

# Appropriating Space and Transcending Boundaries in *The Africa House* by Christina Lamb and *Ways of Dying* by Zakes Mda

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## Summary

The appropriation of space and construction of shelter is part of the human endeavour to conceptualise being *in and of the world*. Places are defined spaces that serve as points of orientation, with the implication that space exists where humans are and vice versa. Houses, in particular, feature as places or sites that occupy and define personal space; they are not only adapted to a person's lifestyle and indicative of his/her identity but also serve as metaphors of certain periods and value systems. A comparison of *The Africa House* (2000) by Christina Lamb and *Ways of Dying* (1995) by Zakes Mda explores the concept of houses as constructs of identity and illustrates how they could be perceived to identify and reflect the cultural boundaries and imaginative worlds of their periods of origin and authors.

## Opsomming

Die toe-eiening van ruimte en oprigting van skuilings vorm deel van die menslike poging om sy/haar bestaan in en verbintenis tot die wêreld te begryp. Plekke vorm duidelik omlýnde ruimtes wat dien as oriënteringspunte, met die veronderstelling dat ruimte bestaan waar mense is en ook andersom. Huise word spesifiek as plekke of terreine beskou wat persoonlike ruimte beset en definieer; hulle word nie slegs aangepas by 'n persoon se leefstyl en is betekend van sy/haar identiteit nie, maar dien ook as metafore van spesifieke periodes en waardesisteme. 'n Vergelykende studie van *The Africa House* (2000) deur Christina Lamb en *Ways of Dying* (1995) deur Zakes Mda, verken die konsep van huise as konstruksies van identiteit en dui aan hoe hulle terselfdertyd interpreteer kan word om die kulturele grense en denkbeeldige wêreld van hulle tye van oorsprong, en hulle skrywers te reflekteer.

## 1 Space and Boundaries

Studies of space, place and dwellings have become an important field of research in various disciplines during the last two decades. Distinctive fields of study such as anthropology, architecture, social history, (Low & Chambers 1989: 3; Lawrence 1989: 91), psychology, philosophy, cultural studies and literature have discovered correspondences in this respect.<sup>1</sup> These disciplines

all contribute in some way to clarify and explain the human experience of temporal and spatial dimensions; that is, being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1999: 17) and depending on markers of time and space for orientation. The recognition of a common field of interest could partly be attributed to the postmodern diffusion of boundaries between disciplines, but could also be seen as an awareness of and response to the effects of globalisation (technological advancement) and its impact on conventional perceptions of time and space that have been compressed into time-space (Stein 2001: 107).

Human existence is defined by the concepts of time and space that, translated into more conventional terms, relate to historical perspective and “place” in the world. In other words, individual experience is determined and limited by the specific intersection of time and space generally perceived as history (with the implicit assumption of place). However, from an individual perspective, the concept of place takes precedence over space because, as Crang (1998: 102) insists, the human can only conceive of space in terms of himself and his environment; he acts as point of orientation in space, a spatial marker. In this article, the focus will be on the human’s interaction with context and how he/she creates meaning from this process in the production of culture; in particular, how the delimitation of space and the establishment of personal boundaries in the construction of houses or dwelling places express and reflect the individual’s interaction with time and place in literary representation.

As he perceives a close correlation between a group of people and the landscape they inhabit and shape, Crang introduces the idea of a palimpsest, which represents “the development of landscapes through time and the spatial diffusion of culture” (1998: 14). His perception of landscape as a cultural palimpsest (revealing and incorporating traces of previous cultures) or as a text, describing the process of colonisation which appropriated and inscribed the land with meaning. He maintains that

landscapes may be read as texts illustrating the beliefs of the people. The shaping of the landscape is seen as expressing social ideologies that are then perpetuated and supported through the landscape.

