at work in the imported styles of gated communities. These contemporary forms of mimicry, while bearing the comic and grotesque shape of incomplete imitation, are consumer products which function as social markers determining parameters of inclusion and exclusion. Thus, instead of offering a place for disclosing postapartheid ambivalences, the mimic nature of gated communities represents an “offensive architecture” (Joubert, Cart Blanche 2005) which ignores the surrounding social landscape.³³

³³ According to Svetlana Boym’s thoughts on the cosmopolitan city, “[n]ostalgic reconstructions are based on mimicry; the past is remade in the image of the present or a desired future, collective designs are made to resemble personal aspirations and vice versa” (2001, 354). Boym argues for a local cosmopolitanism as an alternative to the opposition between local and global culture. In reference to Benjamin’s porous city, she accredits vibrant potential to cities in transition which are usually strikingly porous. However, she also warns against the destructive processes, which as argued here are inherent to gated communities: “Paradoxically, both the projects of radical modernization for the future and faithful reconstruction of the past aim at destroying this porosity, creating a more total vision of the city” (2001, 77).

Furthermore, the attempt to freeze the idea of a lost home in architectural forms reflects a restorative sense of home. Nostalgically stylised gated communities have restorative elements since they imagine a closed community located in an architecture that is newly constructed but decorated as an “original place” in postmodern pastiche. As Svetlana Boym points out, restorative nostalgia is the past without decay, without the signs of time passing. Moreover, gated communities, as argued here, embrace a static, inflexible idea of who belongs to the community. Even though the gated communities are “only” simulacra of “*imagined* homelands” (inspired by a mediated feeling of inner exile), they are dangerous forms of social exclusion and massive obstacles for social development. Boym warns of a mimic realisation of utopian places come true:

The dreams of imagined homelands cannot and should not come to life. They can have a more important impact on improving social and political conditions in the present as ideals, not as fairy tales come true. (Boym 2001, 354–355)

While within gated communities racial mixing and the emergence of new cultural forms might indeed take place, these are restricted to the affluent classes. While such forms of cultural duplication might evolve new forms of cosmopolitan life as highlighted in Achille Mbembe’s and Sarah Nuttall’s collection on Johannesburg as the African metropolis (2004), Vladislavić focuses on the absurdities and dangers these developments pose by inscribing a language of segregation on the local landscape. Instead of providing a space for a vibrant democratic exchange, such walled-off communities enforce the segregation between the haves and the have-nots and create microcosms for elitist communities. What *The Exploded View* presents is not a hybrid or cosmopolitan society but a society which continues to be deeply divided. Vladislavić’s narrative composition expresses people’s longing for a secure European comfort zone, one that they claim as their heritage, as well as a desire for American ways of life without seeing the potential and value of their own vibrant, local identities. As the following will illustrate, another place which “hallucinates” a lost White dominance is the former colonial space of a game lodge.

6.2.2 The World of Billboards - Life in Simulations

While Budlender enters Villa Toscana as a visitor, Gordon Duffy is responsible for its iconographic announcements, along with its French neighbour Cote d'Azur. As a framer of billboards advertising gated communities, he is a constant observer of the transformation of the African veld into Tuscan or French simulations:

In the sump of the valley lay the freeway, the oily N3, like a slow black river. On the opposite slopes stood two recent townhouse developments: Villa Toscana in the east and Cote d'Azur in the west. (EV, 176)

The South African landscape is literally re-colonised by popular fantasies of European tourist destinations which promise a romantic and relaxing atmosphere. In fact, the billboard advertising industry of gated communities works with similar illusionary mechanisms as the tourist industry's evocation of desires for authentic lost places. While the tourist industry promotes travelling to distant places in order to experience original life, the billboards Gordon puts up promise to bring these desires home.

Surrounded by foreign and yet familiar simulations of places such as Tuscany, game lodges or the Cote d'Azur, Budlender and Gordon lose direction. On his way out of Villa Toscana, Budlender gets lost, and: "At first, he was irritated. Not just with himself for his carelessness, but with the whole ridiculous lifestyle that surrounded him, with its repetitions, its massproduced effects, its formulaic individuality" (EV, 31). The image of Tuscany brushes off on everything like "cheap paint" (EV, 33). The whole place resembles a cheap copy of an imagined original. Thereby, the degree of fake and its artificial atmosphere estrange Budlender from the intended romance rather than embracing him with a feeling of a harmonious home.

In a similar way, Gordon gets lost in a world of simulacra triggered by billboards and magazine images. The clichéd desired homelands that are advertised by the billboards might evoke a sense of distant ancestry for some, for others they might turn into a reclamation of a European heritage and for others still they might simply evoke an upper class lifestyle. Recalling the history of billboard illusions, Gordon laments nostalgically:

Once it had been customary to furnish such wishful images with a notice that said ‘Artist’s Impression’ – even though the place was an *obvious imagining*, a world of watercolour and stippled ink, where the trees along the avenues looked like scraps of sponge and toothpicks, and sketchy men and women went strolling on tapering, coffee-table legs. [...] Now that the fanciful images were practically indistinguishable from the photographically real, were more vividly convincing than the ordinary world, disclaimers were no longer required. (EV, 187; emphasis added)

Gordon’s lamenting of the old-style advertising images reveals that city planning in South Africa has always been based on White European ideals, largely ignoring local environmental and cultural peculiarities. The represented image looks more convincing than “the fading backdrop of reality” (EV, 187). The irony of the gated communities simulating European- or American-ness is that they have no point of origin, they could be anywhere in the world. According to artist Henry Tsang’s observation of gated communities in China, “[t]he American style they’re selling is French, Spanish and Italian. But if you go to France, Spain or Italy, you won’t find it” (Ziegler 2003). While these gated communities imitate Old World or Euro-kitsch aesthetics, they are copies of a global, American-inspired form of affluent lifestyle. As that, the gated communities are true copies of copies promising a different reality.

South Africa has become a collage herself, a vibrant combination of cultural ideas and images easily exploited by new market, capitalism-oriented ideology. The Crocodile Lodge billboard poses like the Hollywood letters on a rocky slope, shining its grandiose prospects to the people passing by on the highway. Urban life in Johannesburg seems to be becoming more and more of a kaleidoscope of different simulacra – of things sprung up at the southern tip of Africa that have little to do with the life of the majority of South Africans. As other models in the world also reveal, gated communities are a development not supportive of forming a sense of community and nation, as sharing common goals and values.³⁴

The Illusion of Memories

In his essay “Imaginary Homelands” (1991) Salman Rushdie describes his feelings of familiarity, home and belonging when he sees an old photograph of his Bombay home which evokes vague memories of his childhood in India before he and his family went into exile. Inspired by his memories, he recalls the famous opening sentence of L.P.

³⁴ This gap between the rich and the poor and the separation of public and social living space is not unique to South Africa but rather common to countries with a high level of poverty, crime and a rich elite.

Hartley's novel *The Go-Between*: "The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there." However, Rushdie realises that "the photograph tells me to invert the idea; it reminds me that it's my present that is foreign, and that the past is home albeit a home in a lost city in the mists of a lost time" (1991, 9). Unlike Budlender's ambiguous dreamlike blend, Rushdie's fragmentary memories about his roots and his childhood home take shape through the lens of distance and exile, and he realises that he has a city and a history – that form part of who he is now – to reclaim. This reclamation, he understands, can only be an imaginary one, that of an imaginary homeland. While the physical discontinuity from the place of his roots due to exile leads Rushdie to invent his complex historiographical meta-fictions and magic realist novels about India, the fictions of places like Villa Toscana have a different quality. Neither Budlender nor Gordon had to leave the country of their roots and yet they express an ambiguous sense of belonging "elsewhere." The dislocation and discontinuity they experience leave them with a feeling of being exiles in their own country – without meaningful parameters of identification – and without a country to reclaim. In contrast to Rushdie, Budlender grew up in South Africa with no obvious connections to Europe – or Tuscany for that matter – except a distant ancestry, i.e. a heritage of European values, cultural affinities and morals. Likewise, Gordon's nostalgia for an American home and childhood has no original referent but only the signs and images of his father's magazines.

6.2.3 The New Divide

Instead of a growing together of a once segregated country, the exploded view of South African social and residential spaces reveals a continuing landscape of segregation where class and money have become the dividing categories. When, one day, Gordon enters the construction site after working hours – the image of the billboard in mind – he is able to picture how people can immerse themselves in the simulated home of a lodge:

Leaving their offices, agencies, studios, showrooms, chambers in Sandton and Midrand, muted interiors full of cool surfaces, blinded and air-conditioned, and taking the freeways across the newly domesticated veld, the residents of Crocodile Lodge, the account executives, human resource managers, stockbrokers, dealmakers, consultants, representatives in their high-riding 4x4s and their vacuum-packed cabriolets, their BMWs and Audis, would see ahead of them not a town house but a game lodge, and their professional weariness would yield to the pleasurable anticipation of getting inside the gates before nightfall, drawing up a bar stool made of varnished logs to a counter cross-section of ancient yellowwood on a lamplit stoep, taking a beer or a glass of single malt in hand, and gazing out into the

gathering darkness, *where the night creatures were stirring*. (EV, 188; emphasis added)

The “old” discourse has changed; in the “new” South Africa also African places and images have become the object of desire: “It was the first time [Gordon] had seen a complex with an African theme, safari lodge, all sandstone and thatch” (EV, 174). However, the simulated Africa that Crocodile Lodge represents is an “Africa” *made* for tourists – including African tourists – enjoying the luxuries of game lodges and a colonial lifestyle. Except, the idyllic lodge lifestyle bears an ever-present uncanny element: it refers to the repressed memories of the Black majority whose faceless shadow – stirring like the night creatures – still lurks in the White man’s mind. As South African writer and critic Njabulo Ndebele significantly points out after closer inspection of the game lodge:

If there is any guaranteed safety it is the safety from the past. But if the past is gone, there can be no safety from the future. For the game lodge has become a leisure sanctuary where moneyed white South Africans can take refuge from the stresses of living in a black-run country. Once the game lodge was an extension of their power; now it is a place where those who have lost power go to regain a sense of its possession. Everything there is still in place: the measured conveniences, of course, but also the faceless black workers, behaving rather meekly, who clean the rooms, wash the dishes, make the fire, babysit the children, and make sure that in the morning the leisure refugees find their cars clean. (1998, 2)

In this quote, Ndebele refers to the White South Africans’ denial of accounting for continuing past imbalances and their largely uncontested maintenance of old (economic) privileges. The game lodge in postapartheid South Africa, observes Ndebele, still represents the “‘leisureing’ of colonial history” (Ndebele 1998, C4; 1) and hinders a deconstruction of the image of Africa. Entering the White leisure domain, the Black tourist realises his or her own reflection in the faceless Black workers and consequently their own powerlessness: “they lack the backing of cultural power” (Ndebele 1998, 2).

However, with the growth of a small moneyed Black middle and upper class since the overthrow of apartheid, gated communities, as well as game lodges, are becoming increasingly non-racial. While this might, at first, give hope to an opening up of these exclusive, White enclaves, the moneyed Black elite seems to be adopting the ideologies and privileges of their White counterparts. One might assume that the moneyed Black elite must adopt the White ideology because, otherwise, as Ndebele says “[t]he black tourist is conditioned to find the game lodge ontologically disturbing” (Ndebele 1998, 3)

– perhaps the only way to indulge in the simulated surroundings is to mimic White behaviour.³⁵

The Exploded View further alludes to the shift from a racially-driven to a class-driven society by providing hints that the only protagonist who lives in an upper-market, bohemian place, which appears to be a gated community, is the Black artist protagonist Simeon. Without mentioning any details and without being explicit, the implied reader is led to assume that Simeon lives in such a splendid place. Before a braai,³⁶ Simeon’s gaze falls onto his garden pool:

The pool was vividly blue in the twilight (Ruth had already switched on the underwater lights). A liquid lozenge of California in the crust of Gauteng. There was something about it that thrilled him, something glamorous and electric that produced a current of longing with no definite object. (EV, 109)

In addition to the Californian atmosphere, the pool is surrounded by Mediterranean terracotta. The excerpt illustrates that a sole reference to racial categorisations has become obsolete and that the “contradictory spaces” (Bremner 2004, 46) of gated communities testify to a new segregation which not only runs along racial but also along class lines.

