A Stranger in the Country of His Birth: The White Man's Predicament in The New South Africa as Portrayed in John Conyngham's *The Lostness of Alice*

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Summary

This article evaluates the former white settlers' position and experience in South Africa, Africa and Europe as represented by the English male protagonist who features in *The Lostness of Alice* (1998) by John Conyngham. It is argued that the legacy of the colonisation of Africa and apartheid in South Africa have given rise to suspicion and resentment that still influences the settler descendants' perception of self and the other. After the inauguration of a black-majority government, contemporary white South African men, as exemplified by the protagonist, are no longer able to configure their subjectivity as "master of the estate" (estate denoting the country) and in opposition to others. Aware of their minority status and their contradictory non-African identity, they tend to dissociate themselves from the country and African continent as home. As borderline figures, they experience disquiet and distress as well as a sense of loss in terms of physical orientation and belonging. In a bid to discover identity and meaning outside conventional parameters, they explore different spaces by way of travelling. The novel is critically analysed in terms of the protagonist's experience of the concepts of space and place, the presence and transgression of boundaries, and the influence of these paradigms on his sense of self and his relationship with others and society at large. The narrative strategy of intertextuality in relation to the myths of Africa is also investigated.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel evalueer die voormalige blanke setlaars se posisie en ervaring in Suid-Afrika, Afrika en Europa, soos verteenwoordig deur die Engelse manlike hoofkarakter wat figureer in *The Lostness of Alice* (1998) deur John Conyngham. Daar word aangevoer dat die nalatenskap van die kolonisasie van Afrika en apartheid in Suid-Afrika aanleiding gegee het tot agterdog en wrewel wat steeds die die setlaarafstammelinge se persepsie van die self en die ander beïnvloed. Na die inhuldiging van 'n swart meerderheidsregering, is hedendaagse wit Suid-Afrikaanse mans, soos vergestalt deur die hoofkarakter, nie meer in staat om hul subjektiwiteit te konfigureer as "meester van die landgoed" (landgoed duidend op die land) en in teenstelling met die ander nie. Bewus van hul minderheidstatus en teenstrydige identiteit as nie-Afrikane, neig hulle om hulself te distansieer van die land en Afrika-

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kontinent as tuiste. As randfigure, ervaar hulle verontrusting en onsekerheid asook 'n gevoel van verlies in terme van fisiese oriëntasie en behorendheid. In 'n poging om identiteit en betekenis buite konvensionele parameters te ontdek, verken hulle verskillende ruimtes deur middel van reis. Die roman is krities ontleed ooreenkomstig die hoofkarakter se ervaring van die begrippe van ruimte en plek, die teenwoordigheid en oorbrugging van grense, en die invloed van hierdie paradigmas op sy sin van self, sy verhouding met ander en die samelewing in die algemeen. Die narratiewe strategie van intertekstualiteit met betrekking tot die mites van Afrika word ook ondersoek.

Introduction

This article illustrates that *The Lostness of Alice* (1998) by John Conyngham reflects on some of the major issues expressed in contemporary South African literature (both English and Afrikaans), namely the former white settlers' standing in South Africa, Africa and Europe, their orientation in African space as an unknown and alien environment and their encounter with the indigenous population as the other in contrast to the self, this giving rise to self-examination and self-confrontation. It is argued that the colonisation of Africa and apartheid in South Africa have given rise to suspicion and resentment that are still felt in the present. Although perspectives on colonisation and its repercussions have changed over the last century as the settlers gradually acclimatised to Africa and intensified their interaction with the land, after the inauguration of a black-majority government, the settler descendants have become increasingly subject to feelings of ambivalence and alienation as regards their perception of self and place in the country as well as in Africa and Europe. Hence, inherent tensions – vestiges of which were already present at the beginning of the twentieth century in the protagonist Marlow in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) – have since liberation become more prominent. Having surrendered their power over the land and lost it to racially different others, the white settlers experience disquiet and distress as well as a sense of loss in terms of physical orientation and belonging. With "all the old moral signposts" (Miller 2006: 143) shattered, these men, as denoted by Conyngham's protagonist Christopher Jameson, are no longer able to configure their subjectivity as "master of the estate" (estate denoting the country) and in opposition to others. Christopher stands outside the matrices of patriarchy, ownership and masterdom in terms of which white South African male identity has customarily been structured (Viljoen and Van der Merwe 2004: 115). Without family or heritage, the character's condition is evocative of the English settlers' displacement and *Unheimlichkeit* (not-being-at-home) in Africa among non-white others. Politically marginalised and haunted by the impermanence of his position, he attempts to cross physical and psychological borders and explore different spaces so as to transcend his historical identity and discover meaning outside conventional parameters.