(Crang 1998: 27)

The interaction with context occurs in specific places and moments in time, which the individual (or community) associates with aspects of identity (Crang 1998: 111). In the final instance, places are therefore defined spaces “to which meaning has been ascribed” (Carter, James & Squires 1993: xii); they serve as points of orientation in human experience. The term “place” used in this sense should, however, not be associated with a mere location, but be interpreted in accordance with Crang’s (1998: 110) perception of place as the organisation

of experience related to bodily situation (direction), perceptual space (what we look at/observe), existential space (social meaning) and cognitive space (how we abstractly model spatial relationships). These aspects also correlate with the ideas expressed by Doxtater who defines space as a text that is

immediately integrated with or influenced by social reality. It is lived in, consciously and unconsciously manipulated in close regard to social others, and probably evolved from socially important higher order forms of territoriality. Second, space is able to position symbolic objects in many media, in comparison with certain medial limitations of other texts, including language. It is therefore more wholistic, comprehensive, or all-integrating. Third is the cognitive salience of space, or perhaps a structural predisposition of mental processing of spatial information, mapping, direction, mnemonics, and so on.

(Doxtater 1989: 116)

Although Rapoport (1989: xiii) identifies the same principles at work, he simplifies the equation somewhat by defining space as a concept that comprises

relationships between people and people, people and things, things and things. The design of the environment can, however, be conceptualized as the organization of four variables: space, time, meaning, and communication.

(Rapoport 1989: xiii)

As it was mentioned earlier that cultural expression is the product or result of human interaction with context, it might be apposite to provide a working definition of culture here. Both Rapoport's (1989: xii) and Crang's (1998: 2) definitions of culture include (or imply) the concepts of *social boundaries* and specific *values* associated with the group (ideological markers) and emphasise the idea of a certain way of life or *life-style*, as Rapoport (1989: xv) prefers to call it. However, Rapoport's (1989: xii) definition also specifically mentions that "it is a way of coping with the ecological setting" which will feature strongly in this article. Basically, a study of culture would then involve the description of how people make sense of their world or space, how they define themselves and others and how they attribute meaning to places. Critics such as Low and Chambers (1989: 7) and Crang (1998: 7) emphasise the dynamic quality of culture, its role in human existence and in the formation of identity.

The main consensus about contemporary culture and the formation or construction of identity seems to be that it can no longer be associated with an area, but that it relates to various aspects of a person's "place" in the world (class, education, language, etc.). In effect, the social dynamics of exile and migration create hybrid identities which replace the static perceptions of identity associated with a specific place. De Toro summarises the position of

the postcolonial subject in the following excerpt:

Today, with the blurring of boundaries that once surrounded totalizing discourses ... we can only position ourselves with regard to a nomadic subjectivity, in a nonhierarchical space, where discourses are being constantly territorialized, deterritorialized, and reterritorialized, and where the only certainty is that nothing is certain.

(De Toro 1995: 39)

An important form of cultural expression is located in the delimitation of personal space or the establishment of personal “boundaries” in terms of dwellings. Apart from the provision of shelter, dwelling space is usually associated with home and family life; it has become a symbol with different associations for different people. Consequently, houses or dwellings seem to play an important role in the human’s interaction with his environment and social context and in the process of identity formation. Rapoport (1989: xii) describes houses as universal expressions of culture that differentiate themselves due to the particular setting; they serve as a link between people and setting. Both Rapoport (1989: xix) and Lawrence (1989: 92) point out that traditional and modern communities perceive the importance of houses in different ways: the former see it as a shelter and meeting place while the latter see it as a status symbol and question of personal pride. (This perception plays a seminal role in the interpretation of the two novels discussed in this article). Consequently, “life-style” is an important component and indicator of culture. In certain instances, ownership of a house or having a house in a certain neighbourhood indicates affluence and independence. Kanika Sircar claims that, apart from ownership, the English also attribute special value to privacy found in separate or semi-detached houses because such structures allow “the expression of certain culturally valued characteristics – isolation, privacy, independence and, above all, the autonomous control over one’s surroundings and the freedom to do as one likes in them” (Sircar 1987: 304).

Houses or dwellings could therefore be regarded as important cultural indicators or, as Hummon claims, “nonverbal signs for defining and communicating identity in modern society” (1989: 208). He also attributes an emotional dimension to houses, because he maintains that when we “identify ourselves *as* people of a certain type, quality, or value; we also identify ourselves *with* others or significant objects, forging a sense of belonging and attachment” (Hummon 1989: 209). In this sense one could perhaps talk about “home” as a more appropriate description, because it not only describes the building or house but relates to interpersonal dynamics.

