“THE STRANGER AT HOME”: REPRESENTATIONS OF HOME AND HOSPITALITY IN THREE SOUTH AFRICAN POST-TRANSITIONAL NOVELS

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Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of home and hospitality in Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, Ishtiyaq Shukri's *The Silent Minaret*, and Ivan Vladislavić's *Double Negative*. It attempts to trace the un-homeliness of the central characters and to account for their feelings of discomfort. As such, it argues that the home is incapable of being inviolable because the invasion of the public is always a possibility. The implication is that master narratives such as race, history and politics are always entering the space one constructs as private. That said, this study also argues that the home and those things with which it is most closely associated, such as belonging, comfort and safety, may actually hide a form of violence. By this I mean that in the desire for homeliness, one may exclude others from one's home. Consequently, this argument draws on Jacques Derrida's writings on the aporia of conditional and unconditional hospitality to investigate what ethical possibilities might, somewhat unexpectedly, be created by the un-homely home. The study is therefore an exploration of the potentials that inhere in a certain kind of un-homeliness, the most important of which is the chance to respond ethically to the alterity of the other. In sum, there is a necessity to extend hospitality beyond condition and beyond limit, and this ethical imperative is at odds with the desire for comfort and safety. The way in which post-transitional novels explore these issues of hospitality and home is the primary focus of this study.

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Introduction

A Gesture of Hospitality

Welcome. Can one welcome another to one's thesis, or research? And moreover, should one? By 'should' I do not mean to ask primarily about the appropriateness (or lack thereof) of such a welcome. Undoubtedly, this issue of what is appropriate is not without a certain measurable value, but, as I will show through a close reading of Jacques Derrida's work, it is precisely this measurability, accountability, or recourse to an economic transaction which ensures that the issue of 'proper' behaviour is not primary. Rather, I would like this 'should' to register in the dimension of an ethics of hospitality.

Of course, introductions are nothing but a certain kind of welcome: 'welcome in', they say, 'let me inform you of what you may expect to find inside'. In a sense, though, this inside to which one is welcomed is strange and does not coincide with the inside (one thinks) one knows. At first, the welcome seems to locate the reader inside the work: it seems to suggest, *from inside*, that one is welcome. Nonetheless, this greeting is presumably only necessary because one is outside, unable to see what is within, and so, in a gesture of hospitality, is told what to expect. Accordingly, introductions suggest that they do not contain what will be read 'inside' the work. As such, they lie outside of the actual research to be conducted. They can only warn, foreshadow, proclaim, or testify to what is inside. And thus they surely always already testify to being just outside of that inside. This inside is a little 'inside-out', out of kilter, and "out of joint" (with time as well as with space, as Hamlet and Derrida remind one [*Specters of Marx* 1]). What one is here beginning to perceive (perhaps in an inside-out fashion) are the complexities of hospitality and its effects on the experience of space.

But, as my title would already have informed you, it is a specific space which places this research, namely the home. Clearly, a welcome can be extended from many places, a number of which are, strictly speaking, not what we think of as space (such as an introduction that welcomes its readers 'in'). I do not and cannot deny this fact: hospitality can (and moreover should) be extended everywhere and not primarily from the home. Yet it is because we often (too often) do welcome the other into our home that this space and its connotations have a particular focus in the thesis to follow. For, I will argue that modern society privileges the home for reasons that are at once necessary and also problematic. It seems to me that the concept of home overemphasises safety, security, belonging, sovereign space and, by

association, sovereign subjectivity. And it is exactly these aspirations and values that I believe are undone, problematised, deconstructed – in the Derridean sense but also in the sense that one 'un-makes' a house or home – by the novels I intend to analyse. In a way, then, they render the home un-homed.

So, one must begin again. One must again and always say *welcome*, though one must not too hastily assume that one knows to what or from where one is welcoming the other (another term that will need to be unpacked). For research to be unsure of its coordinates, of what or where it is, seems precarious, disturbing even, but the destabilisation seems, to me, to be unavoidable. To be sure-footed here, to be sure of where the foot lands and whose land that is, would be most unwelcoming, most inhospitable. It would be doing a form of violence that the content of the work would attempt to disavow. This is a hasty form of apology, and indeed it may even be read as an alibi, but the risk of that (or even of being accused of scholarship that is bad scholarship because it does not know 'what it is') accompanies the guest one welcomes, without reserve, and without coordinates.

A House and a Home

This thesis aims to discuss the un-homeliness that is depicted in three post-apartheid novels, namely, Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* (2006), Ishtiyaq Shukri's *The Silent Minaret* (2005), and Ivan Vladislavić's *Double Negative* (2011). In order to do this, I must first explain what I mean by terms such as home and un-home.

A house is a physical structure, a building in which one resides. Whether it is made of bricks and cement, wood or tin, its purpose defines its nature and, for this reason, its signifier is a fairly neutral term. But I wonder if one can construct a home out of only these materials? Are walls and a ceiling sufficient, and if not, what else might be required? If one imagines a home, does one visualise merely the empty rooms, and the things like doors and windows that can be touched and utilised? Indeed, I would think that many consider the image of their home incomplete without people in it. In the absence of loved ones who belong there, some might feel that a home becomes a much more generic, cold, empty space – a mere house.

