Foregrounding Boundaries Between Self and Other in South Africa: A Comparative Analysis of *The Lostness of Alice*, *The Good Doctor* and *Lost Ground*

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Summary

The article considers the descendants of the original white settlers' experience of space and place in terms of the perception of self and other as represented by the male protagonists who feature in three comparatively under-read novels of the post-apartheid period: John Conyngham's *The Lostness of Alice* (1998), Damon Galgut's *The Good Doctor* (2003) and Michiel Heyns's *Lost Ground* (2011). After the election of a black-majority government, many white South African men feel that they can no longer negotiate a place that supplies them with a stable and secure sense of self. The novels' three subjects, who exemplify the psychological condition of these men, endeavour to discover who they are and where they belong. Through the traversal of boundaries, the protagonists make connections with the outside world and the different other. The authors, likewise, stretch boundaries by implementing the narrative frame of the detective novel. To foreground the characters' search for selfhood, belonging and meaning, reference is made in the article to aspects of identity formation in relation to the other, such as place, and the expansion of place by the navigation of boundaries.

Opsomming

Die artikel beskou die blanke setlaarafstammelinge se ervaring van ruimte en plek in terme van die persepsie van self en ander soos verteenwoordig deur die manlike protagoniste wat figureer in drie relatief-onbekende romans van die post-apartheids-periode: John Conyngham se The Lostness of Alice (1998), Damon Galgut se The Good Doctor (2003) en Michiel Heyns se Lost Ground (2011). Na die verkiesing van 'n swart meerderheidsregering, voel baie blanke Suid-Afrikaanse mans dat hulle nie meer 'n plek het wat hulle 'n stabiele en veilige gevoel van self bied nie. Die romans se drie hoofkarakters, wat die geestelike toestand van hierdie mans vergestalt, probeer om uit te vind wie hulle is en waar hulle behoort. Die protagoniste maak konneksies met die buitewêreld en die ander deur grensvlakke oor te steek. Die outeurs strek ook grense deur die narratiewe raamwerk van speurverhale te imple-menteer. Om die karakters se soeke na selfstandigheid, behorendheid en betekenis te beklemtoon, word daar in die artikel verwys na aspekte van identiteitsvorming in verhouding tot die ander, soos plek en die uitbreiding van plek deur die verkenning van grense.

Introduction

> 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.
>
> (Mda 2000: 157)

This study traces and evaluates the impact of colonisation and apartheid on the white male South African consciousness as portrayed in novels by three South African writers: John Conyngham's *The Lostness of Alice* (1998), Damon Galgut's *The Good Doctor* (2003) and Michiel Heyns's *Lost Ground* (2011). It is argued that the colonisation of Africa and apartheid in South Africa have left a legacy of suspicion and resentment that lives on in the present. After having had to surrender their power over the land with the electoral victory of the African National Congress in 1994, many of the former settlers doubt who they are and where they belong. No longer able to configure their subjectivity as "master of the estate" (McEwan 1996: 24) (estate denoting the country) and in opposition to others, they are haunted by the impermanence of their position. In an attempt to find permanence, they expand place by crossing geographical boundaries and exploring different locations. The encounter with the other may bring about an awareness of self and a sense of accountability for the past.

   Although the original colonisers' experience of alienation and ambivalence about apartheid has been widely discussed by a number of South African authors,[1] the significance of this experience concerning white South African male identity has not been explored in a comparative study of the three novels mentioned above. For this reason, reference is made to key aspects of identity formation, such as the postcolonial and postmodern person's preoccupation with place and the expansion of place by the navigation of boundaries, which gives rise to a confrontation with the other. The authors' implementation of the detective narrative framework to underscore the settlers' search for selfhood, belonging and meaning is also investigated. The focus of the article will be on the former settlers' sense of identity and the perception of their position and place in the new South Africa, the African continent as a whole as well as in Europe, and in relation to the different other. The article is structured around a discussion of the narrative framework of the novels and significant aspects of identity formation, namely, travel and boundaries and difference and the other.

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1.   See Rita Barnard's *Apartheid and Beyond* (2007), Shaun McEwan's "Identity, Gender and Mediation" (1996), Melissa E. Steyn's *Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used To Be* (2001), Hein Viljoen's and Chris N. van der Merwe's *Story-scapes* (2004) and *Beyond the Threshold* (2007).