The combination of dwelling and belonging (also associated with identity) is usually associated with the concept of home but, as several critics point out

(Hummon 1989: 220; Douglas 1991: 289, 294; Stea 1995: 184), home does not necessarily indicate a specific place or house in the modern sense of the word. Usually, people attribute different connotations to the idea of home, but the most prevalent are those relating to social relationships and networks or perceptions of a place of refuge or continuity, etc.. Douglas points out, “it also has some structure in time; and because it is for people who are living in that time and space, it has aesthetic and moral dimensions” (1991: 289, 294). However, she also cautions that home does not necessarily have good vibrations; that it could signify an attraction and refuge to some while it could imply restrictions to others. In agreement with the above critics, David Stea also attributes a deeper meaning to the concept of home when he states that “[t]he spatial aspects of home transcend conventional concepts of territoriality and home range; they are related to, but are by no means identical with “home ground”, or *tierra*, or “sense of place” (1995: 184). Belonging is then a varied concept that could relate to, or be expressed in different ways such as national identity – shared beliefs, sameness; invented tradition – shared experience, symbol and ritual; and cultural differentiation (self-definition by looking at others) (Crang 1998: 162-169).

Houses as constructs of identity are also often explored in literature, as many texts attest,<sup>2</sup> and as this article will illustrate in particular by comparing two novels from disparate historical periods: *The Africa House* (2000) by Christina Lamb and *Ways of Dying* (1995) by Zakes Mda. These novels illustrate how the different protagonists interact with and react to their respective socio-historical realities and how their identities can be traced back to their respective worldviews. The protagonist in *The Africa House*, Stewart Gore-Browne, is caught in the time warp of colonialism while the protagonist in *Ways of Dying*, Toloki, freed by the boundless realm of the imagination, is able to transcend the barriers and boundaries imposed by apartheid and abject poverty, by creating and “living” his dream of the ideal “home”.

This comparison explains and foregrounds the differences in space and time represented in the two texts as well as the significance of the respective literary genres appropriated to express this difference. *The Africa House* is situated in the former Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) during the colonisation of Africa. It is a realistic novel based on the life and times of Stewart Gore-Browne and his activities in Africa, in particular his establishment of an estate comprising 23 000 acres at Shiwa Ngandu (Lamb 1999: 64-65). *Ways of Dying* projects the struggle of a “Professional Funeral Mourner” to make a living during the apartheid era. It is a novel interwoven with strains of magic realism which, as Mda (1997: 281) points out, informs the daily lives of Africans when he claims:

In my culture the magical is not disconcerting. It is taken for granted. No one

tries to find a natural explanation for the unreal. The unreal happens as part of reality. The supernatural is presented without judgement.

(Mda 1997: 281)

It is particularly interesting to note how different genres reflect different social conditions and changing periods and how, as Crang maintains, “the rise of modernity, and indeed postmodernity, in literature corresponds to different ways of experiencing the world and organising knowledge about it” (1998: 44). A versatile cultural construct, literature is able to either subvert or perpetuate historical information as “identities are shaped by embodied and embedded narratives, located in particular places and times ... they are fluid, migratory identities ...”(Carter et al. 1993: x). Crang explicitly identifies this aspect in colonial fiction when he points out that literature not only explores “how accounts of colonised peoples were shaped, but how these ideas reciprocally shaped Western identities. A key idea is that the identities of coloniser and colonised were relational – that is, the one depends on the other” (1998: 59). He furthermore suggests that, “although the formal trappings of empire may have ended, there may be a deep-seated and lingering legacy in terms of how Westerners understand the world” (Crang 1998: 59).