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In the light of the above context, the article aims to address how the white settlers view their identity and place in the "new" South Africa, the African continent as a whole and Europe as exemplified in *The Lostness of Alice*. The article provides insight into the original colonisers' experience of marginalisation, and addresses certain postmodern and postcolonial aspects of identity formation in relation to the different other. The novelist's use of two parallel texts (Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*) to expand the literary frames of reference and allude to the role of myth and the fairy tale (denoting a sense of make-believe) in identity examination and definition is also investigated.

Intertextuality

To foreground the notion of the confrontation of the self and against the backdrop of the political and emotional insecurity of the time, Conyngham makes use of intertextual referencing. Intertextuality is a narratological device within a postcolonial and postmodern discourse that reacts to the past by citing or alluding to previous, usually authoritative literary and non-literary materials. Intertextuality rewrites the past from an alternative – often ironical or critical – perspective so as to reveal residual politics, usually of the colonial era. This counter-discursive technique challenges the notion of a literary production as a self-sufficient, absolute totality with a centralised meaning (Smit-Marais 2012: 122). By transgressing textual and temporal boundaries to invoke earlier material, intertextuality countervails the connection between narrator and author, fiction and reality to engage with and contest colonialism's discourses and power structures (Kruger 2013: 93) in order to dismantle the myth of the European imperialist ideology formulated in colonial texts.

The Lostness of Alice resonates thematically with Charles Lutwidge Dodgson's/Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) to add another layer of meaning to this politically-engaged narrative. Carroll composed *Alice in Wonderland* at the height of the British exploration of Africa. Some reviewers (for instance, Jon Stratton (1990: 170) conjecture that Carroll also commented on the exercise of territorial expansionism and the societies that instigated it. Be that as it may, Conyngham's motivation for invoking Carroll's children story, by his own admission, is that "the oddness of *Alice in Wonderland* [i]s quite a good environment in which to try and look at the oddness of a country that's unravelling, or an order that's unravelling, and a new country that's being born" (interview with Blair 2003: 78).

The journey motif further connects *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Lostness of Alice*. The representative of British society, Alice Liddell, and that of South Africa, Chris Jameson, transgress boundaries to explore another world

and get a new perspective on the old. The distance each character has to travel – Alice from England to Wonderland and Chris from South Africa to England, Spain, Morocco and Gibraltar – signals the country of destination's difference from the country of origin's presence (Stratton 1990: 171). The presence of both Alice and Chris clashes with their surroundings. When in Wonderland, Alice is for the most part smaller than when she is at home. Yet, whether larger or smaller, she is an anomalous presence, and is therefore inevitably disadvantaged. Chris feels that "as an outsider, a colonial" (95) he does not belong in either Europe or Africa, but exists in an in-between space. The two characters, similar to the original settlers, are thus out of place when in a new location; they are strangers wherever they go.

   During their journeys, Alice and Chris encounter others who are both the same and different from themselves. Even when these others speak English and wear European clothes, they more often than not escape Alice's and Chris's comprehension. Whereas Alice engages with the card creatures, trying to mould them to her understanding of what constitutes civilised behaviour, Chris hardly registers the other's presence, betraying that he sees the world in black and white and establishes his identity in essence, rather than in difference. In Wonderland, Alice meets a number of animals such as the Blue Caterpillar, the Dormouse and the Cheshire Cat; some of the white characters in Conyngham's novel (for instance the readers of the newspaper that employs Chris's girlfriend) will not recognise the self in the other and think of black people in terms of nineteenth-century anthropology as "primitive" and "savage" types "lower down the scale of social evolution" (Carey-Webb 1993: 127) or as animals. In the novel, the black people's otherness signifies the site of difference and the source of white phobias (Rutherford 1990: 10). For this reason, the soldiers who capture a black man in the forest effectively dehumanise him. The difference and otherness of the destitute man as well as of Wonderland's weird creatures run counter to and invalidate the (white) self's fixity of meaning, giving rise to angst and agitation.