The Detective/Mystery Novel

Conyngham, Galgut and Heyns all invoke the genre of the detective novel as a frame to emphasise the exploration of identity. The protagonists in *The Lostness of Alice*, *The Good Doctor* and *Lost Ground* play the role of detective at one time or another. An investigator's position as loner and outsider whose inquiries take him to novel surroundings bears similarities to that of the former settlers in Africa who navigated boundaries, familiarised themselves with unknown locations and made contact with others.[2]

Detective fiction can generally be classified as cosy or hard-boiled (Wiehardt 2017). The cosy whodunit is situated in a closed setting, for example a drawing-room, library or small village. The plot takes precedence over the characters' emotions, as dwelling on temperament and issues of identity creation distracts readers from the facts and impedes the actional flow. Neither the fictional characters nor the readers are singularly distressed by the murder; it is not personally threatening. Conversely, in hard-boiled detective fiction, a sense of reality and inclusivity permeates the text. The crime strikes home and the readers empathise with the victim and the bereaved. In the light of South Africa's violent history, the detective genre adheres to the hard-boiled format.

Except for the relatively small setting of a suburb or a town that characterises the cosy whodunit, the three novels under discussion follow the format of hard-boiled detective fiction. In all three, a person goes missing and/or is killed. In *The Lostness of Alice* (*LA*), a sixteen-year old girl, Alice Walker, leaves her parents' home in what was once an exclusively white suburb in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, never to return. In *The Good Doctor*, Tehogo, a hospital orderly who still carries the baggage of the past with him, and the young and idealistic Dr Laurence Waters, who sees only the possibilities of the future, are abducted at different stages from the hospital where they work. In *Lost Ground*, the protagonist's cousin, Desirée Williams, is presumably killed by her husband of mixed race. The fictitious Midlands town of Bushmansburg from which Alice (*LA*) disappears, the semi-deserted hospital from which Tehogo and Laurence (*GD*) vanish, and the backwater town in the Little Karoo where Desirée (*LG*) meets her end are not placid pastoral villages where one aberrant individual upsets the social order for a while before the detective exposes the criminal and the police remove him/her from society. In fact, the novels show little trust in law enforcement services and those in power, but rather question an aspect of law or justice. For instance, the narrator of *The Lostness of Alice,* Christopher Jameson, infers from reading his girlfriend's diary that she has betrayed him with a police detective.

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

Perchance in a misguided attempt to exact revenge on the police, Chris composes an anonymous letter in which he claims to know where Alice's body is buried, so sending the police on a wild-goose chase. Frank, from *The Good Doctor*, refers to his time spent in the army as "the bad old days" (Galgut 2003: 100). This was a period in his life when he assisted in the "calculated demolition of nerves and flesh" (66). In *Lost Ground*, corrupt white detectives, insecure about their own status in a democratic South Africa, plant evidence to incriminate the black police chief, Hector Williams. Peter Jacobs, a journalistic detective who is the narrator-focaliser of the novel, establishes Hector's innocence, but then suspects Desirée's two suitors of the crime, one of which is Hector's second in command. Since the police themselves may be complicit in the crime, social upheaval is not neutralised and order is not reinstated.

Whereas the cosy whodunit's detective observes a strict moral code, the hardboiled detective is not immune to social pressures and may not only become cynical but also perform questionable acts. After Christopher Jameson (*LA*) has left South Africa, he fails to orientate himself in Europe and establish meaningful interaction there. After assaulting a Marrakeshian hustler who tries to rob another girlfriend of his, the detective-turned-criminal flees to Gibraltar. In Gibraltar Chris feels that he has found people with whom he belongs and a place where he can be at home – at least for a while. *The Good Doctor*'s Frank Eloff has accepted a position at a poorly-funded and run-down hospital in one of South Africa's former homelands (created by the apartheid government) with very few patients and amenities. In this no-man's land where nothing ostensibly changes, the doctor – who questions his sense of self and the meaning of his existence in the new South Africa – feels that he can hold on to old certainties and hopefully remain unchanged. Peter Jacobs, the speaking subject of *Lost Ground*, leaves South Africa in an attempt to discover his roots elsewhere. Struggling to adapt to British society, Peter returns to Alfredville, a fictitious rural town in the Klein Karoo where he was raised. Peter, however, persuades himself that he has come home to do research for a state of the nation feature article that he intends to write on Desirée's murder, and in which he will address communal and racial attitudes in the new South Africa (Lenz 2017: 2).