The entrenchment of Western ideas is also mentioned by Wittenberg (1997: 138) who attributes the uncritical perpetuation of ideas about colonisation to the adventure tales of the colonial period. This biased interpretation is contested in postcolonial novels that attempt to disassemble the “naturalisation” of imperialism in culture; a strategy that Wittenberg (1997: 137) relates to J.M. Coetzee’s novel *Foe* because it exposes the unreliability of all discursive practices (history included). The two texts discussed here then provide insight into the mind and aspirations of the coloniser as well as a glimpse of the possibilities for the colonised to escape the past and execute a magical leap of faith into the future. Narrative provides this possibility because it not only expresses the period and cultural experience, but also “plays a central role in shaping people’s geographical imaginations” (Crang 1998: 44). In fact, *Ways of Dying* illustrates how the postcolonial lack of boundaries, translated into literary space and defined by the magic realist mode, ascribes an additional dimension of meaning to the text. The novel’s intimation of hope through means of the imagination, illustrates Crang’s contention that “different modes of writing express different relationships to space and mobility” which “can be invested with different meanings” (1998: 44). The power of the pen, to use an old cliché, is also asserted and expressed in a similar way by André Brink (1996) who claims that we need to “re-imagine” or “re-invent” the future for South Africa.

*The Africa House* and *Ways of Dying* provide useful insight about the implications of different appropriations of space and time and the role of places

or houses/dwellings as expressions of culture or, symbols of historical periods in literature.<sup>3</sup> A comparison of these novels provides a good example of how literature “offers ways of looking at the world that show a range of landscapes of taste, experience and knowledge” (Crang 1998: 57). The basic concern in this article will be to examine how the respective protagonists, Stewart Gore-Browne and Toloki, come to terms with and/or interact with their disparate contexts or environments. It represents a process in which houses serve as the central metaphor, because they are not only adapted to a person’s lifestyle and indicative of his identity but also reflect certain periods and value systems.

Underlying this question, however, is also the significance of Lamb’s and Mda’s respective interpretations and representations of spatial boundaries in their novels and the implications of this comparison for our understanding of the colonial question in Africa. I argue that their reactions to their physical and social contexts provide a crucial link to conceptions of identity that are predicated on the interaction of time and space. Furthermore, it would seem that the synchronisation of time-space (or historical process) was disrupted by the colonisation of African territories that caused a mismatch in the correlation of time and space. Alternately, this concept could perhaps be better explained by Wittenberg’s contention that “[i]mperialism brings together cultures and regions on a global scale but integrates them in a fundamentally unequal way” (1997: 130). Both protagonists share the same physical space (Africa) but at different times and this difference in time becomes the central point in the discussion.

The idea of colonisation and its effects brings home the extent of cultural disruption. The title of Lamb’s novel, *The Africa House*, implies that it could be one of several houses (not the only house) and that the owner does not perceive this one as “home” but rather as a symbol of affluence in the sense that Kanika Sircar (1987: 304) implies above. This impression is confirmed when, in the exposition of the novel (or biography), we are introduced to it as an isolated and uninhabited ruin in the middle of the African bush. The life-story of Gore-Brown is reconstructed around this desolate place which, from a historical perspective, implies that Gore-Brown’s attempt to “civilize” this section of the African bush had not made a lasting impression. Although a testimony to the glory that was yesteryear, Shiwa Ngandu has become meaningless due to its lack of inhabitants because places acquire meaning through their association with people. Ironically, however, the impact of imperialism on the people of Africa has been more severe and lasting. Toloki, his life of deprivation and desperate attempt to survive by “living” off the carnage of apartheid, provides us with an example of this aftermath.

The fact that *The Africa House* is supposed to be a realistic account, or type of biography tracing the life of Stuart Gore-Brown with the aid of photographs, letters and diary entries relating to authentic historical figures, provides an

important clue to the interpretation of the novel. It infers that the experience of the protagonist and the recounted events could be regarded as reasonably reliable and that the anecdotes and character sketches have been selected and arranged from material at hand. However, seen from a literary point of view, this account is but one of the many ways of interpreting reality and forms part of a “complex web of meanings” which in turn relate to other texts (Crang 1998: 57). As a mode, realism reflects only one set of spatial experience while other modes or styles such as magic realism, will effect different experiences. In this sense, *The Africa House* can then be explored through the protagonist’s interaction with his context as well as through the broad postmodern lens of reader and author experience. It is posited that the vast estate established by Gore-Browne at Shiwa Ngandu, represents “the true account of one man’s African dream ...” (Lamb 2000: xxxiii).