   Alice Liddell runs into the other when she crosses the border between the real world and Wonderland and follows the White Rabbit into Wonderland. The Wonderland in Conyngham's novel is Africa, a continent to which the early colonisers attributed wondrous qualities. By comparing Africa and Wonderland, Conyngham conveys the notion that the original colonisers had an exotic and fabulous image of Africa, conceiving of the "unoccupied", unknown continent as a wonderland, a pristine place where they could pursue adventure, realise their potential and lead an Arcadian existence. The author foregrounds the connection between Africa and Wonderland when Detective Sergeant Marais, who investigates the disappearance of a sixteen-year-old girl, speculates that the goldfish in a pond have swallowed Alice Walker's body (50). When Chris's girlfriend, Sally Bowen, expresses horror at the thought, the policeman pointedly tells her: "This isn't wonderland,

you know." (50) Conyngham has confessed to deliberately including this and other references to reinforce the intertextual connection between his and Carroll's narratives.

Conyngham makes it clear that neither Wonderland nor Africa is charmed ground. When Alice Liddell falls through the dark rabbit hole, she finds herself in a world of disorder and nonsensicality, and when Alice Walker passes through her house's garden gate neatly "arched with roses" (7) – the garden being a metaphor for European culture, as McEwan (1996: 23) avers – she leaves behind the ordered world of suburbia in which Western norms apply, and enters a strange and sinister space beyond the threshold of the known and the safe. By extension, Alice Walker traverses the limit between the rational and the irrational, culture and nature. If Africa is indeed a wonderland, it is, as the critic Trengrove Jones (1998: 26) maintains, "an angst-ridden wonderland" that entraps Europeans and lures them into the "heart of an immense darkness", to use Joseph Conrad's (1899: 158) phrase. Carroll's Wonderland is populated by belligerent beings such as the Frog-Footman, as well as malicious and murderous ones like the Queen of Hearts, who commands the decapitation of everyone around her. To all appearances, Alice Walker has stumbled across a similarly cold-blooded other and met an equally permanent fate as being beheaded. References to death abound in Carroll's seemingly innocuous children's tale; Conyngham, by the same token, intimates that violence and death are integral to the daily existence of people in Africa and South Africa.

To summarise, the counter-discursive allusions to Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* that are inserted as hypertests in *The Lostness of Alice* not only define Conyngham's fiction but supply another stratum of significance to it in terms of the presentation of Africa and the similarities between Africa and Wonderland. The references offer opposing interpretations of life in Africa as a fairy tale on the one hand and brutal reality on the other, in the end to deconstruct the fairy-tale reading.

Lostness

The main theme in *The Lostness of Alice* is the former white settlers' loss of home and a place of belonging. Belonging to neither Europe nor Africa, they traverse a territory of ambiguity and ambivalence, thinking of themselves as outsiders wherever they go. In addition to the loss of home, the loss of truth and a connection to people and places also manifest themselves in the novel.

Conyngham's protagonist metaphorically associates Africa with a dange-rous animal that slumbers but can wake up and attack Europeans at any moment when he observes that "across the sheet of inky water, the bulk of Africa, [lies] sleeping" (145). Chris compares the vagabond that the army troops arrest on suspicion of Alice Walker's kidnapping to "a thing of the

forest .... While the (white) soldiers and their families l[ie] tucked in their suburban beds at night, the dishevelled rastaman lope[s] through the dark trunks, foraging, searching." (21) The wilderness is the rastaman's and other Africans' natural habitat, whereas whites belong to civilisation – which is not to be found in Africa. From the point of view of "relics of colonial Africa" (31), such as Chris, there is no hope for Africa after decolonisation; it is "a bloody cock-up" (30).

Since the enfranchisement of the masses, slipping service delivery standards, educational deprivation, unemployment, poverty, crime and corruption have disillusioned a percentage of South Africa's population. Many whites long for the days before the abolition of a regime of racial qualification and categorisation when they could delimit their distinctiveness in terms of Manichean dualisms. Since the return of the repressed, the "stable, centered position" of whites is in danger, to draw upon Lars Engle's jargon (Martin and Mohanty 1987: 201). A burgeoning black middle-class puts whiteness under pressure and undermines it as a position of privilege. Whites consider themselves to have become politically irrelevant and an emasculated minority, "low on the priority list", as Conyngham notes in an interview with Blair (2003: 85). Conyngham (84-85) contends that one feels "one's world doesn't exist anymore; what was good about the world is now passing". Young Alice Walker, with her blonde hair, blue eyes and fair skin so at variance with her surroundings, is the personification of civilised values and the white population's defencelessness. This "fragile beauty" (24) acts as the antipode to the powers of darkness and evil that threaten to engulf the last outpost of Western civilisation in Africa.