It is evident that in the three novels the detective is a disillusioned and despairing individual who cannot configure his individuality in terms of a stable space, in particular a South African one. Christopher Jameson (*LA*) distrusts his South African girlfriend (Sally), and beats a man until the man no longer moves. Frank Eloff (*GD*) detects a "dark brother" (Galgut 2003: 162) and a "dark stranger" (175) in his head, sleeps with his roommate's girlfriend, and fantasises about inflicting violence on his roommate's "soft and pale and vulnerable" (161) body. Peter Jacobs (*LG*) does not accept responsibility for his choices and for others. He denies that he derives his identity from the people around him and pays little heed to his own emotions.

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This is why he is able to desert the person who loves him (Bennie), and unjustly accuses the latter of killing Desirée.

In contrast to the intelligent and intuitive super-sleuths of the cosy whodunit, who are persons of exceptional acuity and accomplishment and do not doubt themselves or their place in the world (Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple are examples), the somewhat unimagin-ative, hardworking middle-class investigators of the hard-boiled genre are ordinary people who are not superior to the readers. Readers may identify with these investigators who form relationships, acquire histories, and whose personal flaws (for example immaturity, emotional ineptness, social isolation, alcohol abuse and drug dependency) make them all the more human. Readers recognise themselves in such persons and can follow them as equals, share in their discoveries, and match wits with them in an attempt to find the key to the puzzle before the detectives do. Often the sleuths – in the same way as the readers do – earn a living by other means than being detectives, and become investigators only by force of circumstance. Sally (*LA*) works as a reporter for *The Natal Times* and so becomes entangled in the case. Chris works on Sally's father's farm and Frank (*GD*) at a hospital. Peter (*LG*) is a freelance journalist who plans on writing a newspaper article for *The Independent*. Besides being amateur extra-legal detectives, the characters may be classified as anti-detectives in that they misinterpret evidence and make critical mistakes. Sally, for instance, blames the Movement for Azanian Liberation for Alice's disappearance, and an innocent man pays with his life. Frank believes Colonel Moller, his superior during the Namibian-Angolan War (1966-1990), has a hand in Frank's mistress's going missing. Frank does not find Maria (she returns by herself), and he can also not locate Laurence, his roommate and colleague. In *Lost Ground*, Peter never catches the culprit; the latter confesses. The guilty party is not arrested and the detective does not succeed in curbing social disquiet. Definitive answers are absent from all three texts and their authors leave readers with uncertainty and questions. Notwithstanding this, the emphasis in these novels is not on unscrambling the puzzle, but on foregrounding the detectives' feelings and the evolution of their characters during the pursuit of a culprit. Hence, the investigation of the crime runs parallel to an exploration of the own identity.

Identity and Place

Identity denotes the characteristics and qualities, attitudes and attributes, combined with the life experiences that make a person or a group of people feel different from others; in other words, unique. Hein Viljoen and Chris van der Merwe (2004: 177) posit that identity is a social construct founded on the premise of belonging to a certain group of people who live within the same *Umwelt* (environment) and share the same values and belief systems. The

features that people have in common with others, such as language, customs and religion, provide them with a frame of reference and give meaning to their existence.

Identity may be comprehended in two ways. As per the first interpretation, the past endows us with a sense of who we are. Antonio Gramsci (1988: 326) avers that we are a "précis of the past", and Stuart Hall (1994: 394) that we are "the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past." Consistent with this quintessentially static conception of identity, the dis-course of self and other need not be evaluated, nor should we do introspection and alter our perceptions. A second interpretation of identity proposes that identity is in a dynamic and perpetual state of formation. When individuals accept others' equal right to existence, interact and collaborate with them, and recognise them as an extension of the self – that is, when people discover the other in the self – they are able to make a psychological adjustment and reject the dualisms on which their self-concepts have formerly been founded. The old identity is re-interpreted or, in some cases, deconstructed and a new cross-cultural subjectivity emerges. Hence, the traditional view of identity as a fixed and static essence, an "already accomplished fact" (Hall 1994: 392), is superseded by that of identity as being in flux, dynamic and shifting.