Nostalgia for a specific cultural past and place has turned into a non-racial consumer trend of desired other places which serve as “utopian defences against African realities” (Goodman 2006, 39). Inside the comfort zone of gated communities, the beneficiaries of the transition cut themselves off from the rest of the city and can maintain leisure and privilege. As static and restorative forms of nostalgia, gated communities develop in a seemingly geographic and socio-historical vacuum: detached from public life they create their own, often privatised, luxurious prison islands. According to Vladislavić, “the most divisive and hostile part of the way Joburg has developed, and perhaps it’s the most obvious legacy of apartheid, is that you don’t ever need to share space with anybody else” (Miller 2007, 141). The destruction of public life – of space that is shared by the people, is one of the dangerous developments in contemporary Johannesburg and South Africa.

The gated communities represented in *The Exploded View* can be analysed as excluding, static forms of nostalgia as they aim to restore a sense of home by rebuilding lost, imagined homelands. However, in so doing, these communities fence themselves off,

³⁵ Instead of defending the European residue of the game lodge, Ndebele asks: “Could the game lodge itself be transformed in the service of rural development?” (Ndebele 1998, C4) In the same vein, instead of constructing new, privatised enclaves, could the gated community itself be transformed in the service of urban development?

³⁶ Afrikaans for barbeque; adopted into South African English.

consciously excluding all those who cannot afford such a lifestyle, and thereby work against the values they promote (on the surface). Ironically, while gated communities on the one hand express nostalgia for the social closeness of a traditional village they, on the other hand, destroy public life and contribute to urban and social fragmentation. Their imagined community represents not a mixed hybrid community but a homogenous, “economically pure” community. The obvious paradox of gated communities is that while South Africa is working to identify as a nation – an imagined community which is trying to find its commonalities – the erection of fenced-off, economically homogenous living spaces is a step backwards. The danger of nostalgic reconstructions of other places lies in the ignorance and conscious insularisation from public life, which disables sustainable development and the creation of a “shared” national conscious. Rather, practices of global consumerism and gentrification are readily lending themselves to designing a landscape of social apartheid.

6.3 Commercial Nostalgia – Bra Zama’s Eatery and the Romanticisation and Commercialisation of Township Life

From the fake, glittery consumer world of gated communities, the second episode moves into the antipodean world of contemporary South African township life. With Egan, the reader does not only enter the sad realities of township (or RDP) houses but also visits a retro-styled version of a nineteen-fifties shebeen. When his wife Janine asks Egan where he and the local officials connected to the RDP housing scheme plan to go for dinner, he already sounds both disillusioned and sarcastic in his expectations of what is yet to follow:

‘He [Mazibuko] wouldn’t let on. He just said it would be something different. An experience.’

‘Probably a shebeen.’

‘Again.’

‘Or maybe a roast-mealie stall on a street corner somewhere?’

‘I’m hoping. It’ll be a change from having people piss on your shoes in the name of cultural exchange.’ (EV, 72)

In the evening Egan is picked up by the local officials Bhengu, Mazibuko, Ramaramela and Marakabane from the Residents’ Association and they drive to “a peri-urban no-man’s land, where a dying business district petered out in motor town” (EV, 78). In this

rather uninviting, half-industrial landscape lies their evening destination: Bra Zama's African Eatery. The shebeen-style restaurant appears like a spot of rural Africa in the middle of used-car dealers, "Something Fishy," a retreat shop and other nameless businesses: "As they pulled into the parking lot, Egan had a fleeting impression of carved wooden posts and thatch" (EV, 78). The authenticity and romantic idea of a rural African thatched hut is, however, soon shattered as it is secured and guarded just as the gated communities are:

A nightwatchman, dressed in a greatcoat and a balaclava despite the summer heat, came to attention and saluted them, ironically perhaps, and then slumped back into a garden chair under a *floodlight against the corrugated-iron fence*. (EV, 78; emphasis added).

This passage demonstrates the mix of military vocabulary (nightwatchman, saluted, floodlight, corrugated-iron fence), leisure and relaxation (garden chair) and cross-cultural traditions (balaclava, greatcoat), thereby incorporating the multiplicity, controversies and ambiguities of contemporary South Africa.

While the exterior of Bra Zama promises an African traditional locality, its interior is a pastiche of modern and retro images and furniture: "The wall behind him was papered entirely in packaging, like the inside of a shack, Glenryck Pilchards and Motorola phones, while the walls to the left and right were dotted with African masks" (EV, 79). The "packaging" deco represents the poverty of township life on the one hand and the commercial desires to participate in consumer life on the other. Egan and his companions sit down at "[a] kitchen table, covered in oilcloth that stuck to Egan's forearms, chairs of curved chrome and Formica, *insistently nineteen-fifties*" (EV, 79; emphasis added). The mishmash of the interior is further supported by the waitresses who are "clearly in costume, dressed up as something, although he [Egan] wasn't sure what. Some national costume or other. Nigerian, say. Or was she supposed to be a shebeen queen?" (EV, 80; emphasis in original)³⁷ This passage reflects Egan's lack of knowledge about his fellow citizens and his insecurity about reading cultural markers. The "African Eatery" clearly wants to attract a large group of people, particularly tourists, quoting from as many African cultural, old style and new style fashions and clichés. Even the menu is dressed in "shack chic" composed of "beer tins beaten flat and stapled together into a patchwork"

³⁷ Shebeens have usually been run by women called shebeen queens. This can be traced back to the fact that men worked in the mines and that women were traditionally the brewers of sorghum beer (Rogerson and Hart 1986, 157)

(EV, 81). These kinds of shack decorations, which in fact turn poverty into creative and colourful style, have become popular as “unique” South African tourist souvenirs within the last two decades. In *Shack Chic: Art and Innovation in South African Shack-Lands* (2003), Greg Fraiser photographically illustrates how shack dwellers make a colourful, creative home out of poverty and the little material they have on hand. Township-style, “shack chic” or “Afro-chic” realised in clothing, handbags, radios, kitchen utensils and the like, prints or photographs have become a fad not only for tourists but also, to a certain extent, for White South Africans – many of whom have never come closer to local townships than by purchasing their colourful artefacts.³⁸ These tourist items function, one might argue, as representations of culture and authenticity yet as expressions of White desire to express their appreciation of the ethnic Other.

The township artefacts, as well as Fraiser’s beautiful photographic collection of Cape Town shacks including insightful comments and quotes by shack dwellers, provide another perspective on and pay homage to life in the townships, usually associated with crime, murder, chaos, dirt and utmost poverty. However, such artworks are in danger of marketing and stylising poverty, thereby distracting from the dire and poor circumstances under which the majority of Black South Africans still have to live. In other words, nostalgic images and artefacts can contribute to a positive re-evaluation of township life, past and present, by arousing intimate memories of home, community and culture despite apartheid’s menace; however, simultaneously the widespread marketing of nostalgia can easily lead to a romanticisation of poverty.

6.3.1 “Insistently nineteen-fifties” – Nostalgia for the Vibrancy of Township Life

In order to grasp the nostalgia which a place like Bra Zama attempts to evoke, it seems essential to take a short detour to shebeen culture in the 1950s. Although the word *shebeen* has become a typically South African word and has been adopted by various local languages, it is of Anglo-Irish origin and refers to a house illegally selling alcohol (OED 1989, 209). The South African shebeen dates back in history to the early development of townships around the emerging mining town of Johannesburg.³⁹ Apart from supplying alcohol, shebeens have fulfilled an important cultural and social role

³⁸ According to Sarah Nuttall, “[t]ownship culture is translated from a socioeconomically stagnant culture into a high-urban experience. The latter gives rise to what is increasingly known as ‘Afro-chic’” (2004, 437).

³⁹ The growing urbanisation, proletarianisation and unemployment of black urban township dwellers led to a flourishing of shebeens within the informal sector, irrespective of the prohibition laws.

within townships (Rogerson and Hart 1986, 156). Especially during apartheid, the shebeen often came to be the only place providing leisure, culture and socialising. Not only was the shebeen a hub for social gatherings, but it was also a place of counterculture where Black urban resistance against apartheid took root. Moreover, it was a place which played a decisive role in shaping Black urban identity.

As the heart and soul of township life, the shebeen has frequently been used as a trope for vibrant Black urban life in literature and film, especially from the nineteen-fifties onwards (Rogerson and Hart 1986, 156; Morris et al. 1997, 5). The reason why the shebeen and township culture gained such significance in the nineteen-fifties and has aroused Black nostalgia partly lies in the emergence of the magazine *Drum* and its celebration of Black urbanity, in particular of the vibrant cultural life in Sophiatown (cf. Chapter 2.2.6.4). Under the Group Areas Act of 1950, Sophiatown was demolished between 1955 and 1963 in order to give way to a poor White Afrikaner suburb sarcastically named Triomf (triumph).⁴⁰ The history and mythology of Sophiatown is both sad and shocking as well as glamorous and colourful, and it continues to trigger nostalgia in former residents. Sophiatown was the centre of Black South African culture and accommodated famous musicians such as Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela as well as writers and journalists such as Lewis Nkosi, Can Themba, Es'kia Mphahlele, Todd Matshikiza, Bloke Modisane, Henry Nxumalo, Casey Motsisi, Arthur Maimane (alias Mogale) and Nat Nakasa, most of who worked for or were published in *Drum Magazine*. According to Michael Chapman, before the forced removal and the arrival of the bulldozers,

Sophiatown had gathered almost mythological import in the literature as a romantic, bohemian world where 'new African' teachers, nurses, lawyers, musicians and journalists, who were usually also creative writers, rubbed shoulders in shebeens with the other products of urbanisation: gangsters speaking their filmstar drawl and dressed in Americanised gear. (1996, 238)

The representation of Sophiatown's vibrant Black urban culture, in literature, film and photography, most famously documented by Jürgen Schadeberg, has led to growing commercial (anti-apartheid) nostalgia for the lost spirit of those times. Also the African Eatery Bra Zama, with its "insistently nineteen-fifties" furniture, tries to evoke and profit from the aura of those times and the atmosphere of sociability and Black urban culture.

⁴⁰ In 2006 Triomf was renamed Sophiatown. However, the former spirit of the vibrant township cannot be recovered.

A Place for the Nouveau Riche

In spite of its pastiche of township shebeen décor, Bra Zama's African Eatery is a deluxe restaurant with a sophisticated selection of food and drinks. Thus, it is a place which the majority of Black South Africans have no means to enter and participate in. The romanticised township shebeen of the nineteen-fifties – as a site of anti-apartheid struggles and counterculture – has become a mainstream place for the nouveau riche as well as for tourists. Thereby, the contemporary elitist shebeen reflects tendencies already simmering in the old fabric of township and shebeen culture. According to Chapman, who dismantles the nostalgically idealised myth of Sophiatown: “In reality, Sophiatown knew wracking poverty and extortionist landlords while the many unskilled labourers and peasants fell outside the interests of its petty-bourgeois professional classes” (1996, 238). As he further points out, several African writers of the nineteen-fifties “displayed bourgeois class-elements in their hankering after the fruits of European influence, opportunity and high culture. [...] Such styling had its beginnings in the shebeens of Sophiatown” (1996, 243).⁴¹ However, since people were strongly united by the fight against apartheid, oppressed as a largely homogenous underclass, class differences and the creation of elitism within the Black community could only fully flourish after apartheid and with South Africa's entry into the global market. Bra Zama takes this stratification even further by shifting its locality outside a township to a rather suspicious, industrial urban periphery – thus geographically distancing itself from the very poor – and by offering fancy pan-African dishes.