There are also certain feelings which a person tends to associate with the home. For instance, one hopes that it is a place of safety and comfort. When one is out in the world, one may feel exposed, vulnerable, and returning home is usually a reprieve from such discomfort. It is where one hopes to go in order to escape the world: a sanctuary, haven, and place of belonging. Consequently, one feature which I think is ineluctably associated with home is

that it is private property, whether one owns that property or not. Since one lives there, and it is where one goes when one wishes to be 'inside' and comfortable, a certain sense of ownership surely inheres in the very concept of home.

Finally, it is likely that one feels one can 'be oneself' at home. It is private space, the world has *no right* to look in or enter without permission, and therefore one has the right to be 'who one really is'. Out there, modern subjects are forced to adopt many personas – "face[s] to meet the faces that you meet", as T. S. Eliot puts it (27). The work of being out in public is exhausting because one must adjust one's behaviour to accommodate society's expectations and rules. So once one steps across the threshold of a space that is one's own, it is hoped (perhaps even expected) that the necessity for such performance ceases. People hope that their homes are inviolable because in that space they behave as if the public were incapable of scrutinising them. It is likely, then, that for most, the idea of home is closely, intimately related to the sense of being sovereign subjects with all the rights and freedoms that should come with that designation in the modern world.

Allison Blunt and Robyn Dowling observe that "home is a series of feelings and attachments, some of which, some of the time, and in some places, become connected to a physical shelter" (10). They therefore suggest that home "is not only experienced in a house", but "*within and beyond* the house" (Blunt and Dowling 10, original emphasis). This sense that feelings of homeliness can be experienced beyond the "physical shelter" is key to my own work, since I attempt to consider the inhospitality of characters like Marion and Helen in Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, and Neville Lister in Vladislavić's *Double Negative*. All these characters extend their desire for comfort, safety and ipseity (or selfhood) beyond their own abodes, and they thus make the whole world homely (to the detriment of others).

Due to the violence that premises homeliness, I have chosen to focus on the trope of what I will call un-home in the novels under consideration. It seems to me that this term is useful in that it contains the very word home, and thus invokes the "feelings and attachments" with which it is inexorably connected. Yet, what the term suggests is also what it simultaneously disavows or makes strange. For this reason, while my use of the word extends the sense in which Sigmund Freud employs it, there is, of course, a correlation. Freud describes the *Unheimlich*, which can be translated either as the 'uncanny' or 'unhomely', as a set of feelings that all have as their basis the return of repressed and yet familiar experiences. According to him, "everything that is uncanny" fulfils the condition of being "something which is secretly familiar [*Heimlich-heimisch*] which has undergone repression and then returned from it" (245). It matters little at this stage of my discussion whether one agrees with

this statement or not. Rather, what I would like to emphasise is the idea that what one might consider strange, unnerving and disconcerting, may actually be what is quite ordinary, familiar and normal. In effect, the boundary between home and un-home is rendered porous by Freud's writings on the matter. There is no home which is not invaded by that which should be unfamiliar, unwelcome and inexplicable. Those things once belonged, and we have merely repressed this fact.

What Freud also points out is that what is typically considered homely is simply what is *normally* construed as such. Familiarity breeds not only contempt, but normativity too. The standardised form of existence is therefore a construction, and its 'proper place' is the home. It is thus not coincidental that the 'nuclear family', which is the most banal signifier of Western normalcy, is traditionally placed inside a home. What violence that image hides has been well documented by feminist and queer theory. Indeed, the idea that there is still (if there ever was) a 'normal family' seems fraudulent, despite being pernicious (see Halberstam 105). As such, and as I show in the course of this thesis, master narratives, along with the power they wield and the terrible harm they may therefore cause, can only begin to be undone if the home, homeliness and the familiar are deconstructed. In other words, one must show how *un*familiar and strange these ideas about the world really are. One must reveal their uncanniness (which has been repressed), so that in the process, the violence that they render invisible might be seen more clearly. There are stories of home which are not being told in modern society. They are narratives which might make one uncomfortable, frightened and unsettled. In this thesis, my interest, in part, is what might be lost should one continue to repress these stories. What worlds that are better, more hospitable and possible might be obliterated in the desire for familiarity and comfort? If one is to accommodate this radically hospitable vision of society, is one not obliged to start *at home*?

Not coincidentally, it is difficult to imagine the capitalist system without private property. Apart from being a valuable asset, often the primary indicator of wealth or lack thereof, it is bound up with subjectivity. In fact, as I show in my chapter on Shukri's novel, those who wander, vagrants of all kinds (including the protagonist Issa Shamshuddin) are deprived of rights and wealth, are hounded and policed, almost certainly because their lack of home makes them far less controllable, determinable and legible. The process of challenging the violence which is done in the name of late capitalism and globalisation must consequently take account of this connection between home and subjection. Any politics which does not do so would necessarily fail to initiate the kind of change that would fundamentally destabilise the power matrix of the nation-state model of the world.