The elements of identity, as well as our personal enactment of them, are influenced by hegemonic ideologies. During the rule of the National Party in South Africa (1948-1994), the master narrative of colonialism and apartheid turned whiteness into an ideological project on which to model a monologic racial and cultural identity. The state enforced white supremacy on the grounds that this race purportedly brought civilisation, progress and develop-ment, in addition to Christianity, to Africa. The indigenes were deemed an extension of nature, the inverse of culture and civilisation. They were denied a stable sense of self by being continually ejected and displaced.

Since the termination of white rule, far-reaching changes have taken place in South Africa. Black elite and middle classes have emerged and "invaded" the once exclusively white residential areas. Those who before defined themselves in disassociation from other racial groups had to relinquish their authority and dominance, power and privilege. Suddenly second-class citizens or, worse, strangers in the country of their birth – a country that has since turned into an ambiguous and contradictory space – whites frequently contend with a dramatically altered reality that "does not support, and indeed is hostile to, many of the taken-for-granted assumptions of superiority and entitlement" (Steyn 2001: 152). Being white could mean that "one is a has-been, discredited, untrusted … whiteness is a discard", as Melissa Steyn (91) phrases it. What used to be an internal and immutable essence, coherent and constant, has become decentred and unfixed. To wit, the postmodern condition of identity as "a process of interaction with various geographical, social and cultural contexts over a period of time" (Wenzel 2008: 143) – this

multimodality countering the conceptualisation of identity as static and stable – has caught up with a large margin of South Africa's white population.

While Christopher in *The Lostness of Alice* remains entrapped within the division between self and other and avoids taking responsibility for who he is in respect of others, Frank (*GD*) and Peter (*LG*), to a lesser and greater degree, may be categorised as postmodern subjects. Their identities are not static but dynamic: becoming instead of being. Frank, whose existence is thrown into disarray by the arrival of a man who has come to the hospital to do his internship, describes himself and Dr Laurence Waters as two strands in a rope: "We were twined together in a tension that united us; we were different to each other, though it was in our nature to be joined and woven in this way." (Galgut 2003: 170) In other words, Frank acknowledges Laurence as an extension of himself and derives his identity from him. After Laurence's disappearance, Frank is willing to exchange his life for the intern's. The older doctor anticipates that in his final moments he would exhibit real courage and transform himself by shaping his subjectivity along new, less self-serving lines (201-202). It follows that Frank's involvement with another person makes him reassess his point of view and breach psychological frontiers. Unlike Frank, *Lost Ground*'s Peter Jacobs does not assume another person's identity, but avails himself of "multiple choices of self-definition" (Lenz 2017: 9). When Peter leaves South Africa in 1988, after writing his matriculation examination, and goes to study at the University of Sussex, his sense of self is no longer confined to one place, but delineates itself in a new geographical, social and cultural context (Wenzel 2008: 143). When he returns 22 years later to write a story for a British newspaper, Peter first introduces himself as a journalist, but later imagines himself to be a detective. Peter's false accusations induce his best friend to shoot himself, and the detective, in effect, becomes a murderer. Who the character is is not only a matter of "being" – something already existing and part of the past – but also of "becoming". His fluid and global personality constructs itself in difference, rather than in essence (Ashcroft et al 1998: 167), and realises itself in various places.

Places animate our imagination and feelings, and are also cultural and psychological points of orientation from which to view our position in the world, indicating where and with whom we belong (Wenzel 2008: 145). Like *Lost Ground*'s protagonist, we live our relationship to places in the company of other people. Place, consequently, is a collective phenomenon, the being-together of people in the same environment, and it encompasses people's thoughts and experiences. Ina Gräbe (2008: 174) explains that a specific locale may at first function as an objective background to a society but later acquire the qualities and characteristics of the people living there, reflecting their history and the particularities of their cultural beliefs. Places, therefore, are shaped and maintained by society, and the places we are in determine who we are. One may contend that, while human intervention defines places,

places also define humans; briefly put, a reciprocity exists between society and places (Wittenberg 1997: 129).