Moreover, Bra Zama's African Eatery appropriates the myth of the nineteen-fifties shebeen culture as well as the authenticity of urban South African poverty, and turns it into a commodity via the emotional power of nostalgia. As Dan Wylie in his review of *The Exploded View* writes, “Bra Zama's Eatery is artificial; it is a place constructed for some strange new class of African (pseudo, quasi, demi, hybrid, half bake, etc.) who is characteristic of our New South Africa (NSA)” (2005, 104). However, Bra Zama does not manage to restore the aura of the past shebeens or their social and political intensity which shaped a distinct anti-apartheid counterculture. Since the anti-apartheid counterculture has now become the mainstream culture, and since Bra Zama is intended to cater to the local nouveau riche as well as to tourists, it does not present the subversive,

⁴¹ The drum boys, as those working for the magazine were called, especially loved posing as bohemians and lived a fast, often dangerous life.

angry and creative space of the past. Rather, it reinforces the class stratification which already took shape in township and shebeen culture during apartheid.⁴²

Moreover, it seems that many moneyed ex-township dwellers have a deep attachment to township life and culture. A common saying today is that the Black affluent class sleeps in the suburb and lives in the township. As also Lindsay Bremner points out, despite the urge to belong to the moneyed classes and to show off their wealth, a “relationship with the culture of township life is maintained” (2004, 46) by the Black elite. Simultaneously, one might argue that frequenting a shebeen allows the Black elite to display intimacy with “their people” and nourish the impression that they have a strong connection to the place of their upbringing, their past and their culture. Thus, an upscale shebeen like Bra Zama enables them to invent a continuous link with their township life and its poverty, evoking the impression of being “one of them” while enjoying the comforts of capitalism.⁴³

A place like Bra Zama also serves White South Africans wanting to demonstrate their liberalism and their “non-racial” attitude by entering Black space and socialising with Black people on an alleged equal basis. Tellingly, however, even though Bra Zama is a safe place for the upper classes, hardly any White South Africans dare to enter the formerly forbidden and still dreaded space of Black South African life. The menu’s proclamation of “The New South Africa” sounds like a mockery considering that the only “pale” people in Bra Zama are foreigners. While the Sophiatown shebeens were especially famous for their racial mixing (which contributed to the creation of a counterculture), the retro-shebeen moves along segregationist lines. When Egan looks around him, he realises that he and his companions are special since they are the only racially mixed group in the whole place: “Glancing around at the other tables, at the pale Danes and Poms, taking a quick census, he felt weirdly proud of himself” (EV, 84). “The New South Africa,” so insistently present on every page of the menu, still has a long way to go.

⁴² It can also be assumed that the place caters to the ex-counterculture, the former anti-apartheid fighters who have become the new ruling culture, best expressed in Mda’s words the “Aristocrats of the Revolution.”

⁴³ This seems particularly essential in today’s politics, where even those too young to have been part of the anti-apartheid struggle emphasise not only their belonging to the masses of ordinary South Africans but also claim a revolutionary background. Belonging to the former freedom fighters, even sixteen years into democracy, still seems to be a free-entry ticket into politics and the elitist classes.

6.3.2 The Ambivalence of Restorative and Reflective Nostalgia

The retro-shebeen demonstrates an ambiguous place of selective remembering and forgetting, and it contains both restorative and reflective elements. It represents a place of memory by conveying aspects of the typical nineteen-fifties interior, which is likely to trigger nostalgia for those who remember these times as well as for those who are familiar with its images. In addition, its homely shebeen atmosphere evokes nostalgia for the days of union and the strong communal ties of the township in the old days. It thus restores an order and social unity within poverty that seems lost in postapartheid townships. Jacob Dlamini (2009) significantly points out that Black life under apartheid was made up of complexities and that there were certain values of community and order which many Black people are missing today. The retro-shebeen selectively recalls the happy moments of the past and thereby gives meaning to Black township life under apartheid as a way to survive or deal with the traumas and negative connotations. In that way, Bra Zama's attempt to restore the atmosphere of past moments of sociability can have significant psychological value in giving meaning and coherence to the customers' past and present life.

However, one needs to bear in mind that this way of restoring positive fragments of the past is also selective, for surely the shebeen has always also been a place of heavy drinking, desperation and violence. Thus, the retro-shebeen simultaneously represents a place of forgetting, because it leaves out the struggles and hardships of the times, the stories of those who were even too poor to drown their sorrows in the social company provided by a shebeen and of those who had to work in the mines or in the houses of their White masters. Bra Zama idealises and reproduces the myth of the Sophiatown shebeen culture without allowing poverty and desperateness to contribute to a more complex narrative about township life in past and present South Africa.

Bra Zama is an example of commercial nostalgia which uses the appeal of the past for marketing reasons, not, however, in order to reflect upon the bygone era. The retro-shebeen is remade and modernised in terms of the "New South Africa." Instead of providing a platform for complex "shared everyday recollections" (Boym 2001, 53), Bra Zama provides a sanitised image of the past – without its poverty and desperation.⁴⁴ The question arises as to how reflective a place of the past fashioned according to the appeals

⁴⁴ Likewise, black history, particularly the struggle against apartheid is both commemorated as well as commercialised in souvenirs, T-shirts and the like. The line between voyeuristic, commercial tourism and sustainable heritage tourism all too often blurs.

of the present can be, when it commercialises and idealises its past, but the majority of people still experience as reality what is being idealised and commercialised in the retro-shebeen. Moreover, the sanitised upper-market shebeen does not challenge the authority of the elite – it is made for the elite. As already argued above, Bra Zama is a contradictory space; the amount of fakeness and commercialisation, as suggested here, outweighs its reflective potential.

Ultimately, Bra Zama turns out to be as similarly secluded and paradoxical a space as the gated communities. While the postapartheid shebeen seems to be an open, welcoming place which provides the possibility for White South Africans to enter formerly feared spaces, it turns out to be an open place for only a chosen few – those who have the means to participate in a capitalist lifestyle. Simeon's artwork after all, reveals Bra Zama as a mere mask – a capitalist place which appropriates the style of the poor for marketing reasons. Hence, the problem with Bra Zama is that it is only accessible to those who can afford it, while the majority of people still spend their time in authentic shebeens, many of which are still marked by utmost poverty.

6.4 Conclusion

Whether the narrative is set in a security village, a black township or an artist's studio, Vladislavić, satirist that he is, exacerbates our bitter-sweet search for rainbow nationhood, urging us on to seek more complex solutions. (Goodman 2006, 37)

The Exploded View presents four individuals searching for their roots and for meaning in a world which no longer makes sense. Thereby, Vladislavić moves into different social spaces which provide a home in postapartheid South Africa. Resounding in all four stories is a feeling of loneliness and alienation, a search for home and shelter and a questioning of one's position within the new order of a postapartheid South Africa. The protagonists' growing alienation from their surrounding world is expressed by their drifting into hallucinatory states of mind, increasingly unable to distinguish between reality and simulation. Caught in a whirlwind of floating signs detached from their meaning, the protagonists long for order, lost values and meaning, metaphorically expressed in the exploded view. Thereby, however, they do not express nostalgia for anything in particular, such as a lost homeland or a particular period in the past. Only Gordon Duffy is an openly nostalgic character who journeys back in time to the idealised home of his childhood imaginings.

The characters, with the exception of Simeon, remain passive, caught by a slight nervousness about how to behave in, speak to and interpret their changing society. Interestingly, the only Black character, Simeon, is the only one who seems to have made it in the “New South Africa.” Not only does he lead a bohemian life but he is also the only one who actively engages with his surroundings. Nonetheless, his life is also disturbing and he seems to distort any ideas of harmony or comfort. Taking him as representing one of the Black voices, he does not show any nostalgia for the past but instead constantly visualises past injustices to the public. Therefore, he uses controversial methods and dismantles his own exploitative streaks. In that way, Simeon can also be read as representing the new Black elite who, striving for success, adopt rather dubious practises. However, Simeon does not seem at ease in the present and despite his success. Home, it seems, remains a dislocated place for him. Budlender, Egan and Gordon Duffy, on the contrary seem to see themselves as “victims of circumstances” (Vladislavić in Miller 2007, 141), now that they have to take their destiny into their own hands; now that they are confronted with the Other or even become the Other themselves.

In the midst of this social nervousness, many affluent, predominantly White South Africans have been seeking a supposedly secure home in gated communities. These communities simulate not only security but also another reality far away from the perceived urban decay and chaos. In addition, with the rise of a Black middle and upper class these secluded places have become increasingly non-racial. Also a predominantly Black place like Bra Zama evoking a predominantly Black nostalgia for a particular urban identity testifies to a growing social stratification and enforces the image of social apartheid. Through his characters and his writing, Vladislavić opens up the gated communities for scrutiny and reflects upon the absurdities and dangers of these developments.⁴⁵

Nostalgia in this novel is treated less satirically. This seems to suggest that the implied author himself can more easily sympathise with his characters and their attempt to understand past and present. Overall, his episodic novel criticises contemporary apathy and White self-victimisation as well as an ignorance of continuing segregationist structures displayed by the privileged, both Black and White.

⁴⁵ He challenges his readers to think about social spaces and borders in a globalised world in general. Gated communities, after all, are a microcosmic example of societal living which affects people globally.

7 Summary of Key Features

Myth may have preceded history, but in the long run it may well be the only guarantee for the survival of memory. (Brink 1998, 42)

To be nostalgic is not to wear rose-tinted glasses but to appreciate [...] life in its complexity. (Dlamini 2009, 109)

The issue [...] is not the loss of some golden age of stability and permanence. The issue is rather the attempt, as we face the very real processes of time-space compression, to secure some continuity within time, to provide some extension of lived space within which we can breathe and move. (Huyssen 2003, 24)

This study's aim was to illustrate nostalgia's complexities in contemporary South African fiction by way of two key authors. Hence, the study first scrutinised the different facets of nostalgia in order to illuminate the psychology and the mechanisms at work when people long for a past time and place which they might not even have experienced or of which they remember only the positive aspects. The questions asked in the introduction to this thesis focused mainly on the triggers for nostalgia as well as the reasons why people choose to dwell in pleasant memories and imagined past worlds; these questions have been answered variously by the four novels. This final chapter will summarise and compare the key features of nostalgia, home and be-longing as analysed in the four selected novels.¹

Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić represent nostalgia and its related concepts, home and be-longing, in complex and diverse ways, both on the story and discourse level, and thus support the claim of nostalgia theory's multidimensionality as introduced in this study. The texts address different parts of the theory. *The Heart of Redness* employs nostalgia's ability to reaffirm cultural identity, to activate historical memory and to recuperate local history in the face of an invasive globalisation. The protagonist Camagu turns to the past as well as to the rural landscape as sources of strength for his present identity. By that, and despite the novel's polyphonic structure, Camagu comes to echo the implied author. Simultaneously, the novel criticises restorative attempts to freeze culture as a precolonial past and cautions against reproducing colonial methods in the disguise of contemporary tourist practises. Thereby, Mda reveals his reflective use of nostalgia. *The*

¹ The comparative analysis of the novels does not intend to stereotype a Black and a White South African author. While it might, at first, seem that their works do not have much in common as they represent different positions and are based in fairly different literary backgrounds it has become obvious that both of them are driven by similar concerns for the country.

Whale Caller, by illustrating past ways of living and interacting with one's natural surroundings, rather didactically provides guidelines for environmentally conscious behaviour. The nostalgically recalled past thus provides alternative ways of living in the present. In addition, nostalgia functions as a way to counter stereotypes which associate environmental concerns with backwardness and thereby reproduce colonial/apartheid racist mechanisms. Moreover, nostalgia in *The Whale Caller* is the impetus to see the past from different perspectives so as to gain a better understanding of both past and present. As Mda's nostalgic subtexts in *The Heart of Redness* and especially in *The Whale Caller* demonstrate, environmentalism is a progressive treatment of the ecosystem which human beings are inevitably part of. Mda makes obvious in his novels that nostalgia can be an effective force in the recreation and rebuilding of a relationship between humans and nature in a country where the majority of people have been alienated from their natural surrounding due to colonial and apartheid binaries. Nostalgia can have creative potential in the rehabilitation of nature, landscape and environmentalism which is a decisive but neglected factor in contemporary South African politics and society. In order to pave the way for the literary analysis, the following will briefly outline colonial environmentalism and its legacy in the alienation of Black South Africans from landscape.