In the later years of his life, Derrida, whose earlier work had often been criticised for being apolitical, turned more directly to ideas of global justice and the creation of a truly cosmopolitan society. He focussed often on the concept of hospitality because it allowed him to rethink the home, and with it all the associations of private property, subjectivity and subjection which make the world such an unequal and unjust place at present (see *Specters of Marx*). This thesis, which owes a debt to his work, takes a similar approach. I think that the various things with which the home is associated – such as safety, comfort, privacy and ownership, subjectivity and belonging – are dangerous in their way. What they allow for is a certain kind of violence which I shall try to argue can only be countered by making the home un-homely. As I show in the course of my reading of three South African novels, undoing this violence is incredibly difficult, however. What is required is that one conceive of a home that is deprived of all those things that distinguish it from a house. This is to say, it obliges one to imagine the home without its homeliness, and that one live there, discomforted and exposed, for the guest, the other, who cannot be anticipated or rejected.

Un-Homeliness and Unconditional Hospitality in South African Literature

In order to explain how this extraordinary form of hospitality is represented or gestured at in the novels under consideration, I would like first to elaborate on the importance of home in South African fiction. In an article on home and South African literary culture, Meg Samuelson wonders "what it might mean to move beyond the liminal threshold moment of transition" and "walk through [the] door and inhabit the house of a new national culture" ("Walking" 130). As with my own work, hers is concerned with "'home' as figuration and home as physical space". Moreover, she contends that home is also a "metaphorical structure in the thinking of nation", and finds its "practices and ideologies" salient as she grapples with the "complexities of housed in home-space" (130). While space is a dominant trope in all South African fiction and its criticism,[1] Samuelson's article is one of the very few pieces that actually considers it in relation to home in particular. Her argument is therefore an important contribution to an underdeveloped are of study.

Significantly, Samuelson admits that the "trope of 'home' and habitation has led [her] to questions of intimacy and violence, belonging and exclusion, hospitality and 'hostipitality', destruction and restitution" (130). Given the nature of her article, which is a survey of different manifestations of home in a wide selection of recent South African literature, all she is ultimately able to do is suggest in the broadest terms how issues such as hospitality and

belonging are reflected in the novels she discusses. What I would like to argue in the following section is that Derrida's writing on hospitality can usefully be employed (in a much more sustained way) to consider the challenges facing those who would like to imagine ethically inhabiting the 'post-transitional home'.

The problem of making such habitation possible, principally, is that South Africa (and, by association, the fiction written about it) is a country ravaged by the idea of ownership (see Graham, *Mapping Loss* 2). Although the colonists were scarcely the first to insist that the land was theirs (by right), they brought with them such a dogmatic need to claim the status of 'first settlers' that they were obliged to eradicate, displace and/or make subservient the San, Khoi and African peoples who they found inhabiting the territory. These strategies for dealing with the 'native' population have undoubtedly scarred the country ever since.

Moreover, as is suggested by colonial literature, the issue of belonging cannot be separated from that of language. In other words, settler writing struggles with what J. M. Coetzee characterises as "the burden of finding a home in Africa for a consciousness formed in and by a language whose history lies on another continent" ("Reading" 173). Of course, it is difficult to know how one can belong to that which is taken by force, and which is unfamiliar, strange and seems to resist the language which one would use to describe it. Colonial writers were faced with an uncertain world, unlike the one from which they had come, which they could either try to describe in terms of that to which they were accustomed, or by using a 'new' language (see Coetzee, *White Writing*). The strategy of using the language of the metropole amounted to a kind of domestication, and involved taking whatever was different and rendering it in terms that were familiar to them. As I will show, this strategy of taming is one that is still prevalent, and is practised by Neville in *Double Negative*, and Helen and Marion in *Playing in the Light*.

In order to indicate how this problem of language and belonging affected colonial writers, I would like briefly to discuss the work of Thomas Pringle, who is often called the 'father of South African poetry'.[2] He was a Scottish settler, an open critic of the Cape colonial government, and when he moved back to Britain, became a tireless campaigner for the abolition of slavery (see Miller and Sergeant, *Survey of South African Poetry* 17–20) His poetry is therefore not that of a typical colonist, a point made by G. M. Miller and Howard Sergeant who write that he was "rare in those days of slaveships and indifference to the sufferings of the coloured races" because of his awareness of "Britain's guilt" (20). And yet, his work shows a tension between a sense of un-homeliness, on the one hand, and a profound

desire for belonging, on the other. For this reason, Dirk Klopper postulates that one must recognise that "as a colonial poet, Pringle's allegiance lies both with the mother country and with the colony, and that his position is therefore necessarily ambiguous" ("Thomas Pringle" 371). As such, he is prone to perpetuating some of the colonial ideas about the land and its people with which his political views seem to be at odds. "This ambiguity pervades his South African writings, creating a breach between his identification with the oppressed people of the land and his partial responsibility as a colonist for the very condition of oppression that he decries", writes Klopper (371).