Traditionally, white South African men could delimit their place and identity on the grounds of land ownership and command over the "inferior" other, as Shaun McEwan (1996: 2) postulates. In the post-apartheid dispensation, political pressure for land reform imperils white men's role as owner and master. Without land, the narrators of the three novels stand outside the matrices of masterdom and patriarchy around which white South African male identity has customarily been constructed. The loss of a circumscribed place chips away at the essence of their being and those who are so dislodged experience an acute sense of loss – of home, of selfhood, and of certainty and safety.

In *The Lostness of Alice*, white people feel no longer welcome in the country of their birth but also do not have a home elsewhere. Watching one of his girlfriends sleep, Chris muses: "Do you know who I am? I'm one of the world's pariahs. A perpetrator of a crime against humanity." (Conyngham 1998: 110) Being a *labourer* on a farm and not its owner, he cannot lay claim to a rooted identity there (Lenz 2016: 7). Given that identity is frequently territorially delimited (Smit 2005: 16), the character cannot negotiate a place that supplies him with a stable sense of self. Chris's condition mirrors the white settlers' displacement and *Unheimlichkeit* among non-Western others now that "what [i]s good about the world is […] passing" (Conyngham interview with Blair 2003: 84-85) and "all the Alices [a]re fair game for the dark forces" (Conyngham 1998: 24). [3]

Because Chris cannot integrate into a truly African identity, and after Sally's supposed betrayal nothing ties him to the country, he embarks on journeys. During his stay in England and Spain, Chris intuits that although his ancestors may have come from Europe (Conyngham 1998: 143), he does not belong there. As "an outsider, a colonial" (95), he is a border figure in Europe, as alienated there as he is in South Africa. Regardless of where he goes, Chris cannot find a permanent home and remains disconnected from himself and others. All of Chris's relationships flounder: with Sally and later with Anna. Except for an Australian drinking buddy and a Jew who has visited South Africa and has fond memories of the country, Chris has no personal encounters overseas (104). He presumes that years of apartheid have cast white South Africans adrift (26), and sees himself as "lost as Alice" (108).

Like Chris, the protagonist of *The Good Doctor* does not have a place of his own. Dr Frank Eloff resides in a hospital room which he has to share with Dr Laurence Waters. María Jesús Cabarcos-Traseira (2002: 52) suggests that if the hospital represents South Africa, a country in crisis of which the social patient requires a "good" doctor to heal it, the room that the young and old

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3.   *Unheimlichkeit* literally means "not-at-home-ness". The figurative translation is "uncanniness".

doctors share within its walls exemplifies the enforced coexistence of different political and moral standpoints – hope and despair, redemption and failure – in the South African space. Comparable to the contrast in their personalities and outlook on life, the two doctors "replicate aspects of self and other" (Lenz & Wenzel 2016: 147). Dr Waters – the "unwanted usurper" (Galgut 2003: 42) – crowds Dr Eloff in his own room so that the latter no longer feels at home there. Nevertheless, after Laurence goes missing, Frank experiences a strange emptiness, as if his life has no purpose. He becomes "one of those aimless people who [are] coming and going, coming and going" (199), confined to a circular existence. So, when the superintendent of the hospital, Dr Ruth Ngema, is promoted and transferred to Pretoria, Frank is eager to move into her room: a place without memories. By reaching across boundaries, first in his search for Laurence and then by occupying the black woman's room and her position, the narrator may be said to articulate his identity along new lines. Despite the decline of the hospital and the fact that it may close in the near future, the doctor feels contented and that he has come into his own. He opens himself up to change as well as the prospect of the unknown and the unforeseen: "I know I won't be stuck here for ever; other places, other people will follow on." (215) Titlestad (2009: 112) avows that this "modest existential reorientation" gives the protagonist "a whole new sense of the future".