The Restless Supermarket stands out as the only autodiegetic narrative which satirically juxtaposes a perceived better apartheid past with postapartheid disorder. Nostalgia in this novel demonstrates the psychological difficulties of coming to terms with drastic social changes. This becomes particularly striking in the protagonist's grappling with his newly marginalised position in a society which had always granted him privileges and superiority due to his Whiteness. This extreme form of restorative nostalgia, presented as biting satire, reveals an inability of the older generation particularly to accept and assimilate to changes. While the other three novels present a plurality of worldviews, *The Restless Supermarket* does the opposite: it only gives the view of one character; the rest is implicit. Thereby, the novel provides a sustained representation of the protagonist's, Aubrey Tearle's, world; the whole meaning of the text is constructed around the silences which the implied author leaves for the implied reader to fill. Thus, Vladislavić depicts the past with a critical distance as the national past – in which he is inevitably entangled – provides a difficult terrain to identify with. Finally, similarly to *The Restless Supermarket*, *The Exploded View* expresses the inability to make sense of the new social order. The various protagonists are caught up in a state of disorientation, momentarily experienced as delirium. They react to the new realities,

perceived as “surreal,” either with passivity or by escaping to real as well as imagined childhood memories. Simulacric creations of supposedly better homes, in the form of gated communities, which are coming to dominate the protagonists’ surroundings, present “purified” forms of living. However, the characters cannot identify with them either.

The question of home is crucial in all four novels. The secure home of the White characters disintegrates and becomes a place of increasing anxiety. The Black characters, on the contrary, were denied the possibility to call a place their true home as they were always subjected to apartheid arbitrariness. One might have expected the home to have improved for the majority of poor South Africans – but, as it has turned out, a nicer, more humane home is reserved only for a few. Both Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić, in their own ways give an ironic, satirical and critical account of the new elite and the nouveau riches that represent the ruling and affluent classes of the young democracy. The nostalgic characters return to their imagined bygone homelands in search for meaning and to find parameters in order to explain the present. These mental escapes from the present relieve the characters momentarily from the struggles in their present home. The emphasis here lies on pasts in the plural since the past to which each character returns is a different temporal realm.

Both authors reflect upon the changed dynamics within the “new” South Africa through the lens of nostalgia. Their narratives reveal that positive memories of both the colonial and apartheid past can be heard from various groupings within South Africa. The body of the four texts examined in this thesis express a sense of alienation and dislocation caused by the political transition from apartheid to democracy and reveal a deep dissatisfaction with the present. Instead of seeing the fruits of the liberation, the protagonists are confronted with the challenges and hardships of a “new,” hybrid and globalised South Africa. Thus, they imaginatively journey back in time to a supposedly better past. The present is, thus, defined in comparison with the past world. The past is then remembered or imagined in positive terms and the present perceived in negative terms. The discrepancy between past and present produces a critique of the present, voiced either explicitly or implicitly. The particular period of the past as well as the particular triggers for the characters’ nostalgic journeys vary from novel to novel.

Mda’s novels tell of the disturbing return to South Africa after decades of exile. What Mda’s exile-protagonists, Camagu (HR) and the Whale Caller (WC), find is not the homeland they were hoping for but one struggling to negotiate between different dynamics mainly circling around modernisation versus tradition. By contrast, Vladislavić

depicts White characters that are physically rooted in South Africa, yet have a sense of culturally belonging to the European or American homeland, even if their ideas of these places are clichéd. Thus, his characters' longing emerges from a position of "inner exile."

Mda criticises the way in which living culture and tradition in the present are exploited when they are turned into museum pieces. His writing is driven by the aim to reclaim modern culture and tradition through negotiating the opposing forces of global capitalism and traditionalism. In Vladislavić's selected novels the present is portrayed as delirium and surreal, whereas the surreal, imagined past becomes real, especially for the protagonist of *The Restless Supermarket*, Aubrey Tearle.

Moreover, all novels discussed in this project sabotage the linearity of time. This reflects the characters' emotional state as much as it emphasises the interconnectedness of time sequences, i.e. the relevance of the past in the present and for the future. Hence, the past is remembered in the present, the future imagined in the past, with the result that past and present merge into a hybrid time level and static, temporal borders crumble in the face of nostalgia's imaginative potentials. The characters' journeys to imagined past worlds are often based on and invoke historical and cultural memories which express their yearning to belong to a particular community as it was during a particular time. In that process, the Whale Caller especially stands out as a character who challenges temporal as well as racial borders by slipping into different identities. He most obviously does not only long to belong to a particular time, place and/or community, but also longs to be someone else entirely.

When comparing the representations of nostalgia, home and be-longing in the selected novels, it becomes obvious that remembering positive aspects of the past has different implications for the two authors. The past(s) which Vladislavić's characters escape to are diverse. While the protagonist of *The Restless Supermarket* longs for the order of apartheid, the longed for past in *The Exploded View* is a borrowed past of either imagined childhood memories set in a different country or of a mimicked, romantic European past. Mda's nostalgic focus, on the contrary, lies on the past before traditional life was repressed by colonialism, modernisation and urbanisation. The longing for the past before the colonial invasion is represented mainly in three ways: either through nostalgic identification of the present with the past self (Qukezwa, the Whale Caller, Saluni), through restorative attempts to freeze traditional culture in the present (as in *The Heart of Redness*) and through the representation of a pristine natural world threatened by the destructive forces of the tourist industry (as in *The Whale Caller*). In contrast to

Vladislavić, who approaches the apartheid past satirically, Mda avoids this period (except for a few allusions) completely.

Again, despite representing certain thematic similarities, the four selected narratives portray and reflect upon very different cultural attitudes. This becomes further explicit in the narrative form the authors have chosen. While Vladislavić uses nostalgia strategically to raise uncomfortable questions about one's position in the present, in Mda's novels nostalgia raises awareness of historical memory reaching back to colonial and precolonial times. Vladislavić approaches positive memories of past times with a critical distance established through irony. By contrast, Mda either educes positive reaffirmation of cultural identity and portrays the colonial past with biting sarcasm or uses the past as a healing force in the present. Hence, the moral value of the authors' approaches to nostalgia differs substantially.

In *The Restless Supermarket* Ivan Vladislavić satirically binarises the past, thereby highlighting the difficulties White South Africans have in identifying with their recent history and actual present. He uses irony and satire in order to establish a critical distance to his protagonist's apartheid nostalgia and overt racist attitude. Vladislavić uses the phenomenon of nostalgia consciously as a way of dealing with a problematic past. It becomes an escape to past security and to lost familiarity and thus works as a reassurance of one's biography and belonging. In contrast, Mda dialogises the past by giving voice to different characters plus the sarcastic voice of the narrator, particularly in *The Heart of Redness* but also, to lesser degrees, in *The Whale Caller*. What becomes apparent is that for Mda recalling precolonial and colonial times does not pose a moral problem; instead, the imaginative return to the past home has identity-boosting potential: it connects the present self with the past self and thereby bridges cultural disruption and establishes what Hutcheon calls a "lost coherence."

Both writers illustrate restorative mechanisms of nostalgia in individual characters such as imperialist (Dalton), apartheid (Tearle) and postcolonial (Qukezwa) forms of nostalgia. Vladislavić reveals restorative forms of nostalgia as continuing mechanisms of the colonial and apartheid discourse (of Othering and exclusion). Mda is critical of an "over-nostalgia" expressed in restorative attempts to freeze cultures in a premodern past. Restorative forms in the selected novels reflect personal struggles to come to terms with changed social positions; this has become most obvious in Vladislavić's protagonist Aubrey Tearle. While restorative nostalgia in his case causes discomfort and rejection for the reader, restorative yearning for a past condition is represented positively as a means of

rehabilitating cultural coherence and identity in Mda's portrayal of Qukezwa and to a certain extent also the Whale Caller and Saluni. Nostalgic longing becomes one way of finding access to and recuperating one's cultural past. Moreover, the act of creating coherent stories in nostalgic reminiscences enables one to recuperate cultural and personal identity. Thereby, it has been shown that restorative elements might indeed also be psychologically valuable, as a "restitutive link," in order to reassure the present identity.² However, desires to restore the past easily lend themselves to social exclusion, (positive) racism or xenophobia as Qukezwa's cutting down of all alien trees and Dalton's cultural village have demonstrated, not to mention Tearle.

Reflective mechanisms of nostalgia become most explicit in Mda's protagonist Camagu in *The Heart of Redness* and to a certain extent also in the Whale Caller. Vladislavić's characters in *The Exploded View* (except Gordon, who gets lost in his childhood memories) see the farce and anticipate the dangers of gated communities dressed in nostalgic fashion; however, they remain unable to engage with both past and present constructively. While reflective nostalgia is hardly expressed in the novels, the two authors' narrative strategies reveal them as being both critical of static and restorative forms of nostalgia and as embracing nostalgia's potentials. Through their novels they employ the multifaceted nostalgia and incite the implied reader to deal with the past and the present in South Africa. While Mda recuperates local Xhosa, Khoikhoi and colonial history and emphasises its relevance in the present, Vladislavić casts light more on a deficient present, which leads to idealisations of the past. Both emphasise that the past is needed in the present in order to create a coherent narrative about oneself and to create a South African nation.

Thus, as has been shown, nostalgia can be represented and analysed in different forms, both on the content and on the discourse level. The concept of the implied author, thereby, plays a significant role as it reveals a certain cultural and ethical positioning to the past within the context of colonialism, apartheid and racism in South Africa. In fact, the decisive difference between the two authors and their approaches to dealing with past and present is the distance with which they depict the past. Mda approaches the precolonial past in particular without a critical distance – the past is embraced by his colourful characters and the landscape. With respect to the colonial past, he plays with the idea of taking on the perspective of the former enemy, the coloniser, in order to try and

² Such psychological value resonates greatly in postcolonial nostalgia.

see the other's humanity. A past not recalled nostalgically or, in fact, in any way, is the apartheid past, which one might assume does not provide sources of cultural identification. Vladislavić, on the contrary, depicts the apartheid past to which he keeps a critical distance by representing a character like Tearle with biting satire. It is a past which for him, one might assume after reading his fiction as well as his interviews, represents both a source of intimate identification on a personal level as well as shame and repulsion with regard to societal accepted racism and injustices. In order to create distance between the implied/real author³ and the narrator, he employs irony and satire as well as unreliable narration. Thereby, he brilliantly shows how one can use restorative nostalgia in order to reflect upon the past in a critical way.

Both writers employ nostalgia as a way of critically engaging with the past and reflecting upon the aspects of the past which are needed in the present. The positive appreciation of the past with a critical or reflective mind can support a process of opening up and admitting the past into the present. In this way, nostalgia embraces culture as dynamic, since it reflects upon the passage of time and engages with the meaning of the past in the present. The approach to read culture and identity through the lens of nostalgia, home and belonging not only reveals the importance of the past for the present. It also shows how a restorative nostalgia can indeed have (psychological) healing potentials in face of a traumatic disruption from home as well as it can turn into a reflective nostalgia when embedded in an unreliable, satirical narrative. On a broader scale, this shows the potential of narrative fiction to be able to reflect upon contemporary society.

As outlined in the introduction, as part of the transition process, the rehabilitation of the country's past has been of prime importance in a democratic South Africa. Again, as Dennis Walder suggests, a positive return to a traumatic past – and that exceeds the recent apartheid history – seems barbaric (Walder 2004). Yet, positive memories during an overall violent, inhumane past can also be valuable. They can be supportive in admitting and coming to terms with the past. As Jacob Dlamini suggests, “in collapsing the memory of the past into trauma, we limit our understanding of South Africa's past [...]. (2009, 111) Such positive memories, however, have largely been dismissed in public discourse as well as in literary criticism. Both, Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić suggest that nostalgia for the past is not necessarily a longing for the old political systems,

³ As the cited interviews with Vladislavić confirm, also the real author Vladislavić distances himself from his character's racist and restorative nostalgic views.

but instead reveals a personal yearning for a wholeness and coherence which move along the lines of disrupted memories and a sense of belonging.