One of his most famous poems, "Afar in the Desert", describes a melancholy speaker who flees "away from the dwellings of men" (43), with only "the silent Bush-boy by [his] side" (2). The speaker bemoans the loss of his native land, "whose magical name / Thrills [him] to the heart like electric flame" (13–14). He thinks of this lost land as the "home of [his] childhood" (15), and contrasts the "passions and scenes of that rapturous time" with the mournful days he now spends in the desert of a foreign country (16). The speaker's desire, that is, to escape the "oppressive conditions that prevailed in the colony", is thus frustrated in advance because he has "internalized the values, perceptions, and attitudes of colonial society, and simply transports these into the wilderness with him" (Klopper, "Thomas Pringle" 377).

It is also worth noting that the figure of the lone poet out in 'empty space', according to Coetzee, is fairly common during the colonial era precisely because the settler "is seeking a dialogue with Africa, a reciprocity with Africa, that will allow him an identity better than a visitor, stranger, transient" (*White Writing* 8). Coetzee also suggests that the emptiness and barrenness of the landscape is often represented as a silence: an unwillingness on the part of the land to enter into the dialogue in which the settler would like to engage.[3] Tellingly, Coetzee posits that this inability to find an appropriate voice through which the land might speak suggests the colonist's "failure to imagine a peopled landscape, an inability to conceive a society in South Africa in which there is a place for the self" ("Introduction" 9).

This same failure of the historical imagination to engage with the alterity of the African is noticeable in Pringle's work, as is evident in his refrain about being accompanied by the "silent Bush-boy" (2). It is difficult to know how to read this unheard figure who stands beside the speaker like an ally, but also somewhat like a slave. His silence denies him voice and agency, which is worrying, as it may imply that he needs no voice, and has nothing of value to contribute. However, one is also aware that it is dangerous for Pringle to speak on behalf of this person who belongs to another culture and another world. In fact, when this

poet does appropriate the perspective of the 'native', it is notable how often these speakers' concerns echo his own. "Song of the Wild Bushman", for example, is an evocation of how comfortable and happy the 'native' is in his 'native land', and, in fact, begins with the speaker contrasting the alien crops and practices of the "White Man" with those of the "Bushman" (1–8). One senses in this poem that although Pringle would like to write from the other's perspective, he finds instead that he must project his own yearning for a homeland to which he is accustomed onto him/her.

Indeed, the San hunter-gatherer's descriptions are really a mere inversion of the pastoral scene that was typical of European depictions of the picturesque (see Coetzee, *White Writing*). Similarly, the speaker's existence is transformed into one "of pasturage and agriculture" (Klopper, "Thomas Pringle" 379), in which, for example, "The countless springboks are [his] flock" (Pringle, "Song" 9). His aim in this poem seems to be to give voice to a race of people who he himself once constructed as "silent" (Pringle, "Afar in the Desert" 2), but the poem shows that he "cannot simply relinquish his colonial identity and preconceptions" (Klopper, "Thomas Pringle" 380). In other poems in which the speaker or main focaliser is 'native' (such as "The Bushman", "The Hottentot", and "The Bechuana Boy"), the central motif is always a homeliness and sense of belonging that has been ravaged or destroyed by Imperial expansion. Nevertheless, one finds again and again that the only frame of reference available to the respective speakers is that of the settler. It seems likely that while Pringle is certainly troubled by the violence of Empire, he is nevertheless unable to write as an African. Instead, "what happens is that the African is presented in the likeness of a European". Klopper asserts that "[i]n this way the otherness of the African, his inarticulable difference, is reduced to sameness" ("Thomas Pringle" 380)

Pringle's writing evinces a sense of un-homeliness that I shall argue is evident in far more recent fiction written about this country. In a sense, this is perfectly understandable because, as I have already shown, home is a series of feelings, attachments and associations which are difficult to imagine as anything more than unrealised desires and yearnings, particularly in a country which has had to suffer the catastrophic effects of the dispossessions with which empires made their name. In short, the writings of Wicomb, Vladislavić and Shukri all demonstrate a connection to the kinds of un-homedness that are described in colonial literature. Indeed, in this thesis, I show that all three texts fairly overtly attempt to reveal that the history of this country is a notable influence on the present, and accounts, in some ways, for the discomfort that is still felt at home.

Un-homeliness was, for the likes of Pringle, a product of the colonial encounter with the other in a strange land. I would argue that this sense of a loss of comfort and privacy, safety and belonging, was exacerbated by the apartheid regime, which showed a pathological need to monitor and control private spaces. Its rhetoric of belonging (of *volk en vaderland*) was, of course, a response to British rule, but also a repetition of the systems of control and ownership which the British had developed. In the words of Rita Barnard, "apartheid can surely be grasped as a deliberate and anachronistic perpetuation or reinvention of the spatial and epistemological distortions of imperialism within one country's borders" (47).