Although pictured as a political figure who fought to establish black representation in the erstwhile Northern Rhodesia, Gore-Browne is nonetheless perceived as a slave to the English way of life due to his awareness of social status and conventions. The description of his house and life conform to and symbolise Crang’s conception of “the very heart of English national identity” that serves as “a talisman for a conservative vision or organic rural values” (1998: 31). In this respect, Gore-Browne then reflects the typical frontier culture that Crang perceives as “both adapting a culture to a new land and shaping that landscape through various cultural preferences” (p. 20). In psychological terms, Hummon ascribes the emulation of a specific culture in strange surroundings to an innate feeling of uncertainty that emerges when “in taking on new roles, exploring new places, or coping with environmental or social change, we may become ‘self-conscious’ of our identity, anxiously searching for new ways to interpret and express ‘who we are here and now’”(1989: 208).

Like Gore-Browne’s lifestyle, the house also appears incongruous in the African bush. On the whole, it emulates a British country house with an unfortunate mixture of different architectural styles:

A magnificent three-storey pink-bricked mansion, with a tower in the centre, a red tiled roof, and a line of elegant arches supporting a first-floor terrace from which a Union Jack fluttered limply. Rising behind it, a granite hill provided a dramatic backdrop. Part Tuscan manor house, part grand English ancestral home, and all completely unexpected and out of place in this remote corner of the African bush. Surely, only a madman or a megalomaniac could have built such a place.

(Lamb 2000: xxiii)



The only concession Gore-Browne makes to Africa are some African symbols on the façade of the house and its name: “two carved wooden rhinoceroses acting as supports for a jutting side window, and the wooden crocodile over the top of the front door frame. The name was African too – Shiwa House, called after the lake which we could just see glimmering blue in the distance” (Lamb 2000: xxiii). Despite his deep appreciation of nature and love for Africa, Gore-Browne then feels obliged to bring order to the wilderness and impart some of his British manners to the indigenous people whom he treats in school-master fashion by meting out brutal punishment for their “disobedience”. His life is also interspersed with visits back home and memories of home, which seem to make Africa “bearable”. In this sense, Gore-Browne still adheres to “home” as a point of orientation and a repository of memories of the past (a longing for roots and origin). He still closely associates his identity with English values, a luxury denied to Toloki in *Ways of Dying*.

Two dominant motives seem to spur Gore-Browne on in his “colonisation” of the African bush. The first impulse relates to his inability to make a success in his own country (a fact that he implicitly admits in a letter to his aunt Ethel), but this aspect is subtly camouflaged by his grandiose ideas of progress and improvement that dominated the imperialist society of the time. Yet, ironically, despite his vast estate, he is still dependent on his aunt’s material generosity and emotional support to maintain his enterprise. The fatal flaw in his venture then proves to be his dependence on England for his survival in Africa, as he violates one of the golden rules of a “life-style profile” that should be made as “congruent as possible with the environmental quality profile” (Rapoport 1989: xvii). This fact is already predicted in the exposition of the novel that relates how his former beautiful and much admired residence and estate has fallen into disrepair, has become a forgotten ruin which has to be revived by memories and transcribed into fiction by the narrator.

The second impulse for his sojourn in Africa can largely be ascribed to his romantic impression of adventure narratives and his admiration for the explorer Livingstone. His venture into the bush then becomes an attempt to “carve out his own identity” (Crang 1998: 48) typical of the adventure narratives. Similar to Robinson Crusoe, who appropriated the island as “a liminal free space in which the emerging individualistic middle classes could project their dreams of success and progress through individual endeavour” (Wittenberg 1997: 144), Gore-Brown then pursues his own dream of making good in the African bush. Although his experience of Africa and its people illustrates genuine devotion and he honestly believes in his mission to educate and cultivate the untamed nature of the country and people, he employs high-handed methods.

In contrast to the realism affected by Lamb, Mda adopts a type of magic realism to portray Toloki’s experience in *Ways of Dying*. It serves as a foil to the uncritical stance of realism,<sup>4</sup> by effecting “a site for cultural critique and

change” (Bawarshi 2000: 336). In effect, it illustrates the essential duality of existence by illustrating the possibility of different interpretations of reality and contests the simplistic, orderly interpretation foisted on the reader by historical documentation. As subversive strategy, magic realism reflects the postcolonial identity crisis resulting from an oppressive colonial past and captures the reality of a postcolonial and multicultural society within the South African context; a position that Toloki occupies in *Ways of Dying*.