All in all, the selected novels reveal the complexities of past and present-day South Africa and expose the long-term effects of colonialism and apartheid. By variously representing nostalgic journeys to imagined or experienced past times, Zakes Mda and Ivan Vladislavić remain critical voices in and of the new dispensation, following literary scholar Kelwyn Sole's call in the early 1990s – "[w]riters cannot afford to leave 'politics to the politicians', now or never" (1993, 4). They emphasise the necessity of dealing with and making sense of the past and one's belonging to the place one calls home in order to move into a future which embraces the diversity of South Africa. A critical nostalgia, one that reflects upon the longing, admits one's cultural history and accepts the past as fragmented, bears the potential to deal critically with the continuing injustices and inequalities in the postapartheid present. However, nostalgia that wants to rebuild the past as it was seems to be counter-productive in the process of community or nation-building. The selected novels call for a dialogue between past and present – an active engagement with the past in the present, always in sight of a "better" future. Thus, they work against a forgetting of a difficult past. Nostalgia can be one way of contributing to this dialogue.

The increasing yet still marginal academic recognition of nostalgia in South African culture and literature confirms the lack and need to deal with positive memories in a past marked by trauma and experiences of disruption. Instead of rejecting nostalgia for its feared fundamental and restorative dangers, this thesis has suggested that we embrace such a fundamental human tendency and that we search for the reasons and mechanisms of longing for an idealised past. After all, nostalgia tells more about the present than about the past and the past offers a well to learn from so that "history is not repeating itself."

Even though this is a local study exploring the particular nature of South Africa, the questions around nostalgia, identity and literary representation are universal. Nostalgia might provide new ways of reading narrative representations of identity within the postcolonial context. Not only specific to South Africa, this way of reading reveals how contemporary narrative strategies try to come to terms with both the past and the present. With respect to the productivity of nostalgia, a more complex understanding of the concept promises a new reading of a wider range of novels and other literary and art forms.

Appendix

The following interview with Ivan Vladislavić was conducted on 1 October 2008 in Berlin during the International Literature Festival.

A.F.: Your protagonist of *The Restless Supermarket*, Aubrey Tearle, constantly drifts into his dream world, his utopian city Alibia which resembles the place he yearns for – in many cases the opposite of a changing Johannesburg. However, he has never been to Alibia and can never go there except in his imagination; similarly does Gordon Duffy, one of your characters from *The Exploded View*, yearn for his dream house and home, inspired by an American magazine, and drift into the time of his childhood. This yearning for a past time and place is characteristic of nostalgia, what is your idea of nostalgia?

I.V.: Well, the question of nostalgia in the South African context is a very complicated one. I've written a little bit about this. In fact, I once began writing a short essay about the question of nostalgia because it fascinated me. It's complicated because I think nostalgia is often taken as a positive value, as a looking back to the past in terms of its positive elements. The etymology of the word is about "to return to home." The question of nostalgia is complicated in South Africa because the question of home is so complicated.

I think that nostalgia is a very natural thing; it's a kind of human quality to look back to the past with fondness and affection – often. It struck me very often that even people who've had very terrible childhoods, for instance, often look back with a certain amount of nostalgia to certain aspects of their childhood and I think it's a human quality that has to do with retrieving the past and recuperating or recovering the best elements of the past.

When you become nostalgic about your own life in the context of your own country that has had a terrible history it feels like a troubled and compromised feeling to feel nostalgic about a white South African childhood. Being in any way a conscious, politically or socially, conscious person is an uncomfortable thing, and I think that's why the question has become more and more interesting to me because it creates uncomfortable feelings and it raises uncomfortable issues about one's identification with the place. I also think that as a white South African this looking back to the past is a necessary process because it keeps the particular nature of your own history in your mind. I feel that if I engage in a nostalgic flight about my own past I'm required to confront

these difficult questions about what the meaning of my own life is. And I suppose I also feel that there's a set of contradictory currents there, a set of tensions because a lot of the contemporary condition, not just in South Africa but generally, is about forgetting the past, about getting away from it quickly, losing history, losing a sense of the past. I think looking back to the past is necessary and valuable. That's just a couple of ideas about it. It's a very complicated issue; it's an interesting thing to be exploring, though.

A.F.: Definitely! Before I first approached the whole phenomenon of nostalgia, I thought of nostalgia as a rather negative thing because it has a conservative, reactive connotation. However, the more I read about it, the more fascinating I've been finding it and the more potential I've been seeing in the whole complex of nostalgia because as you said it's a way of dealing with the past and you need to deal with the past to cope with the present and also to move forward and create a future where the past is not forgotten, suppressed or denied.

I.V.: That's what I came to when I was trying to write to this idea. I don't know whether it's possible, the idea of a kind of critical nostalgia. It sounds like a contradiction because it is a conservative thing on the one hand. On the other hand it's also an inclination that, I think, attaches one to places and attaches one to one's own story and that's a necessary thing if people are going to develop a sense of belonging to a place, of feeling at home in a place. I think if you have no nostalgic feelings about your own story and how it's connected to the place in which the story happened it's very difficult to feel connected and responsible for that place in the present.

There is this quite strong tendency in South Africa to not want to deal with the past. This is something what you will know from your own experiences as a German, it's not unique to South Africa, this need to turn away from an unpleasant history. If nostalgia provides a way back to recover the past and deal with it I think it can be a positive value.

A.F.: I also think that these nostalgic reminiscences of certain aspects of the past – they are very selective but, therefore, they also have the potential to tell stories official history writing does not tell. I think it's necessary and valuable to hear these individual stories and ask why they are remembered in a distorted way or why they tell positive things only.

I.V.: That makes sense because nostalgia is often caught up with very personal things, with very intimate things. This idea of a critical nostalgia, which I never really developed, was embodied in some ways in *The Restless Supermarket* before I tried to theorise it. There the nostalgic impulse was treated satirically, and dealt with in an exaggerated and parodic way. In the end, my narrator's nostalgia is about unattainable things, and quite silly things or trivialities, and he avoids the bigger picture that one has to confront if nostalgia is going to make any sense really, if it's not going to be simply an excuse for not dealing with reality.

A.F.: How do you see the connection between nostalgia and utopia?

I.V.: I haven't thought about the connection directly before. I suppose there is a tendency – we touched on it earlier, this idea that one's memory is usually selective and that people tend to remember the positive or exaggerate the positive very often. Of course some people do the opposite; some people also tend to remember the worst things about the unexperienced, which is also true. But I think one gets the sense now to try and deal with it concretely in South Africa. You have a lot of people who feel that everything was better before. And it's not exactly a utopian sense but it's certainly a feeling that they were living in a wonderful country where everything worked, where there was no crime and so on.

A.F.: Who are these "some people"?

I.V.: Well, it's interesting – I think they are all kinds of people. Some of them are formerly privileged white South Africans. I heard the same things said by, quite surprising, working class black people who are finding life more difficult now. They have a feeling that things were better off in the past; that they were better off in the past.

I think it's a natural reaction to a difficult present. South Africa has, in a way, been through a slightly unrealistic utopian period where people thought all the country's problems would be resolved. And people are developing a more realistic sense of things now. That includes an understanding that some things were better, some things were worse. And then trying to understand why that is, I think that is the crucial thing always. Someone said to me recently – this is a working class black guy who struggles to make a living, and he said to me: "In my father's day there wasn't so much unemployment.

Everyone had a job. You just had to wait next to the road and someone would come and you would have work.” That may well be true of his particular experience; it may well be true that his father was always employed. But it’s pointless looking at this in isolation and say that therefore things were better. You have to put that into the context of why was he employed, how was he employed, under what conditions was he employed. Or the other restrictions on people’s personal freedoms, the violation of human rights might have made it possible that his father was always in employment. But that wasn’t necessarily a good thing.

A.F.: Coming back to the question of home. It seems that Europe has remained such an ideal place for White South Africans. How could it sustain for such a long time, was there a myth created about an original homeland?

I.V.: Well, it’s an amusing thing in a way, isn’t it? I was thinking recently this whole notion that white South Africans were ‘Europeans’, the terminology itself is just so amusing. If you think that as recently as the eighties you would have signs on things saying “Europeans” meaning “White South Africans,” people classified as that. It’s so ridiculous that it’s almost amusing. If you had asked the average European whether the people, the white South Africans they met were Europeans they would say, “Evidently not.” So it has an amusing side to it.

I think this sense of Europe as home varied from one group of people to another. I don’t think it was a coherent or uniform sense among white South Africans. I certainly know that amongst certain English speaking South Africans there was a sense that England was home. I would have known, for instance, people of my generation who had parents who were born in England and who still had a sense that England was actually home. But then, I can say from my own experience in my family, Europe was never regarded as home. There was no sense of that at all and I’m only a second generation South African. My grandparents were born abroad. My father, who was born in South Africa, had a very strong sense of himself as a South African. I don’t think that the idea that we had a home somewhere else was ever expressed to me in that way. And I think that’s true for many South Africans. I don’t think the way in which that mechanism worked as a psychological mechanism was really about ever thinking that you would go back home, that you would return to Europe or that you would belong there. It was more a

sense of taking on this mantle of Europe, taking on a set of values and a set of supposedly superior nations in order to justify your place in Africa.

The Afrikaners on a whole, whose history goes back over generations and generations in South Africa, the people that drove the apartheid system are very often seven or eight generations in Africa. They have no real sense that they would ever go anywhere else. But I think they took on this European mantle, almost vicariously tapping into the power, the prestige, the supposed superiority of this other power base, and used that to justify their own position.

One could imagine how that developed during the colonial period when, in fact, there were a lot of Europeans knocking around in colonised countries, and these were people who had no roots in these countries, for whom home was somewhere else. For the generation who are the founders and perpetrators of apartheid that's not the case, they don't think of home as somewhere else. I don't think anyway.

It's interesting, now, that there's a younger generation who has in a way gone back to a much earlier sense of themselves in the world, a younger generation of South Africans who are much more mobile. But I think it's a different thing. It's not a colonial thing; it's actually a contemporary global sense they have of themselves. I know so many young people, who move very freely, who live in Europe or not, who live in the East or Australia or America or not. They come and go. They are much less rooted than previous generations were.

A.F.: I have one more question concerning nostalgia. Several of your characters grapple with the changing social and architectural landscape and yearn for a different place – a place where they could feel at home again and in that way they express a nostalgic feeling, a longing to return home, to a place of comfort and familiarity. You depict them as individuals, though with similar feelings of displacement and alienation and with similar nostalgic responses to the present. Would you say that there is something like a collective nostalgia?

I.V.: I don't know. I think it's certainly quite a common thing to encounter but I don't know whether people have a sense that they are engaging in that feeling collectively. There clearly are things that touch people quite broadly. One of the things that you talk about are the changes in the architectural landscape; one of the things that touches people very deeply are changes of names of places, which is something which fascinates me.

And I think that reveals some of the things you're talking about if you look at people's responses to that. There has been a big argument about the changing of the name of Pretoria to Tshwane, which is a whole news thing. Just very recently, for instance, there was a proposal by the Pretoria City Council to change the names of twenty-seven of the major streets in the city. This includes the very well-known streets of Pretoria that are named after the founders of the city like Paul Kruger, Andries Pretorius and so on. It's interesting to see the different reactions of people to that proposal because some people say it doesn't matter. I've spoken to people, my family who live in Pretoria, I say, "What do you think of this?" And some of them say, "I don't care whether the street is called Paul Kruger Street or not." And then there are people who feel deeply offended by it – deeply offended.

I've been very surprised by the different reactions. I think it's because the fabric of one's own memory is so woven into things like that, into what things are called, into the names of places and cities and towns and mountains and so on, these things are kind of embedded in people's memories and I think that changing them, this sort of symbolic power of it, it doesn't really have to do with any kind of practical thing, it's not that you can't get used to the fact that the street is called something else. The symbolism of it, I think, is deeply threatening to people. It feels to them as if their past is being tempered with – not the present but the past is being tempered with. Their memories are actually being erased. I think it's the symbolic power of it, which is hugely important.

A.F.: And it's the symbolic power of a past they identified with, their home, their familiar places.

I.V.: Yes, it's familiarity, it means, "I belong there and this is my place, it's something I'm comfortable with." And now it's all going to be changed. And people do take it as a personal attack on the integrity of their own memories, the integrity of their existence in that place.