When Alice vanishes, white South Africans feel besieged and fear that they, like the teenage girl, will become "fair game for the dark forces" (24). Feelings of discomfiture have intensified and, after two centuries of exploiting and suppressing others, whites are left alienated, "spiritually deformed" and "rotten with fears", as Rian Malan (1990: 412-413) rather subjectively words it in his autobiography. An atmosphere of utter hopelessness and *fin du monde* prevails. In brief, the predominant theme of this novel that renders the temper of post-apartheid South Africa may be understood as white angst in the face of an impending apocalypse when remaining boundaries rupture as well. Sally wonders if it is "our time next" (60) and dreads the forceful and violent appropriation of the land. The wheel may turn full circle: the crimes of the past will be redressed in the future and those who have dispossessed others and stigmatised them by virtue of their skin colour could be disgraced and driven off the land. In a worst-case scenario whites may even experience a similar lot as the colonists in Kenya did at the hands of the Mau Mau.

A theme that emanates from the preceding one of fear for the future is lostness – the word "lostness" describing a particular community's apprehensiveness in the face of an indeterminate and unpredictable future.

Lostness is not an existential concept but a concept peculiar to South Africa and Africa, signifying the former settlers' perturbation after the trauma of transition. Being of European extraction but their families having lived in Africa for decades, the settler descendants are unresolved as to which continent they belong. Chris and Sally view themselves as English, even though their families have lived in Africa for five generations. Similar to Chris and Sally, white South Africans, who have benefited from apartheid, have misgivings about their place among African others. They presume that they are not welcome in the country of their birth but also do not have a home elsewhere: "A lifetime of apartheid ha[s] cast [them] adrift." (26) Chris muses: "Do you know who I am? I'm one of the world's pariahs. A perpetrator of a crime against humanity." (110) Experiencing alienation and rootlessness in Africa as well as in Europe, outsiders such as Chris are as "lost as Alice" (108). They occupy a "fractious limbo" (43), a position of insubstantiality and peripherality imposed by imperialism and its aftermath. Chris speculates that he and other whites are to see Alice's fate symbolically: as a glimpse of all their lostnesses, now and to come (117). The lostness of the protagonist, who epitomises colonialism's castaways, serves as a bleak symbol for the displacement and disillusionment (Petzold 2008: 149) of white South Africans who still cling to preconceived colonial ideas and cannot join the "rainbow nation".

The loss of a connection with people and places also features as a theme in the text. All of Chris's relationships flounder. Wherever he goes, he has no personal encounters (104) and forms no significant attachments, but remains disconnected from others and himself. The narrator's inner dividedness also accounts for his not finding "a nest for his body, padded to his measure" (to use Gaston Bachelard's image of a home), where he can live "in complete confidence" (1994: 101, 103). Being a tenant on Sally's father's farm, Chris cannot claim a rooted identity there. It may also be said that, being a white man, he does not truly belong to the African land and is only tolerated for the time being. The roots that his ancestors put down in the soil are being extracted after the termination of the segregationist National Party's domination. Since nothing ties him to the country and its people after Sally's presumed betrayal, Chris embarks on journeys to England, Spain, Morocco and Gibraltar. Regardless of where his travels take him, he cannot find a permanent home. What is more, he lacks the ingenuity to find "a way to reclaim displacement and tracklessness as a form of freedom" and "something to be desired" (Barnard 2007: 31). Bachelard (1994: 10) points out that in a postcolonial era the "normal unconscious knows how to make itself at home everywhere", very much like a snail that carries its house around with it. Chris does not know how to negotiate a place that supplies him with a stable and shielded sense of self, and his geographical lostness leads to psychological lostness and vice versa.