Moreover, apartheid seemed to place an (until then) unheard-of emphasis on the home itself by creating Bantustans or 'Homelands' for black people, by the forced removal of thousands from their houses and communities under the Group Areas Act of 1950 in conjunction with the Natives Resettlement Act of 1954, by the ever-present fear of security police taking one from one's home, by the attempt to enforce Afrikaans as a 'home' language, and so forth. Once again, the literature written during that traumatic time reflected this un-homed state. Indeed, the pervasive use of realism which characterised protest literature of the era meant that forced removals, migrant housing conditions, the situation in the Bantustans and so on were often the primary focus of representations of home written during apartheid.[4] One might well argue that when Njabulo Ndebele famously called for writers to "rediscover the ordinary" (41), he had in mind, in part, a writing of the domestic scene that did not focus so exclusively on the home as a site of spectacle and spectacular political intervention.

Apartheid legislation and practice constructed the home as an overtly political space,[5] and the "so-called architects of apartheid (Malan and especially Verwoerd) presented their policies as a way of making South Africa *Heimlich* for the white person" (Barnard 49). Yet, as Barnard reminds us, "this *Heimlichkeit* had its uncanny double from the start" because "[t]he comfortable suburban house, in both a historical and socially symbolic sense, was inseparably connected to its prototypical and repressed other: to the house in the township, a place that has remained unseen (perhaps even now) by many, if not most, white South Africans" (49). Barnard's comments on the doubling of the suburban home by the township house are taken from her analysis of how and why Nadine Gordimer's apartheid fiction implied the necessity of "leaving the house of the white race" (qtd in Barnard 48). As I show in my chapter on Vladislavić, this very same ethical imperative is evident in his most recent work. Clearly, then, the *Heimlichkeit* of the South African suburban home is now, as it was then, a product of violent political and economic practices which construct comfort for some

at the expense of suffering others. It is worth mentioning that while Barnard does recognise that practices of exclusion and inclusion are therefore pertinent in understanding why one must exit the "house of the white race", she does not draw directly on the concept of hospitality in thinking through these matters. As such, while her work on the 'politics of place' in the literary output of this country is influential, I would argue that there is still more work to be done in order to tease out other ways in which space and power are related.

In any event, what Barnard's argument proves is that representing the home as unstable, incoherent, and often violent was probably a necessary aesthetic and political course of action during apartheid. It seems logical to assume that with the coming of the fully democratic dispensation which, by law, cannot police the private home as the apartheid regime did, representations of home in South African literature would no longer imagine it as such a contested space. But my thesis will show that prominent South African writers continue to write of an un-homely home, and seem to conceive of this as a defining feature of the post-apartheid experience. My study will further argue that, in ways which intersect with postmodern, cosmopolitan concerns, the works of Wicomb, Shukri and Vladislavić posit a profound connection between space and discourse – suggesting that notions of one's own space, one's home, are dependent on discursive constructions (of the political, the racial, and the historic in particular), and especially on what one might call the discourse of the 'other'.[6]

The otherness of the other has obviously troubled South African writers since the very first colonists began to describe their 'new-found' residence. Arguably, it is J. M. Coetzee's fiction that has been most influential in terms of considering the issues of space, alterity and their relation to hospitality. In novel after novel, the metaphor of the house or home, and uninvited visitor, figures prominently. In *Age of Iron*, for example, Mrs Curren finds a tramp named Vercueil in her backyard on the very day that she is diagnosed with terminal cancer (Coetzee, *Age* 4). Inexplicably, though he is a drunkard and uncommunicative, she finds that she becomes responsible for this man who refuses to be understood or 'housed' in conventional ways. Her illness also pushes her to write a letter to her daughter in Canada. This letter is the novel the reader encounters. Not coincidentally, she leaves it in Vercueil's keeping, trusting that this man, who has done little to deserve her faith in him, will deliver it to its intended recipient (Coetzee, *Age* 33). This summary suggests that Coetzee has long been concerned with the trope of home, and with the ethics of hospitality. The relationship between Mrs Curren and Vercueil is characterised by the fact that he is an uninvited guest who is strange beyond her ability to place him, and who nevertheless becomes her

responsibility, and salvation, since he is the one entrusted with her most intimate words, written while she is dying.

In the post-apartheid novel, *Disgrace*, Lucy is raped by intruders while her father, David Lurie, is trapped in another room. Lurie advises his daughter to abort the child produced of that awful invasion (Coetzee, *Disgrace* 197), and to leave her home. To do otherwise, in his estimation, is "an invitation to them to return" (158). But Lucy does not heed her father's warning and instead marries Petrus, a local farmworker, who will protect her and her child in return for the farm (203). David takes a modest abode and is afforded the status of visitor in his daughter's life. By this stage of the text, he is willing to imagine "[v]isitorship, visitation" as "a new footing, a new start" (218). The novel is therefore about visitorship in all its forms: the violent and intrusive, the welcome and respectful. In so many ways, Coetzee's text stages the difficulties of hospitality in a South African context. His exploration of the space of home and its metaphoric resonances, as well as his interest in the ethics of hospitality is quite undeniable (see Marais, *Secretary*). As such, his writing is an important precursor of the novels under consideration in this thesis.