I think it's a very interesting project to change. Clearly, for the new powers that be it does have the impact of "we are claiming those places for the new society." There's no question about it, there's no question in my mind that it's about power, it's about who owns those places, who these places are for, who those places commemorate, whose history is being sustained, and whose history is not being sustained. And I think that

sometimes it's done quite insensitively. It would make more sense to me if these changes were made subtly.

No one really cares whether they change the name of Church Street, for instance. I doubt that you could find ten people who would really have a problem if they change the name of Church Street to Albertina Sisulu Street. But when they change the name of Paul Kruger Street to Albertina Sisulu Street it makes a very strong political statement. I think that it would be in the kind of interests of the society to do these things more subtly and create a new tapestry of meaning and association so that a broader range of people can identify with the place and that people don't feel threatened. At the same time I also understand that South Africa has a colonial history. And apartheid history is so woven into the place that it has to change, too. I have absolutely no feeling of loss or nostalgia to see Verwoerdburg disappear down the dustbin. I think it's subtler than simply getting rid of all the existing names and places ... and then have a new set of heroes. It should be done more subtly – it probably won't be.

A.F.: But I suppose that's also always the tricky question. How can you live with the physical imprints of the past – do you have to destroy them or can you live with them constructively in the present and future, and commemorate the past at the same time?

I.V.: I think there are ways of doing it. I think the haste with which Eastern Europe got rid of its communist history, for instance, is probably, in retrospect, a slightly problematic thing. It amazes me that you can travel around in certain countries here and have no sense of this quite recent past – it has been so effectively erased so quickly. I don't think that's necessarily a good thing. It makes more sense to me to transform what exists in a critical way.

I think the best example of this is Constitution Hill in Johannesburg – as an example of how you can keep an existing space and not erase the worst aspects of that history but create a new context in which people can understand the past. I think it's a brilliant example of what can be done if you operate sensitively. Constitution Hill is a better history lesson than any amount of erasing the past could ever be. The past is so present there but transformed within a new critical context. And I think that's really the solution.

A.F.: If Johannesburg tells the story of South Africa's racial past what does it tell about the present and what could it anticipate for the future?

I.V.: I think Joburg is a very interesting place. As a barometer of change in South Africa, I think it's more interesting than any other city. Although, it is also true that the recent changes in South Africa's history are reflected everywhere. You can go into the smallest town and it is not the same place that it was twenty years ago. You can find traces of the change everywhere but the scale of Johannesburg, the scale of the migration of people into Johannesburg – it allows one to see how the country's changing in a very obvious, in a very clear way. It's a harsher picture of the contemporary society.

You've spent quite a lot of time in Cape Town. It's not as if Cape Town is untouched by exactly the same processes of migration of people and so on. It's a bit more difficult to see, it's more difficult to sense. You can go to parts of the city with the feeling that things haven't changed that much. You can go to parts of the city where things feel pretty much as they used to twenty or thirty years ago. But you can't get that feeling in Johannesburg very often.

A.F.: Let's talk a bit more about architecture – while there have been many attempts in post-1994 South Africa to break the old colonial and apartheid (racial and social) borders on the one side, there has been a rapid and alarming tendency to construct new borders in the form of fortresses, so-called gated communities – euphemistically called residential areas or living complexes – on the other side. It is a development you reflect upon in your recent novels. How do these physical structures reflect upon the social realities? Would you say there is a growing segregation in society not primarily based on race any longer but class? A kind of commercialisation of apartheid?

I.V.: I think that's true. Definitely. I think that's exactly what the gated communities and closed suburbs, townhouse developments of a certain kind; it's exactly what they reflect. It's a new non-racial secure middle-class that has developed. It's also possible to go into certain gated communities that are almost exclusively black in surprising parts of the city. I have friends who live out in the North in one such community that's very very largely black. And I mean it's not like a metropolis, that's just the way it is.

Certainly the reason why people have access to those kinds of lifestyles is a class thing. It reinforces the division in a society that is very problematic. It reinforces the

inequality in South Africa, which is actually at the heart of the country's problems. It's the extreme inequality between rich and poor that's actually at the heart of the problem. And it creates all kinds of other problems. It's difficult for people to develop a sense of commonality, of living together in one society when you have people living in what are effectively independent villages ...

A.F.: ... where you don't need to leave if it's not for work or travel reasons. These fenced-off residential areas are almost self-sustaining. It's almost as if you have your own little luxury prison.

I.V.: Yes, it really is. It really is - to live in those places and be extremely cut off from what's happening around you. And that's not a good thing. It's very bad for the society as a whole. Also, I think it reflects an aspect of the general kind of privatisation of the things that the society needs in order to function properly as a whole. Those little stacks that are closed off. As you said, they have their own little entertainment areas, their own roads lightening that are working perfectly; they have their own security systems. And that ties into this unhealthy tendency that you get those things if you have money to afford them. And what happens outside the walls is not your business.

A.F.: In an interview with Stacey Knecht (the ledge, 2006) you said that the "new" society is not actually here. That was two and a half years ago. How do you evaluate the situation now?

I.V.: Well, I think South Africa is a constantly changing, evolving thing. To go back to what you were talking about earlier, the utopian mood in South Africa at one point was reflected in the idea of the New South Africa⁴. We had the old version and now we have the new version. And the new improved South Africa was going to be better and everything would be sorted out. I think, maybe that fantasy was necessary at one point in order for people to buy into the change. You kind of had to imagine that it would all be fine. Everything was going to work out perfectly. Probably the myths of the Rainbow Nation, the perfect future, the New South Africa were necessary fictions at one point. But

⁴ The different spelling of the New South Africa and the "new" South Africa is due to the fact that I keep the spelling used throughout the analysis, whereas Ivan Vladislavić who was so kind as to proofread most of the interview, capitalised the words.

now it has become more and more clear that some of the difficulties the country faces are not fixable in ten years. There are things wrong with South Africa that will take generations to fix – if they can be fixed.

I think the disillusionment is a necessary thing and probably a healthy thing now. The recent political changes may have some very positive sides to them. The way in which the things have changed and in which we've changed our president is a little bit alarming – and that one knows that there is a lot of politicking going on behind the scenes. But it's also reassuring in a way that the political process can actually work to ask the leader who is unpopular to resign. There is a very positive side to it. In a sense it's democracy working within the constraints of a political party. The fact that it's possible to change a president is a very positive thing in any democracy.

The new political leaders are certainly talking a lot about the need to refocus their policies on the poor, for instance. Now, this might just be a lot of political talk because we've heard it before but there might also be some truth in it. There certainly are new people coming into the cabinet, for instance, who, I believe, are better politicians, who do have the interest of the poor closer to the hearts. Change is a necessary thing and a good thing. The new society ... it will always be something in process, something evolving.

A.F.: It would be terrifying if things were not in process and developing.

I.V.: Sure, that's when you need to be worried. Put it that way, when people complain about the changes in South Africa or one feels insecure about certain things, things like moving in the right way or whatever, I always remind myself what it was like to live in South Africa in the seventies and eighties when, in fact, one felt that nothing would ever change. And that was a much worse feeling.

A.F.: Was it a feeling of stagnation?

I.V.: Absolutely. It was the feeling that no matter what happened politically it would be impossible to move. The state felt so powerful and things felt so stuck. South Africa felt so jammed in the past, so jammed in a kind of hopeless, nightmarish version of how society should be. It felt so difficult to imagine things changing even though there was so much political activity going on. You had the sense that it was just going to go on like this.

I imagine people in the Eastern block had this feeling too, thinking at some point, “How would this ever change?” And if one reminds oneself how that felt like, then the feeling when you wake up in the morning and you’re not quite sure what’s going to happen - that’s quite a good feeling.

A.F.: In the *Restless Supermarket* you not only mention the fall of the Berlin Wall but you also juxtapose the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of apartheid. Also in your earlier work you frequently touch on the parallels between the two totalitarian systems and their collapses in the late eighties, early nineties. Does that give you a wider perspective or more critical distance to your own history as a South African and to the political happenings under apartheid and the transition in South Africa?

I.V.: Yes, I think there are analogues. I think that the nature of South African society, the political system in South African history, has always been connected with the wider global system. The Soviet Union had a particular prominence in my own experience of our recent history: the sense under which the national party created this monstrous version of communism as a way of justifying their own system; and, ironically, the similarities between the two systems, how they finally were, in fact, parallel in many ways, in terms of how they functioned as more or less totalitarian systems.

I think the connection between the final collapse of the Soviet block and the collapse of apartheid are clearly connected politically. The one wouldn’t have happened without the other. It’s quite extraordinary how closely tied they were. For me, I guess, it’s a way of seeing the South African situation in a broader context.

A.F.: What I find striking is that even now, fourteen years after apartheid, most White South Africans still haven’t set a foot into a township. I find it difficult to understand that even people claiming to be so liberal and to be so welcoming to a democratic, inclusive South Africa don’t seem to make an effort to visit their domestic workers or gardeners or just go and see what a township is really like. (In a way it’s actually not that different from East and West Germany just after the wall came down. Some people were curious and came to the other part of Germany to see and to visit relatives and friends. But then, there are also, still, many people who have such strong stereotypes and fixed borders in their minds about the other side and the other people that a huge amount of ignorance prevails.) However, I think it’s necessary to create a discourse and a space to cross these

borders, to communicate and to see that the people on the other side are, after all, just people and no aliens. How do you see the interaction of South Africans in contemporary society?

I.V.: What that reflects, what you are talking about, is the power of the past to go on shaping people's understanding of things. There is a huge legacy of fear, of entering black space. And that's what it is largely about – a legacy of absolute fear. I guess the sense that it was forbidden has carried over into the present, too. I think a lot is driven by fear. And the fact that South Africa is a dangerous place allows people to feel that they shouldn't make that effort because it would be reckless or it would be foolish to do that.

And you've touched on something important, which is that all the change we've been speaking about, in a way, has been flowing too much in one direction. That the parts of Johannesburg that have changed have been very largely the formerly white parts of the city that have had this influx of people and so the physical place has changed, the makeup of the population has changed, how it works has changed.

But you haven't had the flow of white suburbanites out into the townships. And there're certainly many townships in Johannesburg where you would feel like you're in the past. You'd feel very much like before in terms of what the place looks like. It's true that there have been huge strides of electrifying areas and improving them and so on. But still, the flow has been more or less in one direction. And that reflects the other divide I was talking about, which is between the rich and the poor. It's quite understandable to me that many really poor people would feel that nothing or not much has changed for them.

A.F.: What do you think was the biggest mistake of the transition?

I.V.: I think the biggest political catastrophe of the transition has been the Aids crime, the way Aids has been dealt with or not. It's not directly related to the transition – well in a way it is. I think that that's been the biggest political blunder of the previous government over the last two terms that Mbeki was president. I think in retrospect that will look like their biggest failure, the way they dealt or didn't deal with it.

Apart from that, it reflects a more general failure. The failure to adequately focus on the poor, which is reflected in all the imbalances that still exist in this society like the education system. The imbalances in the education system are still obscene after fourteen years of democracy. It is unforgivable to me that kids are still going to school under trees,

still going to schools with no electricity, with no libraries, with no books. That's just extraordinary to me.

It's the education; it's the health system...despite all the advances that have been made in those areas – what do failures reflect? Is it that there hasn't been enough attention paid to transforming the situation of the really poor? And, actually, I believe that a lot more could have been done if the economic policies would have been slightly different.

A.F.: Do you think a policy like affirmative action is helpful?

I.V.: I think that some policy like that was necessary. I don't think that it's particularly helpful any more. And it's also that so much of the affirmative action has suited the same people. The purpose of affirmative action was never to create billionaires out of individuals, to create a class of super-wealthy people who have benefited over and over and over from the same policy. It doesn't make sense to me at all. I think that even within its limitations that policy should have benefited a much larger group of people. Now, I think it's a positive hindrance; it's simply enriching people who already have the connections and the money to enrich themselves, who don't actually need help. But I don't feel that the policy itself was entirely unnecessary. I think some kind of mechanism for redressing the imbalance was necessary in the beginning. It certainly served its purpose not. Now, I think the focus should be to get more people into jobs and to create real economic opportunities for more people.

A.F.: ... and again, the base for that is education ...