When Peter Jacobs's father (*LG*) sends his son to England, Peter loses the security of his family home in Alfredville, a town that may be taken to represent South Africa on a small scale. Because people's identity, to a large extent, is attached to the places that define them (Barnard 2007: 63), when Peter Jacobs emigrates, he can no longer associate his consciousness with place. "[T]he relation between identity and place is destabilised, so that the essence of his being becomes disoriented." (Lenz 2017: 9) Peter subsequently refers to himself as a "foreigner in two countries" (Heyns 2011: 237). In England he lives in a flat that belongs to his partner. When an interim accommodation, a flat cannot anchor people in their place of origin (Lenz 2017: 9) and does not supply sanctuary from the loneliness and alienation of the external world, even more so in new surroundings. Uprooted and estranged from his point of origin, Peter "persists in the uncertain position of the periphery where [he] participates without belonging" (9). Being neither here nor there, this postmodern subject comprises a condition of existential isolation and ostracism. Peter, akin to the protagonists of *The Lostness of Alice* and *The Good Doctor*, wavers on the margins between divergent spaces. Here he occupies a position of insubstantiality and peripherality – and experiences lostness in both.

Travel and Boundaries

Peter Jacobs's travels have situated him on the threshold of society – between boundaries. Homi Bhabha (1994: 4), with whom Viljoen, Lewis and Van der Merwe (2004: 17) concur, avers that thresholds are energising sites of cultural interaction, transition and potentiality where the personality expands and imaginative awakening occurs. Those who negotiate barriers by making connections with the outside world broaden the parameters of their experience and confront "the strange and disavowed aspects of the self" (Kostelac 2010: 59). Geographical and philosophical distance from familiar climes and contexts is a liberating and formative experience, often yielding self-revelation, internal change and spiritual renewal. The traversal of borders may also open one's eyes to South Africa's social and political inequities, culminating in a changed, more critical perspective on the country.

In an endeavour to escape their peripherality, reorient themselves in new milieux, and find identity and meaning, the novels' three narrators take to travelling and breaching boundaries. Chris (*LA*), whose consciousness is divided between two continents, escapes into the outside world and negotiates the spaces of Europe and the interior of Africa. Peter (*LG*) returns to Africa to elude his marginality and uncover a coherent and connected self in his hometown. The expansion of horizons by the navigation of predominantly psychological boundaries enables Frank (*GD*) to acquire insight into himself, as well as a sense of accountability toward others.

An integrated sense of self requires a sense of belonging – if not to a place, then to a person or persons (De Lange, Fincham, Hawthorne & Lothe 2008: xii). As indicated in the *Identity and Place* section, belonging originates from the values, belief systems and experiences people share with others in a specific location. Notwithstanding this, Chris, Frank and Peter refrain from reciprocally connecting with other people (albeit it only at the start in Frank's and Peter's cases). Throughout *The Lostness of Alice*, Chris uses various women for sexual gratification. Although he is in a relationship at the beginning and end of the novel, both relationships lack trust. Frank's marriage fails after his wife has found love with his best friend/business partner. Afterwards Frank constructs psychological borders around himself. He does not want to get involved when his mistress falls pregnant. He considers it an invasion of his privacy when Laurence moves into the hospital room with him, so infiltrating Frank's space. When Peter (*LG*) leaves the country in order to avoid military conscription, he forsakes his childhood friend, Bennie Nienaber, who has always carried a torch for Peter, and takes Peter's decision to leave as treachery. Upon Peter's return, Bennie reaches out emotionally, but Peter rebuffs him, which causes Bennie to shoot himself.

In summary, all three speaking subjects are without an attachment to people and places. They could be said to exist "in a strange twilight zone halfway between nothing and somewhere" (Galgut 2003: 34). Globality denotes

homelessness; serenity or salvation does not arise from travelling. Feeling lost, they experience feelings of alienation and *Unheimlichkeit*, and exemplify the psychological condition of white South Africans after the temporal frontier of apartheid has been bridged.

Difference and the Other

The protagonists experience lostness because they struggle to create a connection with others – principally the other. Christopher Gittings (1996: 6-7) maintains that the Western European psyche was founded on the assumption of the "white patriarchal construction of difference". As critics of colonial practices, Bhabha (1994: 162, 164) and Hall (1994: 396) recognise that difference operated as the decisive factor that separated the settlers from the indigenous peoples. Difference – "the effect of the other" – "was the repository of our fears and anxieties" about all that was alien, excessive and impossible to contain; in short, all that could unsettle the centre (Rutherford 1990: 10). The black people's presumed irrationality, immorality and the threat they embodied vindicated Europeans' appropriation of their land and silencing or subverting their history and culture. These "lesser people" were kept at a distance by being emptied out of spaces, either metaphorically or literally. In the words of Lenz and Wenzel (2016: 146), "Distance served to confirm and compound the others' foreign, fearful status", and acted as motivation for colonisation.