Mike Marais' monograph on Coetzee's fiction explores this issue of hospitality, and draws extensively on Derrida's writings on hospitality (as well as Levinas's conceptualisation of ethics, and Blanchot's thoughts on literature). One key area of difference between my own work and Marais' is that one of his primary concerns is the recursive nature of Coetzee's work. He argues that "this novelist's continued sense of responsibility for what has not, and cannot, emerge means that his writing possesses a certain repetitive quality" (*Secretary* xiv). Marais elaborates by explaining that because the other can never be accommodated by the text, the "writer's task is never done", and argues that this accounts for the similarities "between Coetzee's apartheid fiction, his fiction of the transitional period, his post-apartheid fiction, and his Australian fiction" (Marais, *Secretary* xiv). While I think it valid to consider writers like Coetzee, who wish to write about that which cannot be described or contained, 'secretaries of the invisible', that is, servants of an obsessive need to represent the unrepresentable, my own work on hospitality does not focus on the position of the author (except tangentially). Rather, my main interest is what becomes of the home once the other has entered it.

As is the case in Coetzee's fiction, the novels under consideration in this thesis suggest that the homeliness of the home (by which I mean its sense of being inviolable, comfortable, private, and safe) is illusory, and that, for this reason, the other cannot be excluded. This is to say, because physical and material forces, such as police and criminals,

as well as discursive formations (such as history, race, class, gender, and politics) are always and have always been invading the home, rendering it un-homely in the process, the possibility of utterly excluding the other is also impossible. As a result, I believe that while a home without those things which make it homely is unimaginable, it is similarly unfeasible to think that homeliness is phenomenally real, because things like comfort and belonging are projections (often used to blind us to violence). This aporia is central to my study, and I show that it is reflected in the contradictory feelings about home and homelife of several characters in the novels. In effect, what three quite different South African writers depict is characters who are enthralled by a vision of homeliness which is at odds with their actual homelife. It is as if they are trapped in their homes, and imprisoned by their faith in safety, comfort and belonging.

In fact, I will argue that rather than continually barricading the door against this uninvited guest, the novels which I have chosen to discuss all seem to suggest that the other might be the home's salvation. Here I must be clear: the eschatological phrasing is both deliberate and problematic. As I show in the chapters to follow, the responsibility for the other is interminable. For this reason, one cannot assume that once one allows him/her to enter one's private space that one can then close the door behind him/her. Precisely because one should not place the other in forms or limits, one cannot know when s/he has arrived. In effect, un-homeliness (in the sense in which I use the term) becomes an endless state, which nullifies altogether concepts such as privacy, safety and comfort. Nevertheless, the other is a saviour figure as s/he offers the only respite from the violence which enters our homes daily, and wrecks our intimate lives.[7] The irony, of course, is that, if uninvited, the arrival of the other is an invasion, and therefore incipiently violent. In Wicomb's writing, in particular, this paradox is consciously explored as she shows that Marion feels just as violated by those who are beyond her frame of reference as she does by the constraints of a belief in a pure race which she has learnt from her mother. Both otherness and history invade her home, and render it unhomely.

According to Derrida, the possibility of justice is determined by how one treats the other. Should one attempt to know or give form to him/her in any way, one (inadvertently perhaps) negates his/her alterity. The forms that one gives belong to the past and the present – in other words, to that which is known already. While this necessity of delimiting the other in one way or another may seem sensible, what it precludes in advance is the future. By this I mean to say that when one defines the other, one obliterates the possibility of a future which is actually different from the past and/or present. Consequently, the violence of today and

yesterday begins to define the future and the world as we know it continues, one terrible catastrophe piled on top of another. If, however, the "future-to-come" is not rendered in terms of what has already taken place,[8] it is possible that what might emerge can be radically different, and redeeming. Derrida contests that in terms of this salvic dimension of the time of the other, one must differentiate between "eschatology and teleology", because the former is emancipatory as it potentially allows for a new world, whereas the latter is deterministic in that it reduces the future to a continuation of or 'natural' progression from the present (*Specters of Marx* 45). While, for him, this distinction is crucial, he admits that "the stakes of such a difference risk constantly being effaced in the most fragile and slight insubstantiality" (*Specters of Marx* 45). He then asks the following question:

> [i]s there not a messianic extremity, an *eskhaton* whose ultimate event (immediate rupture, unheard-of interruption, untimeliness of the infinite surprise, heterogeneity without accomplishment) can exceed, *at each moment*, the final terms of a *phusis*, such as work, the production, and the *telos* of any history?
>
> (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 45, original emphasis)

So it is essential to retain the notion of a saviour even as one rejects the "*telos* of any history". It is necessary to affirm the possibility of that which is impossible: namely, a future that exceeds the means of production that have created a vastly unequal, hostile world where justice is merely a word and the past always predetermines the present. This is the promise that the other offers one at the expense of the homely home – which does not exist in any case – so that the home might yet be saved.