I.V.: Yes, I think that should have been the focus. It should have been made a massive priority to transform the education system as fast as possible. And there's no question that huge numbers of people have been left behind. If you think about it, it's still possible for someone who was born in a democratic South Africa to have gone right through school and got the worst education you can imagine. We're talking about fourteen years – that's an entire education, an entire primary and secondary education. There's still a whole generation of people who missed out on a proper education. I think that's a huge failure.

A.F.: It's interesting to see how you reflect upon the social realities in your fictional work. Focusing on your style of writing, it has changed from more experimental writing,

at times labelled magic realist, to more realist and satirical texts. In *The Exploded View*, your character Egan reflects about his work with an architect and comes to the conclusion: “Let’s get real. Let’s have more realism at the planning stage. That’s what you need if you’re going to do your bit for reconciliation and development. Realism” (74–75). Is that what you have come to realise for yourself, have you “sobered up” and has this changed your style of writing?

I.V.: I would take this comment as kind of ironic statement about my own work. That’s clearly a joke about realism, there’s clearly a play on realism in the political sense and the literary sense. And I suppose I’m making a bit of an ironic joke about myself because my own practice has moved from a more fantastical version of things to something that’s a bit more recognisable and, in fact, into a kind of work, just recently, that’s quite rooted in documentary. I think that’s a process that happens with a lot of writers. For me when you’re younger and you’re starting out there’s just the tendency to be more experimental, to try things out, to feel that you should be trying to break the mould every time you write something. And as you go along, you understand that there are certain ways of writing that work because they’ve been tried and tested and there are certain modes that are going to communicate more directly to people.

I’ve tried, in my own development as a writer, not to cling to something that is going to define my style forever. *The Folly* was a fairly successful novel in my terms and so therefore I should go on writing in that style. But I must say that I haven’t closed off that other way of writing. For me it’s always been a case of having to find what you’re interested in and allowing the style that you looking for. So, I think that there might be certain things which I’m interested in exploring in the future that will be more suited to another way of writing that is not so realistic.

But on the whole I think it’s a fair comment that you made, which is that it so happens that my own particular interests moved from being very concerned with what could be imagined to being more concerned with what’s actually there or ready. And I think that’s probably the focus on a lot of political thought and a lot of social thought at the same time as being from what can be imagined to actually what has to be dealt with, what’s in front of you. So it’s a congruence.

I think it's a similar thing to what happened with a lot of East European writers, for instance. I keep going back to that, but in the heydays of the communist period it was necessary for writers in those systems to write in ways that would allow them to say things they couldn't say in a realistic way. And I think there is also the tendency to imagine more when you're living in an oppressing environment because your surviving reality is not that pleasant, so there is perhaps this tendency to imagine more, to invent more. When I was younger I was very concerned with that and now I'm not that concerned with it. Although, I must also say that I'm not a great fan of the strictly realist novel. I don't think it has much of a place any more in contemporary writing.

I suppose what I'm interested in is how to expand the possibilities of work that is nevertheless quite grounded in reality, that's dealing with things that can be observed and documented. In *Portrait with Keys*, for instance, although the individual elements of the book are quite closely based on observation and are documented in a quite realist way, the way in which the book is structured as a whole is not anything like a realist novel. So it's a way of trying to open up that form and see what other things can be done with that.

A.F.: You can find a similar structure in *The Exploded View*, which is also not written in the form of a chronological realist novel but is a composition of different, individual parts that, as you find out after some time, somehow connect and interlink.

I.V.: Yes, that still interests me more. It's the kind of writing that allows the reader to do more thinking. The strictly realist novel is a kind of path down which you have to go with the writer and when you get to the end you get to the end of the path and it's not really much room for manoeuvring within it.

A.F.: Do you feel that as a writer in South Africa that there is a certain pressure how to write about the recent past?

I.V.: I think there is the pressure not to deal with the past. I pick it up in all kinds of ways...I pick it up from certain reviewers, from what the readers say... a feeling that, you know, if you write a book about the apartheid period, people are not interested, they don't – there's a resistance to read about the past.

A.F.: About the recent past?

I.V.: Yes. I suppose there has been a little bit of writing about more distant history. Especially, there's a sort of Cape Town writing that deals with the era of slavery. Ivette Christiansë just recently wrote a book about that era.

I think people are probably more open to the distant past but if you talk about more recent apartheid past people are resistant to it. And I think I understand that, too. "Another book about apartheid – oh my God! Isn't there something else to write about?" But I think there's a balance to be struck there, too. I think it's important that writers do keep looking at that period.

I've said that very often before in interviews but I will say it again. I think some of the best books about apartheid will still be written. And that's purely because I see that in other literatures, in fact, when the past recedes the really good books get written because people have more perspective about those events and they have a broader context and more information and they have some critical distance from it and it becomes clearer what a particular historical period was about. So, there's no reason why writers shouldn't go on writing very good books about the apartheid period and perhaps create books about it. I mean I hope so. This sort of cutting off of the past and saying "No we mustn't write about it any more" is a very dangerous thing.

A.F.: I have a question, out of personal interest, concerning the recent outbreaks of xenophobia in the townships. What do you think, why is the anger of the poor people in South Africa directed against other Africans rather than against still privileged Whites or the new Black elite?

I.V.: This is a complicated thing. I think it's also so many different things. One of the things is that there's a continuity between this kind of violence – I mean the violence against foreigners and the general violence in South African society. I think it's not very helpful to split them off, I can understand why that happened, when this outburst of xenophobic violence happened. It was so strange and so repulsive that one would say this is an aberration; this is a completely crazy, inexplicable thing. That would be one's initial reaction. I guess that was my reaction. How can you explain this? But in a way I think it's more helpful to see it as part of a more general climate in which people solve their problems by violence. And if you think of it that way, the level of assault and violence, crime and murder in South Africa – in fact, most of that violence is directed against people that are close to the perpetrators. It's not directed against strangers. I mean it is to

a certain extent but, in fact, a huge amount of the violence is directed against people who are known to the person who commits the murder or the assault. It's against family members, against friends. In that context it makes more sense to me that people would turn against people who are in their neighbourhoods, who are running shops in their street. I think it is part of a general pattern, which is a very unhealthy complex of things, which is about violence almost against oneself. Achille Mbembe wrote a very powerful piece about what was being called xenophobia was in fact negrophobia – a kind of self-hatred. I think there is an aspect of that. It's about lashing out at the people that are close. And the people that are in a sense weaker than you are, the people that are more vulnerable – for a lot of people who are really living on the edge, who have very limited resources and very little real power, the people they can actually direct their anger against are the people that are more vulnerable. And who are those people? In South African society: it's women, it's children and it's foreigners. Foreigners are vulnerable, they're accessible, they're there and they're among the few people who are actually in a worse position than you are. They have less on a hold on the society, fewer rights, fewer people to help them, fewer resources they can mobilise to protect themselves. I think that must be part of the explanation. What do you think about it? How does it strike you?

A.F.: I agree with you that it's a whole complex of things, one that I cannot really grasp. I think that it is the easy or simple way to turn to the weaker parts of society, to your neighbourhood or family...

I.V.: ... and the foreigners in South Africa are often in a very very weak position because many of them are illegal, they've come into the country, they don't have proper papers. As one has seen, during the aftermath of all of this, these people have been treated terribly by the state as well. People have been sitting in these camps where their rights have been violated again. They haven't had proper protection. Many of these people have absolutely no resources of their own. I think that people who don't have a legal status are immediately incredibly vulnerable and then they don't have networks of people to protect them. They are so far from home and basically they are lost. There was, I think a sense, that you could hurt those people and rob them and assault them and drive them out of their communities and get away with it and so people took out their own resentments and anger on those people.

A.F.: I also think that the apartheid state exercised such brutal power and violence over black people, treated them as people of sub-standard, and managed to break their self-dignity and authority over themselves and over their belongings, their place. The apartheid state, I think, put such immense physical and psychological violence on peoples' minds and spirits that it created a feeling of inferiority and loss of authority over one's own life. One of the ways, then, people could still play out some authority was by turning onto the weaker parts of their community or family, as you've just said. And I suppose these kinds of feelings, these perverse power structures and these structures of fear and utter disempowerment that resulted in a violation of the weaker parts of one's community stay with people. It will take a huge amount of time to get over these mechanisms, these, by now inherited structures. And to many, things haven't really changed; they still live in utter poverty with no prospects.

I.V.: I think that's true, that's very much the case. It's a history and a kind of politics that is built around exclusion as well. South African politics has nearly almost always worked that way. And this immediate period of the transition that we were talking about earlier, is the hopeful period of the Rainbow Nation, of the New South Africa. It's a kind of brief window where suddenly it becomes possible to think inclusively, suddenly it becomes about everybody, it's not about excluding people, it's about including people and everybody feels part of it and there's a wonderful euphoric moment. It's almost as if the politics has turned tipsy-turby. Suddenly it's about inclusion, about feeling welcome, about saying the country is for all of us, everybody is welcome. And then it switches back to, in fact, what has always been the norm, which is, it's about "us" and "them," it's about who's in and who's out. Our politics have always worked that way. Politics are conquest from the beginning, fading over into the colonial period, which is very much about excluding certain people and allowing certain people inside the status and keeping people out. And then there's apartheid, which takes it all to an extreme point of exclusion. So it's not surprising in a way that everybody has absorbed those ways of thinking. It goes back to your point about the one-way flow. Why do people still feel that they are so powerfully excluded from certain physical spaces? Our whole history has been about that, thinking in these categories and the primary category is never the open inclusive one, it's always the exclusive one.

A.F.: Who is your proofreader? Do you have a proofreader?

I.V.: Not really, no. I do my own proofreading, generally. Well, I always proofread my own books if I can but I've got quite some good work from different people, people who have handled the books in publishing houses. I never think they're good enough. I don't have one person who does that for me. I'm very obsessive about that so I tend to do it myself.

A.F.: Can you see certain similarities between you and your characters?

I.V.: Well, of course. I have all their good qualities and none of the bad qualities.

A.F.: Thank you.

The following interview with Zakes Mda was conducted over the phone on 24 April 2009.

A.F.: In *The Heart of Redness* you deal with the colonial encounter of the British and the amaXhosa community in the nineteenth century. The novel challenges the linear sense of time by moving freely between the past and the present to the effect that at times the past and present selves seem to become one. There is one instance when Qukezwa nostalgically looks back to the times before the colonial encounter when she stands along with Nonquawuse at the river seeing visions in the water. Furthermore, in your keynote address “The Pink Mountain: Landscapes and the Conception of a Literature of Public Action” for the conference in Vermont, you talk about the *domaine perdu* – the myth that compels one to return to one’s home. What is your understanding of nostalgia?

Z.M.: What is my understanding of nostalgia? It’s the ordinary definition that you have, namely a longing for some past event.

A.F.: In nostalgia theory there is a discussion whether nostalgia is limited to societies that follow a linear time structure. This view would exclude the abaThwa and the Xhosa community from the feeling of nostalgia. What is your opinion about that?

Z.M.: I’ve never thought of it that way. Nostalgia involves time in whatever sense but it involves space as well. Time and space and these may or may not be linear but as long as time and space and longing are involved I see that as nostalgia.

A.F.: Would you see nostalgia as a Western phenomenon?

Z.M.: No, it is human, I mean, rather than Western or African. I believe that human beings whoever they are will from time to time long for what they used to know. Whether they knew it personally or whether it’s something that is part of historical memory. In other words not something that they experienced personally but it’s part of historical memory. That is why sometimes a people they have nostalgia for a period in which they themselves personally never lived. Some period and place, which is part of what you will call historical memory.

A.F.: In a lecture you gave at the University of York you said that, “[m]emory is vital to identity. Memory loss leads to loss of identity, because who we are is fundamentally linked to memory” (2002, 280). Can you elaborate a bit more on the relation between memory and identity? I’m particularly interested in what you understand by memory: are you referring to an individual experienced past that is or is not being remembered or are you implying a kind of cultural memory – a memory of events not necessarily experienced first-hand but transmitted through storytelling over centuries?