Space, Place and Identity Formation

In an interview with Peter Blair (2003: 85), Conyngham poses the question: "While we have evolved through four generations in Natal, becoming more African generation by generation, are we getting any closer to Africa accepting us?" Differently put, can colonised land ever be home to those who reckon they have become expatriates in the land of their birth and doubt their right to ownership of usurped soil? The reality of living on the African continent soon dispels all traces of idealism; Africa is not as welcoming as the nineteenth-century traveller may have thought. "[P]ost-apartheid disappointments such as corruption, failures of governance, populism, and xenophobic outrages" (Barris 2008: 2) have tarnished the colours of the rainbow nation. As Chris observes: "… so much for our notion of an African paradise" (55). The "real" Africa is a "peculiar blend of beauty and squalor" (111). It is paradise and hell at the same time (55); at best, it is "paradise enriched by the hell within it" (114). Although white South Africans' perception of and relationship with the continent are tinged by ambivalence, they struggle to sever their allegiance to it; Africa holds a strange fascination for them. Even when away from Africa, Chris senses the continent as being a brooding and menacing presence on the horizon. He and other expatriates are not able to step out from under the shadow the continent casts over their existence. Africa appears to keep them in thrall. After returning from Europe to Morocco, Chris acknowledges that "it is a tonic to be back in Africa. The harsh sunlight, the dust, the poverty, the vigour of a racial polyglot and the brooding threat of terrible violence [a]re all part of [him]." (110) In spite of Africa's problems, here the former settlers feel fulfilled and whole.

South Africa, though, is not the real Africa as places like Lamu and Marrakesh, for instance, are. Chris's search for Alice may also be interpreted as a search for the real Africa, but before long he comes to the conclusion that South Africa is sufficiently real for him. After the overthrow of the white government and the inauguration of a black one, South Africa evidently is a tamer version of Africa – yet still "with the possibility of rawness" (103). Chris summarises it as follows: the country is a fractious and "fragile limbo where the Old and New Worlds meet" (103). In its liminal state, South Africa hovers between political and social orders, as well as between two identities – "one that is known and discarded, and the other unknown and undetermined" (Wright 2009: 9). South Africa is not first world – the known but soon-to-be discarded identity – but it is also not third world – its possible future fate. Although their ancestors came from Europe, settlers like Chris will stay in South Africa until such time as the country reverts to the "real" Africa and its custody to the indigenous inhabitants.

According to the critics Viljoen and Van der Merwe (2004: 21) as well as Jochen Petzold (2008: 143), the space of the farm may be considered a

microcosm of the country. Petzold theorises that the farm, comparable to the country, is an ideological space imbued with political and emotional connotations. In the past white people defined who they were in terms of the ownership of land – which they cultivated into farmland – and authority over others who were considered part of the land. A lack of land meant losing the essence of their being and the purpose of their existence. An icon of natural and numinous identity, the farmland expressed the soul of the white man's being. The farmland was also a space that was inscribed with the history of colonial domination, appropriation and occupation. Since the farm excluded the wilderness and its destructive elements, here the colonial, patriarchal mentality could perpetuate itself without much interference from the outside world. The farm, furthermore, was seen as the wilderness that the white man, through his labour, had transformed into fertile farmland (Petzold 2008: 143). Since he had imposed control on disorder by cultivating the wasteland and demarcating its borders – very much like Robinson Crusoe does with the island – it belonged to him. From a colonialist point of view, the native inhabitants were judged other and an extension of Nature, liminal to Culture (of which the European man was the guardian). They belonged to the soil that had been reclaimed from the wilderness on its outskirts and civilised. Giving the land to them would result in chaos and ruin.

Chris, however, does not own the farm/land. Given that identity is frequently territorially delimited (Smit 2005: 16), he cannot configure his individuality in terms of a stable space. Entrapped within hegemonic colonial discourse that deem ownership and dominance – as opposed to collaborative relationships – a requirement for the shaping of subjectivity, he also questions his connection with the country. Chris's situation may be likened to that of Wynand in Van den Heever's farm novel, *Somer*. Viljoen and Van der Merwe (2004: 115) describe Wynand as having

> a non-identity; he stands outside the usual matrices in which identity is constructed: he has no family, no heritage, no future; he is always yearning for the faraway horizon; he has no security and no responsibility; and above all, no land.

At the same time as Christopher Jameson's relationship with Sally flounders, his tie to the ground is rent apart. Although he has a strong emotive bond with the land, he does not possess it, and nor does he the woman. The colonial, patriarchal mentality dictated that men pacified and possessed the land, its occupants and women. White women, on the score of their "smaller brain size" (Stott 1989: 75), apparently fell into the same category as children or savages. Hence, the treatment of land echoed that of women (Driver 1988: 13; Crang 1998: 65). When Chris leaves South Africa, he loses both the woman and his homeland. Since selfhood requires a sense

of belonging – if not to a place, then to a person – this absence of a significant attachment precipitates a schism in subjectivity.