Coming from a traditional society, Toloki perceives a house as a refuge and meeting place. His lifestyle is typical of the nomadic identity who, as a result of globalisation (and we could readily substitute colonisation here) has lost the sense of home as a place in the postcolonial context. Hummon explains this condition in the following way:

Moreover, modernization, by fostering social and geographic mobility, has fundamentally altered the person’s relations with place. The modern individual – confronted with a placeless, homogeneous landscape of tract housing, urban renewal, and the omnipresent McDonald’s; ceaselessly moving from one dwelling place, community and region to another – can develop neither an imagery of self based on locale nor a sense of belonging in a specific landscape of dwelling, community, or region.

(Hummon 1989: 221)

The subject in a postcolonial situation is therefore rootless and “homeless” and fails to connect to any specific site of orientation; has no reference to identity. Particularly within the apartheid context, people like Toloki were uprooted from traditional communities and became migrants and beggars hovering on the periphery of large cities in a desperate search for jobs and survival. Toloki’s bid for survival depends on his “job” of mourning the dead. Ironically, he depends on death to be able to live. His “home” is a public corner of the quayside shelter where he keeps all his worldly belongings in a shopping trolley (Mda 1995: 10). In this atmosphere of poverty and violence, death is a daily occurrence. He is at home in squatter camps, or in more polite language, informal settlements, where the shacks consist of “cardboard, plastic, pieces of canvas and corrugated iron” (Mda 1995: 42). When he helps Noria, his childhood friend, to construct her shack, however, it becomes a shared occupation and is described in the following way: the “structure is a collage of bright sunny colours. And bits of iron sheets, some of which shimmer in the morning rays, while others are rust-laden. It would certainly be at home in any museum of modern art” (Mda 1995: 60). This colourful construction assumes a significant meaning for the observers and inhabitants: it is compared to a work of art. However, it is when Toloki collects furniture catalogues and back issues of *Home and Garden* magazine (Mda 1995: 92) from which he takes the

pictures to paste on the inside walls of the shack, that the shack becomes a home and a personal lived-in space. This is the second shack that he decorates in this way, but the difference is that his first shack mostly had pictures in black and white whereas Noria's shack has colour:

The four walls are divided into different sections. On some sections, he plasters pictures of ideal kitchens. There are also pictures of lounges, of dining rooms, and of bedrooms. Then on two walls, he plasters pictures of ideal gardens and houses and swimming pools, all from the *Home and Garden* magazines. By the time he has finished, every inch of the wall is covered with bright pictures – a wallpaper of sheer luxury.

(Mda 1995:103)

Like Alice in Wonderland, Toloki and Noria undertake enchanted walks through the house and explore the garden that seems to represent a pool of tranquility. This grandeur is contrasted with the meagre furnishings of Noria's shack that is "devoid even of a single stool" (Mda 1995: 105). Noria recognises the power of belonging when she urges Toloki: "We must be together because we can teach each other how to live" (p. 106). The imaginative journey they undertake is intermingled with realistic actions such as when Toloki "covers the large oak table with a lace tablecloth" and then fetches the cakes he had brought from the oven (p. 105). Noria also seems to possess a unique quality to inspire artistic innovation and together, they manage to create their own world and discover their artistic talents.

Toloki effectively represents a hybrid identity who is no longer dependent on interaction with the physical delimitations of a structure, but can transcend it to populate his imagination with images of home and belonging. Ironically, being unaffected by status and money and no sense of "home" as such, Toloki has the opportunity to create his own home in the world of the imagination. Similar to his job as funeral mourner, he converts a dismal shack and his limited means into hopeful possibilities. He has the benefit of a free spirit, which makes his dreams boundless; a valuable tool for survival and for building a rainbow nation in which

cultures are not seen as "territorially exclusive" or homogeneous but include internal differentiation. This will stress that there is no "essential" core to cultures but that they are always "hybrids" formed out of interactions and movement.

(Crang 1998: 161)

Toloki uses his imagination to construct the future and does not rely on a defunct society to inspire him. As such, he illustrates Crang's impression of a culture in which "[i]t is in the juxtaposition, mutations and connections of

different cultural spaces, in the overlaying of contradictory cultural landscapes over each other that creativity and vitality may emerge” (1998: 175).