Z.M.: Memory is both whether it is historical or whether it is personal memory which comes from an individual experience. We are the sum total of what we are and who we are. I mean our identity is the sum total of our experience as human beings and that’s what makes us who we are. But then it goes further than just our personal memory because our historical memory has got a duty to our identity and will continue to. Because the past is always a strong presence in our present whether we like it or not.

A.F.: In your paper on the pink mountain you elaborate upon the association of the natural environment with backwardness as a consequence of racism. In addition, there seems to be the tendency to equate traditions with the past and modernisation and technology with the present and the future. What is your view on the association of traditions and customs with the past?

Z.M.: Well, tradition, of course, may include modernisation. All it means to me is what has been past or continues to be past from previous generations. I mean the culture is (merely) how people live and how people deal with their environment and when they do that, of course, there are tools that they use to deal with their environment. And when these are passed from one generation to another they don’t stay in their original state. Because culture is dynamic, of course, it will always change in order to meet the demands of the present.

That is what tradition is all about. In other words I don’t see it as something that is static. I see it as something that is dynamic, that will change all the time to meet the needs of the present, and the present may include therefore technology. And the past actually may include technologies of the past and those are part of tradition.

A.F.: Your novels variously deal with the past. Especially *The Heart of Redness* and *The Madonna of Excelsior* take up historical facts and re-tell or re-imagine the “popular” past from different perspectives and thus give a more complex picture of the past. What is your opinion, how is history being dealt with in South Africa? Has the new government contributed to a more complex history recording, one that includes the different stories and perspectives of past events and that supersedes the rather one-dimensional version of colonialism and apartheid?

Z.M.: Well, I don’t know about that. I’m a novelist, you know, I write novels and I write from imagination. But it so happens that sometimes I use historical topics in order to create fiction that is located in history. In *The Heart of Redness*, for instance, my main sources are two. One is history as written by an historian called Peires. My second source is the oral tradition; history as transmitted from generation to generation. So I take the two types of histories together, you know, and then locate my fiction within that history. I create my fictional world based on those histories be they history as recorded by historians or history as recorded by the oral tradition as passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. To read both of those histories is important and both modes of history are of equal value. I don’t take one above the other.

A.F.: Do you feel that, as a writer in South Africa today there is a certain pressure how to write about the recent past?

Z.M.: Well, I don’t believe in prescriptions that writers should be encouraged to do this or that. The writer is an artist, is a creator in his or her own right and the writer writes what she or he wants to write about. Some writers may not have any attachment to the past. They will want to write about the present. That is legitimate enough for them to do that. Some writers will want to write fiction for their own sake, for entertainment’s sake and nothing else and that is legitimate. Some writers will want to draw from memories or the past, from history and so on and that is legitimate. I mean a writer will not all do the same thing. Writers will do what each writer wants to do. There cannot be any prescriptions that writers must do this or that. Writers in South Africa must do anything they want to do. Why should there be pressure in South Africa and not anywhere else? I’ve been living in America for many years; I wouldn’t have anybody who says a writer in America must write about this or that. They write about anything they want to write about. Why would

that be different anywhere else in the world? And who would put that pressure on any writer in fact? I don't know anything about the pressure in South Africa, you see. I live there as well, I go there every year and so on and I wouldn't see anybody putting pressure on anybody, you know. I just see them create in a free environment and create what they want to create.

A.F.: One of the major criticisms against the TRC was that it created a feeling of closure and hence has been contributing to forgetting the past. What is your opinion upon that?

Z.M.: The TRC they don't put pressure on anybody to do anything. People do what they want to do and if you look at the theatre of South Africa and the literature of South Africa you'll see what I'm talking about. In any situation, of course, there will be trends, you know. In the same way in this country there will be a trend where there is this popular mode at this time and many artists follow that and then a different popular mode and so on. And trends and schools of thought and so on is what happens in the arts anywhere in the world. And that's what happens in South Africa as well.

I'm not afraid. There could never be national amnesia. I mean that would never happen because the people have memory and people have recorded what has happened in their day-to-day life and they continue to do so. So, even if anybody could try to make people forget about the past, I mean, the people will not forget.

A.F.: You've spent about 30 years in exile if I'm not mistaken...

Z.M.: ... something like that.

A.F.: ... and most of that time you've lived in Lesotho...

Z.M.: ... which is just like being in South Africa, I mean culturally, except that it was a different government which was not apartheid government. But culturally Lesotho is the same as South Africa.

A.F.: What does home mean to you? Where do you feel at home?

Z.M.: I'm at home everywhere, I mean I'm a South African, you know, I'm a South African, I was born there, I'm a citizen of South Africa, I go to South Africa all the time, I work with South Africans. I'm an activist in South Africa. I work with communities in South Africa for community development. So, that's home. But here also where I live, my wife is here, my children are here - it is home as well. Why should I only have one home? I can be anywhere in the world, I carry my South Africa with me, it's inside me.

That's why my novels, if you look at my novels they are written all over the world. Most of them, *The Madonna of Excelsior* was written when I was in France and in the Netherlands; *Ways of Dying* was written when I was in America, all of it, and so on. But they all are about South Africa. Why – because I don't need to be physically in South Africa because I carry South Africa with me.

A.F.: Do you think that your exile experience, and hence your distanced perspective on South Africa, has influenced your view on South Africa? Would you say that you have certain opinions or ideas about South Africa which are likely to have developed because you had (and still have) an outside position?

Z.M.: I found that distance was very useful to me although, of course, actually distance is not really distance in that I was living in Lesotho interacting with South Africans in Lesotho – culturally being in South Africa. Just politically I was not in South Africa. So there was not much difference there and one couldn't really talk of distance in that sense. But distance in whatever sense, of course, was helpful because it actually did help me to write about South Africa in a much more metaphoric sense, in a much more figurative sense rather than to be literal.

A.F.: In other interviews you've stated your similarities to your protagonist Camagu. When you first came back to South Africa after longer periods in Switzerland or the US, did you encounter your cultural traditions anew when you came back to South Africa?

Z.M.: No, no no, I mean, actually, when you live for a long time from South Africa you tend to appreciate South Africa even more and you appreciate your culture and your tradition even more. That is why, for instance, when Camagu comes back he is much more appreciative of his culture, even more than the people who are there. In the novel, for instance, when the snake comes into his room and the local Xhosa people want to kill

it then he stops that because that's his totem, a snake and he's much more appreciative. He's the one in fact ... I don't see how he was alienated from his cultural identity. Actually, my intention was to show the opposite. For instance, the woman who's the schoolteacher in the village, who's proud of America – and she was only in America for a few months – she condemns some aspects of the culture, she condemns the traditional dancing and Camagu defends that because he appreciates that culture. So I don't see how he comes to be culturally alienated? I think he comes as being much more appreciative of his culture than some of those who are inside and who are trying to move away from it because of what they think ... and that they are civilised by so doing. Although I don't remember some aspects of that novel. I wrote it many years ago but I don't remember any instance where I can say he is alienated from his cultural identity.

He loves his culture even more than those people who are there. And he corrects people who are there all the time. He corrects that woman schoolteacher, he corrects the white man who owns the shop there on paternalism, on top-down kind of development that he's doing there without consulting the people or without having the people themselves being part of their own development and so on.

What I remember in the novel is that in fact even though he spent 30 years in the US he comes back and is not alienated from his culture. He finds people in his country who are alienated from their culture because they say they are being civilised by so doing.

A.F.: Let's shift to your successive novel *The Whale Caller*. When I read the title *The Whale Caller* I first thought of Maori culture and their rich mythologies of whales which you also mention in that novel. I'm not aware of any such myths in any South African culture...

Z.M.: ... well I don't know them either. But there are whales in South Africa and they have always been there. They are the same one's you will find in Australia and New Zealand– the southern white whales they are in South Africa as well. In *The Whale Caller* I'm talking about the Khoikhoi people and what they need to do with whales long before the white people came. That's for real that's not just for my imagination. In *The Whale Caller* I write about the Khoikhoi people how they used to feast on the whales, how they used whale bones to build their houses or furniture and so on. That's how it happened. In *The Whale Caller* I draw from the oral tradition of the aboriginal people in their relationship to the whales.

A.F.: How did you come across Aboriginals?

Z.M.: That I came across when I was in Australia and I was fascinated by that and because I'm an artist I use anything from anywhere and I'm not restricted by anything. I'm a member of the human race and if I find something interesting somewhere and it works for me as an artist I use it. And nobody's gonna question me about it. In that novel I've also written about the shark callers from those islands – I just forget the islands... They rattle to call sharks in order to kill them. I write about that culture as well. The Whale Caller is aware of those cultures, and he learns something from them as well. In order to deal with whales in his own environment, he also draws from those indigenous cultures.

A.F.: When you wrote theatre plays, they served an urgent and direct purpose: to communicate with the very people. In your Vermont paper you say that your literature is a literature of public action, one that merges your community activism with your creation of literature. Does that mean that you have an intention in mind – as community activism would imply – especially when you write about the past, traditions, myths and the encounter with globalisation and neocolonialism?

Z.M.: No no no. It happened naturally because I myself grew up as an activist, as a community activist. So my writing of a novel became part of public action and sometimes public action came as a result of a novel that I was writing. In other words, once I'm writing the novel I will be involved in the issues in that community. And then I will be an activist in a quarrel, correcting those issues. So it was not an intention in the beginning that my creation of that literature should have that function. When I look back I see that for almost every novel that I created some public actions resulted or it was because of being involved in some public action that a story came into being. Then I wrote a novel.

A.F.: You also created theatre-for-development plays...

Z.M.: Theatre-for-development is something completely different from novels. As a novelist you write a novel because you have a story to tell and you are telling that story. Theatre-for-development is a methodology for rural development or for community development. In other words you create theatre precisely because there are issues that the

theatre must deal with. I don't write novels because there are issues, you know, I write novels because there is a story to tell. And then of course, since my story is rooted in a particular place my character will interrupt with that place. They will interrupt with their environment. And someone in the environment will include politics; it will be a political environment in that play. But I don't begin by having issues that I want to address in a novel. I begin by "Hey I'm fascinated by this story and I want to tell this story" and since the story is about human beings and human beings are in conflict and some of that conflict will involve them in their social environment. Some of that conflict will involve them in their political environment. Then issues emerge organically from the process of the storytelling. Theatre-for-development does not work like that. Theatre-for-development – the theatre company goes into the community to deal with issues and only to use theatre as a vehicle of addressing those issues. Theatre-for-Development only exists because people have issues.

A.F.: Concerning contemporary South African society, how do you evaluate the social developments over the past 16-18 years? And what do you think about the statement that there has been a major shift from a race-based towards a class-based society; a new segregation justified by criminality and the need to secure one's private and public life?

Z.M.: That will always be there in a capitalist country. So it's there in South Africa as well. That's the nature of capitalism and there will always be classes. So that's what we have but that does not mean that racial divisions are no longer there because it's only been sixteen years since the end of apartheid. So we still have a racialised situation and I think it will continue to be there for quite some time. But, of course, we also have a class-based situation. And sometimes a racialised class-based situation as well.

A.F.: There have just been elections in South Africa and there has been a major split within the ANC. A new party, COPE, has been formed to depart from the ANC. Both share the same tradition of the struggle for liberation. Do you think COPE is a serious alternative to the ANC's monopoly, one that will take serious and urgent issues of the poor closer to their hearts? Or is it just one more party that cares for their own enrichment?

Z.M.: Not at this point. As you just said the ANC has won with quite a big majority so COPE does not pose a serious threat. Well, but you must also understand that COPE was only founded a few months ago – for each to have got about 10 or 12 % they have done very well taking into account that it is such a young party.

The ANC is very much entrenched in South Africa. The people are associated with their liberation; this is an organisation that has brought us this liberation. So there is that sentimental attachment to the ANC and that will remain for quite some time until, of course, we have future generations who do not have that personal memory of the ANC, who just see it as any other political party and will want it to account as any other political party. But with this electorate and the next one you will find change as the older generations faded out of the scene, and new generations come into being and take over and they will look at the political situation in a much more practical manner: “Does this party meet our needs, does it do what it promises to do for the people or not” rather than “is this a party that brought us the freedom that we enjoy today.” That won’t be a big factor any more. But at this moment it is a very big factor.

A.F.: Thank you.

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