It seems to me that it is this particular promise of a radically unknowable future which makes Derrida's later work on hospitality and justice so relevant to discussions of what has come to be known as "post-transitional" fiction. Ronit Frenkel and Craig MacKenzie, who first conceptualised this term, argue that it signals "the character of this new wave of writing, which is often unfettered to the past in the way that much apartheid writing was, but may still reconsider it in new ways" (2). They elaborate by noting that "[o]ther features include politically incorrect humour and incisive satire, and the mixing of genres with zest and freedom", and conclude that "[a]ll of this often renders nugatory traditional markers like nationality, race or ethnicity" (2). Yet, as they cannot help but concede, the notion of a rupture or break from older writing styles and concerns (which they hope to describe) is problematic. Hence, they grant that, while "[l]inguistically, the term 'post-transitional'

indicates something occurring after a period of change", "the notion that there are periods of change (or transition) and ones of stasis is fallacious". In fact, according to them,

> All periods in history witness change. It is a question of the extent of change (however dramatic it is), which, of course, the period from around 1990 to the turn of this century in South Africa (and globally) certainly was. Another fallacy that should immediately be debunked is the 'end-of-history' notion – that we have emerged from a period in which contestation over economic and social systems (how society should live and work, in other words) is over, and that the dominance of global capitalism and the free-market system is self-evident. The recent corporate collapses all over the world – and particularly in the industrialized West – have surely put paid to that particular conceit.
>
> (2)

It is this tension inherent in the phrase which interests me: while post-transitional literature seems to point to a body of work that is no longer defined by the transition, it announces that it is, in many ways, merely the continuation of a revolution that can have no point of rest. Increasingly, this literature makes it clear that the hope which came with the election of Nelson Mandela's African National Congress (ANC) party in 1994 has diminished, and been replaced by a worldly realisation that, for many, the inequalities of the past continue to haunt the present. In fact, a text like *The Silent Minaret* shows that these problems of class, race, gender and nationality are being exacerbated by a global-capitalist system that became more influential after freedom.

At best, some writers depict the pernicious violence and instability of modern South African society as part of a revolution that is ongoing, and did not end in 1994 because one political party had replaced another. At the other end of the spectrum, there are authors who see the modern South African state as a betrayal of the ideals of the Struggle against apartheid,[9] and as a failure of governance, civilisation and simple decency. I am not, at this stage, concerned with which side of the debate the writers considered in this thesis might be argued to take. Instead, what interests me is the sense, innate to both points of view, that the past still holds too much sway, that society has yet to discover a way of being which excludes violence, and therefore still seeks a justice worthy of the name.

As I have said, it is appropriate that home is the locus of this concern about a better world. First, although it is a place that is often constructed as safe and inviolable, the ruinous forms of hostility with which South Africans are grappling all occur within it. To give but one example, the domicile has always been the principal and primary space for the patriarchal domination of women, including physical and verbal abuse (see Samuelson, "Walking"). To

assume that the home will offer one refuge from violence, even though various forms of aggression are perpetrated in this space all the time, is to fall under its spell and to be enchanted by what does not exist. There is no inviolable home, and, as I shall demonstrate, comfort and safety are, in fact, the product of a particular kind of hostility. Furthermore, the home is a space which is often seen or conceived of as less important, less meaningful than other more public spaces. But what if there is, as I shall suggest, an always-crossable line between the private and the public? Would this not mean that the perceived difference between spaces which matter and those which do not would have to be rethought? There are other spaces in South Africa that are constructed as if they are not important: the township and rural village come to mind. If indeed there is to be an eschatological justice in the country, it would, of necessity, have to address this division between the places that are worthy of thought, concern and focus, and those that are not. Let us start at home.

Finally, I would like to suggest that the notion of hospitality, together with the concept of home with which it is ineluctably associated, provides an apt way of rethinking the violence which the novels I have chosen depict as rife in this country, because, as Derrida contends, all hostility can be conceptualised as a lack of hospitality.

In an interview, Derrida explains that there is a disjuncture between the principle of hospitality and its practice. He observes that "[t]his principle demands, it even creates the desire for, a welcome without reserve and without calculation, an exposure without limit to whoever arrives" ("Principle" 6). In effect, the very concept of hospitality is premised on inclusion and, accordingly, does not require that the host limit access to his/her home. To be hospitable, truly hospitable, one must "welcome without reserve and without calculation". Derrida refers to this kind of welcome variously as infinite, unconditional, unlimited and hyperbolic hospitality. The inherent paradox, however, is that one would not need hospitality were it not for exclusion. It depends on exclusion. In other words, it seeks to counter that which occasioned it. For this reason, it is impossible to create an all-inclusive community. By their very nature, communities must exclude some, draw limits, and establish borders. As such, Derrida notes that "a cultural or linguistic community, a family, a nation, can not not suspend, at the least, even betray this principle of absolute hospitality", and that this is done so as "to protect a 'home', without doubt, by guaranteeing property and what is 'proper' to itself against the unlimited arrival of the other; but also to attempt to render the welcome effective, determined, concrete, to put it into practice" ("Principle" 6). By implication, the *practice* of hospitality is always determined by conventions, conditions and limits. There is, for this reason, no actualised, phenomenal form of hospitality which does not exclude.