In contrast to Gore-Browne, Toloki is able to transcend his limitations in a positive way. Gore-Brown, on the other hand, believing himself to transcend his African surroundings, is in fact creating a blue-print of British imperialism so that he becomes imprisoned by his past. Toloki’s lack of reference and his homeless condition, allow him to create his own future. He is, in fact, effectively freed from his past. Gore-Brown’s dream was a replication of the past; restricted by reality, while Toloki’s dream has the scope of the imagination. It is perhaps this aspect that Larsen refers to when he claims that “[t]he role of art and literature is not to qualify identity as superficial and artificial or to make it a metaphysical abstraction, but to underline that there is always a basic element of choice and construction involved in any identity”(1997: 292).

In conclusion, the difference between the two texts is effectively underlined by the realistic account and context of Gore-Brown’s experience in Africa (illustrated with photographs), while *Ways of Dying* relates to an authentic historical setting conceptualised in magical realist terms. When the texts are regarded as part of the palimpsest of identity formation described above, they also imply Crang’s contention that “finding the routes through which forms have propagated reveals the connectedness and mutual imbrication of different cultures”(1998: 172). In this sense, Toloki as an outsider or exile in *Ways of Dying*, has an opportunity from the outside of history to write his own text, a position that Elizabeth Grosz explains in her discussion of different forms of exile:

The marginalized position of the exile, at the very least, provides the exile with the perspectives of an outsider, the kinds of perspective that enable one to see the loopholes and flaws of the system in ways that those inside the system cannot. The position of the exile automatically has access to (at least) two different kinds of discourse and history, one defined by exclusion from a social mainstream; and one provided autonomously, from its own history and self-chosen representations. This is a position uniquely privileged in terms of social transgression and renewal.

(Grosz 1993: 69-70)

It is the concept of choice that is inverted in the comparison of the two novels. Gore-Browne, though endowed with both the economic power and the opportunity to choose his fate, is ironically weighed down and ensnared by his colonial heritage and social standing. Sadly, his dream becomes a mere duplication of his past. Such a “dream” has to, and finally will, degenerate into a ruin as symbol of his unnatural and arrogant appropriation of space in Africa. It becomes a memory of former glory, of one man’s folly to improve on nature.

In contrast to Gore-Brown, Toloki has no choice but to rely on his wits, his ability to survive and an active imagination. In different ways, the two novels both attest to the adaptability and resilience of the human spirit in its reaction to, interaction with and transcendence of spatial boundaries. They illustrate the significance of historical periods and their contribution towards the construction of identity in literature. In this case, the protagonist in *The Africa House*, Stuart Gore-Brown, is doomed to re-enact the imperialist appropriation of Africa while Toloki, the protagonist in *Ways of Dying*, illustrates the possibility of transcending time and space through the imagination – thereby providing a solution to the South African impasse created by apartheid.

## Notes

1. As far as philosophers are concerned, Bachelard (1964) and Heidegger (1999) devote considerable attention to space, place and dwellings. On the literary front, several conferences such as the Poetics and Linguistics Association Conference: “Challenging the Boundaries” (Istanbul, 23-26 June 2003) and “Place, Memory, Identities: Australia, Spain and the New World” (Melbourne, 9-12 July 2003) have taken place while various book and article collections also address the topic of space and boundaries (Darian-Smith, Gunner & Nuttall 1996).
2. Here Dickens’s *Bleak House*, Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights* and Poe’s *The Fall of the House of Usher* immediately come to mind.
3. In this instance, the authors and by implication the readers, could be associated with designers in architecture who, according to Rapoport (1989: xx) differ radically from users in the sense that they “emphasize perceptual qualities” while the users focus on “associational qualities”. In other words the author and reader have the advantage of a much broader perspective and overview, or in anthropological terms, can be associated with an “emic” perspective which relates to “how members of a given group see things” (in this case the protagonists) and “etic” perspective which relates to “how an outside observer or analyst sees the same things” (Rapoport 1989: xiv).
4. The unconditional acceptance of historical material as mentioned above

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