   Apart from this, the perception of European superiority directly influenced the institution of the policy of apartheid in South Africa (1948-1994) – a response to alterity which refused to recognise the equivalent humanity of others and predicated difference on racial qualification and classification. Whites delimited their distinctiveness against the difference of the other races: the self's whiteness against the other's ostensible "wildness" (De Kock 206: 176). The other provided a negative reference point for subjec-tivity, a kind of inverted self-image. Steven Thiele (1991: 184), in Taking a Sociological Approach to Europeanness (Whiteness) and Aboriginality (Blackness), proposes that "blackness and whiteness be understood as a pair …." Europeans "became whites only in parallel with their identification of those they colonised as blacks." Self and other are thus co-created, and the other's alleged lack of presence functions as the foil against which the self articulates itself as the "privileged site of presence" (Stratton 1990: 44).

   Nevertheless, when the self is shaped in opposition to others it has a detrimental effect on both (Lenz & Wenzel 2016: 146). What affects the one affects the other. Jean-Paul Sartre (1965: 28) submits that "the dehuman-ization of the oppressed … becomes the alienation of the oppressor". Shaun McEwan (1996: 28) adds that a consciousness (such as Christopher Jameson's (*LA*)) that will not engage with others on equal ground remains encumbered

by its own suppositions. A consciousness that is inherited from the past and not capable of transgressing boundaries that marginalise or exclude, stunts its own growth and limits its potential.

In the three texts, some of the characters' lack of affiliation with others reverberates with a similar affiliative lack between races. Characters, who make no attempt to move across the concrete and abstract lines of division between "us" and "them", express the essence of their being in keeping with the self-other axes of similarity and difference, imposed by imperialism and apartheid. Conversely, those who realise that they themselves are others among others, and make an effort to re-evaluate old conceptions about self and other, are able to look at others through different lenses and treat them as individuals. Those who establish a truly reciprocal understanding with others find their identity relieved of its historical constrictions and can achieve an integrated selfhood.

An example of a person who remains caught up in defunct discourses that deem the destruction of the other's distinctiveness as integral to the functioning of the self is Christopher Jameson. Because Chris subscribes to separateness, he pays scant attention to the existence of black people. Collectively blacks embody a hostile and fearsome presence, a peril to his and other whites' political-racial distinctiveness. Because the homeless person in the bush near the missing girl's house represents the racially inferior other to the predominantly white army troops, they deride and threaten to inflict violence on him. The rastaman must be guilty of the crime of which he is suspected, because he is black.

Whereas Conyngham does not allow any individual black character to play a significant role in *The Lostness of Alice*, Galgut does give prominence to African characters. At the beginning of *The Good Doctor*, the focaliser perceives of blacks in a stereotypical fashion: as inert and inefficient (Dr Ngema), or corrupt and criminal (Tehogo). Dr Frank Eloff feels that the orderly (Tehogo) should not even have a room in the same passage as him and Dr Laurence. As for his black mistress, Frank initially views her as an object to satisfy his sexual desires. The silence between him and Maria suits him (Lenz & Wenzel 2016: 149); he does not wish to connect with her on a personal level. Frank subconsciously regards himself as the centre, and does not pay attention to this voice from the periphery, nor does he enter into her life-world. Maria is Africa, the passive, female body,[4] while he is Europe. After Laurence vanishes, Frank gradually fathoms the absence of attachments in his life, and how "narrow and constricted" his life has been up to now (Galgut 2003: 91). The doctor's unfolding identity makes him reappraise discourses of self and other, and Maria becomes more than an object to satisfy

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4. For a description of the African continent, see Rebecca Stott's The Dark Continent: Africa as Female Body in Haggard's Adventure Fiction, in *Feminist Review*.