For settlers whose identities have not kept up with the changes in the country, Europe remains their former home and the source and arbiter of meaning (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin 1998: 91). Western Europe and other first-world countries are perceived to represent culture and civilisation, and are places of progress in the arts, science and commerce. The "Dark Continent", in contrast, is conceptualised as "a primeval place of origins" (Bunn 1988: 18). Chris hopes that Britain, "like a forgiving parent, [will] overlook the waywardness of its prodigal sons and daughters" (90). Though it is common to refer to the country where one was born as one's fatherland, the fact that Chris compares unknown territory to a parent attests to his ontological isolation. Even though Chris admits that he comes from Africa (143), he quickly points out that the settlers originally came from Europe. Since a Eurocentric worldview has served white South Africans well while the National Party governed the country, *présence européenne* (Rutherford 1990: 233) still supplies them with a secure and stable identity. This reluctance to relinquish loyalty towards Europe may explain why the protagonist's consciousness is divided between two continents, and why he fails to integrate into a truly African identity, but instead wavers on the margins between two divergent spaces, experiencing lostness in both.

Schick (1999: 24) states that places, and, by extension countries, are not "objective realities" but exist through people's affective or emotional relationships with them. People forge such relationships by inhabiting spaces, experiencing and conceptualising them. Every place or country thus reflects its inhabitants' experience and knowledge, beliefs and practices. The accretions (and erasures) of these traces of "cultural memories and residues of past practices and knowledges" (Carter, James & Squires 1993: 23) make up a record of change, called a palimpsest. A place is therefore a palimpsest or a reservoir of feelings and memories (1993: 116), and a sense of "us" originates from the shared relationships to a lived space. Because Chris did not play a part in either the palimpsest of place or the realisation of a mutual identity, he feels excluded and metaphorically dislocated. Wherever he goes and whatever he sees, he remains estranged from his surroundings and is reminded in some way or another of Africa.

In an effort to establish a home away from home and regain a sense of perspective and self (subjectivity being contingent on spatial relations), Chris tries to find similarities between his new location and South Africa. For example, upon smelling Casablanca's salty air he recalls Natal's coast, and in Volubilis, a partly excavated Roman city in Morocco, he notices icons of apartheid South Africa: Afrikanerdom's Voortrekker Monument and Bloed River laager. The protagonist's desire for "reassuring" (138) resemblances makes manifest that he is attempting to replicate the colonising moment – the inhabitation of new territory while striving to find

parallels with the old – because he is homesick and wishes to control the new space. The inference may be drawn that for South Africans there is indeed no place like home, the concept of which evokes feelings of nostalgia and memories of the past and origins in those who are away from it (Wenzel 2008: 146). For those who are there, it provides the comfort of a secure and stable identity.

Travel and Borders

Chris seeks out Europe and later the interior of Africa to escape his peripherality, reorient himself in new milieux, and discover identity and meaning. Not unlike the original colonisers, he goes out into the world with the intention to explore and to conquer. Although traversing topographical borders "entails physical and spiritual dislocation and alienation" (Viljoen 2013: xii), there are also benefits to be gained from travelling. While travellers cross physical, geographical borders, they simultaneously transgress social, cultural and mental borders, in the process acquiring knowledge of what lies beyond a threshold and broadening their experience. For this reason, numerous scholars (for example Van Coller 1998: 53, 62;Wenzel 1999: 137; Rowley 1996: 137) proclaim that the expansion of horizons and exposure to other countries and cultures may act as an enriching and a transformative experience, enabling contact and communication, so opening up new possibilities. As voyagers make connections with the outside world, they obtain a different perspective on people and places and are able to appraise and adjust previously biased perceptions. Revaluating their sense of self and different societies' norms and sense of justice, they come to comprehend that difference from the self does not denote inferiority in the other. Traversing the concrete and abstract lines of separation between "here" and "there" and "us" and "them" gives access to otherness and results in recognising the other as an extension of the self. So, at the same time as travellers' knowledge of others and other places increases, they also gain insight into themselves. Sofia Kostelac (2010: 59) posits that distance from familiar contexts is "a precondition for a confrontation with the strange and disavowed aspects of the self," which in turn induces internal change and spiritual renewal.

Notwithstanding his journeys, Chris does not appear to experience change or transformation. Drifting from one strange space to another and crossing several borders, Chris's meanders appear to be without direction and purpose. The narrator compares himself to an autumn leaf that is tossed around by the gusts (94) and "blown at random by the winds of fortune" (97), never finding a place to settle down. Since he does not constructively engage with others and little cultural transgression takes place, his travels translate as an "endless running away" (Galgut 2004: 176) – and similar to

Alice's excursion, his are also to nowhere. Constant relocation situates him beyond borders, so that he does not fit in either at the centre or the periphery and, as a result, he is alienated from people and places so that "history happens elsewhere, it has nothing to do with him" (15). Accordingly, the navigation of topographical boundaries and globality, intended to appease his need for interconnectedness, rather signposts homelessness, and the dividing line between home and world fades. What is more, the diaspora experience of "globalisation and a lack of belonging" exacerbate the character's "cultural fragmentation, displacement and exile" (Wenzel 2008: 143), so that there is no salvation or serenity to be found through travelling. Hence, the search for Alice and an integrated, coherent self remains fruitless – "the centre is elsewhere" (14). "Marooned by his inflexibility" (31), Chris Jameson is unable to escape his secluded, insubstantial self. Edward Said (1993: 27) emphasises that there are three themes in the literature of settler colonies which persist in postcolonial society: the problem of finding and defining one's own "home", physical and emotional confrontations with a new land, and exile. These three themes are pointed up in Chris's peripatetic and isolated condition and encapsulate the ubiquitous concern with place and displacement in postcolonial societies.

  Chris eventually comes to rest at the southern extremity of Europe, the Strait of Gibraltar, a place from where he, "a poor Robinson Crusoe figure marooned in a colonial backwater" (153) by his own admission, can glimpse Africa – home and also not home – in the distance. Here, poised between the borders of Europe and Africa, "adrift on that fluid highway between two continents" (108), which, according to Jones (1998: 26), constitutes the "geographical equivalence" of the narrator's in-betweenness; he experiences *Entgrenzung* (the "more or less sudden disappearance of any inner and outer limitation") (Müller-Funk 2007: 83). Conyngham (interview with Blair 2003: 87) conjectures that this is as close as the character will "get to foundness within the central lostness of the human condition". The next section will determine if the "foundness" Chris attains is sufficient for the reader to set store by his judgement.

Narration and Narrator

McEwan (1996: 49) speculated two years before *The Lostness of Alice* was published that

> Conyngham, in his third novel would move away from first-person narrative mode which in the first two novels [was] the prime vehicle for the ironic treatment of the protagonists' limitations and the position of the protagonists outside the political mêlée. The third protagonist [i.e. Christopher Jameson] may possibly be treated less ironically and may be a more reliable witness in his account of a country in turmoil/transition.

The first two chapters of this retrospective postmodern narrative does appear to render an omniscient and reliable third-person account of the events surrounding Alice Walker's disappearance. The readers have access to the actions and thoughts of all the characters. However, in Chapter Three, a shift in focalisation takes place when Christopher Jameson introduces himself in relation to his girlfriend, Sally Bowen, whom the readers were led to believe was the novel's protagonist. It becomes apparent that the readers have been privy to the recollections of a character who has hitherto been unknown. This destabilisation and dissolving of boundaries between third- and first-person narrative parallels postmodernism's resistance to a fixed and one-dimensional realist representation and resonates with the "often irreconcilable facets of the self" (Kostelac 2010: 58). It also register with readers that the reality and the truth the author reveals are relative concepts, mediated through his subjectivity.