his physical needs. After she aborts a child (probably Frank's), his sense of obligation and responsibility toward the woman increases to "an obscure weight of guilt" (160), which testifies to the character's self-confrontation and personal growth. As the binaries collapse in terms of which white South African male subjectivity has previously been constructed, Frank, who has earlier aligned himself with the old South Africa, starts to relate to black South Africans in a more emphatic and humane way. He also notices similarities between himself and Tehogo. Discerning that the other is an extension of himself, the doctor feels more sympathetic toward the orderly. Frank finally understands that

> his complicity in or indifference to the injustices of the past has left an imprint on the present. It is this awareness of accountability towards the other and for the sins of the past, as well as intense self-appraisal, which leads to a revaluation of his place and purpose in the world and the reconstitution of his consciousness.
>
> (Lenz & Wenzel 2016: 134)

Even though Peter (*LG*), like Frank, at first keeps others at a distance and perpetuates gender and racial stereotypes, his reading of South Africa through racialised European tropes is gradually confounded by reality and he enters into the domain of the other. Peter acknowledges Nonyameko Mhlabeni (a Struggle veteran he has befriended in Alfredville) as an equal: her otherness no longer constitutes inferiority in his mind. In contrast to how Frank treats Maria, Peter listens to Nonyameko and connects with her. In the same way as Frank, Peter makes a psychological adjustment in terms of his outlook on cultural differences and the relationship between self and other. At the moment of Peter's greatest distress, he does not adhere to colonial notions of masculine self-definition which stipulate that a man be dominant and strong. When he grabs the black woman's hand to try and find solace, he refutes the stereotype of the other as foreign and fearful. Though this postmodern text steers clear of a neat and easy ending, the reader suspects that *Lost Ground*'s narrator will shake off his solitude and re-evaluate his South African identity to recast it as part of a multiple identity. This new identity will centre on the acceptance and inclusion of others in lieu of their rejection and exclusion.

Conclusion

In this article the settler-descendants' search for selfhood in Africa and Europe has been examined by looking at three contemporary South African novels' narrative framework and aspects related to identity formation with reference to the other. The analysis has sought to show that the legacy of colonisation and apartheid still has a bearing on white men's perception of self and their position on the continent and in Europe. The memories of the

injustices committed in the past persevere in the present and will disfigure the future if responsibility is not taken and amends are not made. After the enfranchisement of the masses, South Africa's white population have grown increasingly conscious of their minority status and feel relegated to the periphery of society. To counteract their sense of displacement and lostness and to rediscover who they are and where they belong, these people may take recourse to the transgression of frontiers. Christopher (*LA*) and Frank (*GD*) convince themselves that they have found a home – Christopher in the intermediate territory of Gibraltar and Frank in the hospital room – but, being postcolonial and postmodern subjects, they have no permanent abode. Chris's and Frank's journeys will continue, as will *Lost Ground*'s Peter's, and, as with Peter, will probably lead back to South Africa. This is because the descendants of the original settlers, on the whole, still conceive of Africa as their home, or at least the continent is as close as they will get to home.

In the liminal space of post-apartheid South Africa, the former settlers may alter their perceptions of others. While this does not hold true for Christopher Jameson and the other whites in Conyngham's novel, who see blacks as degenerate and malevolent others, the fear of the other seems to abate as the years pass since the advent of democracy. Frank Eloff (*GD)* begins to recognise the similarities between himself and Tehogo, and also endeavours to establish an emotional connection with Maria. *Lost Ground* features relationships to which colonial and apartheid dualisms no longer apply: between Peter and Nonyameko, and Desirée and her mixed-race husband, Hector. Peter and Desirée accept otherness on equal terms and engage with those who are different from them. Whereas Chris traverses geographical boundaries, Frank transgresses symbolic ones when he recognises the other in the self, while Peter, after doing introspection and taking responsibility for his actions, transcends spaces of separation between self and other. It would appear that white South African authors feel more positive about a changed country the more time elapses since the transition. Perhaps it is a matter of realising that there is no returning to what was and getting used to the new. A future study might investigate whether this trend will continue and if the novels by Conyngham, Galgut and Heyns form part of a bigger tapestry unfolding in post-apartheid South African literature.

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