Being a first-person focaliser, Christopher Jameson bridges the textual gap between the author and the readers. Since Chris's views interpose themselves between the readers, the events and other characters' actions and motivations, readers have a high level of access to him but not to other characters whose actions and motivations are interpreted by him. Chris shapes the readers' responses, and controls their judgement. Nevertheless, an autodiegetic dramatised I-narrator is potentially more biased than an omniscient third-person narrator (Smit-Marais 2012: 39), and the audience has to treat the assertions of this character with circumspection and, it would seem, distance his contentions from the author's. To cite Jeanette Kearney's (1990: 1) commentary on *The Desecration of the Graves*'s protagonist: "We have to beware ... of following too closely the tracks pointed out by our sophisticated guide." In *The Lostness of Alice*, it soon transpires that the I-narrator is a former white settler living in a country fraught with racial tension. Implicated in two centuries of exploitation, he is at odds with those around him, and conceives of himself as an interloper who does not truly belong to the land, and suffers the impermanence of his position on the continent. Ideologically marginalised from both Africa and Europe, he has no home to call his own, no family; in other words, no boundaries to provide a framework for his existence and no safety-net to shield him. When Chris, on a flight from Mombasa to Lamu, directly addresses the readers ("You can't imagine how difficult it is piecing together these fragments from a lost world." [37]), the readers start to suspect a lapse in his detachment and a growing discrepancy between authorial and narratorial views (Robinson 1992: 14), which impacts on their assessment of the character's reliability. By drawing attention to Chris's constant misinterpretation of persons and events, his erroneous assumptions and biased assertions, Conyngham, furthermore, alerts the readers not to put a premium on Christopher's conclusions (McEwan 1996: 21). He does not articulate a balanced and truthful perspective and can by no means be regarded as a reliable narrator

who shares the author's views; Chris's assertions should be dissociated from Conyngham's and read ironically. The narrator's interpretation of events is limited and prejudiced. Moreover, his professed liberalism, his "seeking equality and a place for all in the sun" (44), at the beginning of the novel is just a smokescreen, disguising his prejudice. His insights and self-censure amount to no more than "lip-service into the realm of constructive change and personal growth" (McEwan 1996: 43); they serve to ease his privileged white conscience and disguise the "impulse for mayhem" (109) that "so often rises in his gorge" (80), and eventually erupts in violence.

   Scarred as Christopher Jameson is by memories of his past – "baggage [he] cannot jettison" (137) – his identity does not accustom itself to the changes in the country, and he remains entrapped within the axes of similarity and difference. His consciousness, inherited from the past, is not capable of evaluating past discourses of self and other and transgressing boundaries that marginalise or exclude, and therefore he cannot enter into the domain of others and accept them. McEwan (1996: 68) submits that accepting the other is a prerequisite for the constitution of an integrated self and a commitment to the broader society. Though present political structures no longer underwrite "a positionality of power and privilege" (Steyn 2001: xxx) centred on whiteness, this compromised character does not discard the inflated perception of self "confabulated as part of the colonial master narrative" (138), and defines his identity against "inferior" others. In addition, the protagonist refuses to relinquish his paternalistic and proprietary attitude towards others as well as towards the South African land. He avoids taking responsibility, and like the author's other two protagonists, Colville (*The Arrowing of the Cane* [1986]) and Cranwell (*The Desecration of the Graves* [1990]), Chris thinks of himself as a pawn "in an unjust game" (Conyngham 1990: 129), blaming the ostensible dissolution and collapse of the country and his personal predicament on forces outside himself, without appreciating that he, too, has a role to play in the construction of a non-exploitative, post-apartheid South Africa. Caught up in the preconception of what he should be and what others are (McEwan 1996: 69), he does not establish the essence of his being within inclusive, egalitarian structures, and is "confined within the narrow space for Self" (28) he has mapped out for himself. A manifestation of the constriction and obsoleteness of a neo-colonial mentality in a postcolonial environment, he feels "the frustration of such confinement" (67), and he does not attain a purposeful, socially integrated existence, wholeness or closure (Van der Merwe 2013: 100). Nonetheless, that three protagonists of Conyngham's are in the same dilemma, that all three cannot transcend the psychological barriers of their historical identity and its limitations (McEwan 2006: 69) but are entrapped in a web of superseded colonial discourses and white male supremacy, their attempts at insight into themselves and their relationship

with others doomed, may indicate that there is a place for this point of view in the South African context.

Conclusion

As the analysis of *The Lostness of Alice* have shown, some white male settlers still carry the burden of the colonial past and apartheid with them. Colonial discourse and a colonial mind-set still prevail in contemporary South Africa. As the narrator-protagonist of Conyngham's novel exhibits, a number of whites consider that the political changes and the Africanisation of South Africa imperil their position that previously depended on possessing land and subordinating those deemed "other". The former settlers now have to reconfigure and integrate their identity with the unfamiliar space of the "new" South Africa and Africa, "accept all that is Other" (McEwan 1996: 69), and dispense with divisive binary systems on the basis of which white South African subjectivity has formerly been constructed (Van der Merwe 2004: 126).

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