Paradoxically, these limited forms of hospitality are not welcoming because they fail to include the other in the most radical way. They "betray this principle of absolute hospitality" since they define the home by excluding some from it. Yet, for Derrida, the unconditional and conditional forms of hospitality are aporetically intertwined. That is, they "do not contradict each other" but "remain heterogeneous at the very moment that they appeal to each other, in a disconcerting way" ("Principle" 6). On the one hand, unconditional hospitality is impossible because any community that practises it does so within certain bounds. The community which could extend unlimited hospitality would have no borders, would include everyone and everything, and would be undefinable and indeterminable. On the other hand, the conventional, practical hospitality which is inevitable is also insufficient because it fails to be utterly inclusive. And, as a result, it draws on the unconditional form as its guiding principle. In effect, the one form is always simultaneously a corruption and affirmation of the other one. Practised hospitality affirms a form of welcome which it cannot actualise. Similarly, unconditional hospitality can only be experienced in its limited forms, which are revealed as wanting.

This aporia can be characterised as one which defines the (im)possibility of an ethical treatment of the other.[10] Unconditional hospitality demands that the guest be allowed to remain totally anonymous, and that no restrictions be placed on his/her alterity. Accordingly, Derrida states that

> [p]ure hospitality consists in welcoming whoever arrives before imposing any conditions on him, before knowing and asking anything at all, be it a name or an identity 'paper'. But it supposes also that one address him, singularly, that he be called therefore, and that he be understood to have a proper name: 'You, what is your name?' Hospitality consists in doing everything to address the other, to accord him, even to ask him his name, while keeping this question from becoming a 'condition', a police inquisition, a blacklist or a simple border control. This difference is at once subtle and fundamental, it is a question which is asked on the threshold of the 'home' and at the threshold between two inflections. An art and a poetics, but an entire politics depends on it, an entire ethics is decided by it.
>
> (7)

It is patently absurd to imagine that one can name someone without invoking the social and therefore generalising dimension of naming, or respond to his/her singularity without knowing him/her. Nevertheless, the fine boundary between the possible and impossible also determines "an entire ethics". As such, the most welcoming, most ethical treatment of the guest would also be the one which least negated the otherness of the other.

It is as if hospitality necessitated that the host forgets him/herself and what it is s/he wants, for the sake of the guest. Indeed, this selflessness is an unavoidable corollary of the principle of unconditional hospitality. However, since this principled hospitality cannot be practised or, rather, since its practical forms are a negation of it, it follows that selflessness too is impossible. Here, then, is the circumscribed space in which ethics can be thought through: there is no ethical engagement which is not done for the other, and yet, engagements are usually self-motivated to some extent. The dissolution of self which a true ethics demands is often untenable and doomed to failure. That said, anything less and the act which we call ethical is in fact merely economic. A business deal has been concluded: I have given so much; you have received it, and then given the same in return. This balanced equation leaves no remainder. The problem is that if there is no excess, there is no chance of change. Revolution requires that things do not stay as they are. By definition, then, even the least radical form of ethical action which desires a better form of being than is currently available would have to reckon with this excess. It would have to give itself over to a passion without end, which is to say, a hospitality without limit.

The benefit, for me, of thinking beyond the threshold of what is possible is that it allows one to consider the work of creating social justice in terms of refashioning the home. To reiterate, justice is bound up with how one responds to alterity. As such, unconditional hospitality amounts to a justice which would respond to each singular being in its singularity, thereby refusing to foreclose on its alterity. It is for this reason that Derrida reminds us that "[i]t is often forgotten that it is in the name of unconditional hospitality (which gives its meaning to all welcoming of the foreigner) that we must try to determine the best conditions, that is to say some particular legislative limits, and especially a particular application of the laws" (7). In other words, it is necessary that societies orient their laws and their behaviour toward the excessive, perhaps even the infinite. This provides the "best conditions", and paves the way for an ethical practice *par excellence*.

But it must be said that this orientation would necessitate a radical destabilisation of the home. The closer one comes to the infinite, the less clear the boundaries become. A home which is absolutely and utterly open to any guest who might arrive, and which makes no demands whatsoever of him/her, could not be 'owned' or thought of as 'private'. The dividing line between private and public is erased at the (hypothetical) point at which one's hospitality reaches infinity. One's home is therefore rendered profoundly un-homely by the ethical imperative of unlimited hospitality.

This is why I believe the concepts of un-homeliness and infinite hospitality are ineluctably bound. As I have already noted, we associate the home with privacy, selfhood, subjectivity, comfort and safety. In all sorts of ways, these resonances are so innate to the very idea of home that they exceed the physical places where we actually reside. Nonetheless, they are problematic because they demand that homes remain inviolable spaces. It is not feasible to think of one's property as private if it can be invaded at any moment, and by anyone. Similarly, what comfort is there to be had in a home that can be overrun by uninvited guests who demand of their host an interminable responsibility? Clearly, homeliness is irreconcilable with the obligations of a truly just response to others.

In the novels I have chosen to analyse, the un-homeliness of the various homes and characters is a dominant trope. By subtle and overt strategies, the works in question show that homeliness is an illusion, and privacy, comfort and inviolability are manufactured. And, it is my contention that these texts depict the home as un-homely precisely because they suggest that it is necessary to abandon the promise of home for the embrace of the future. By this I mean that the novels imply that homeliness, as it has been formulated by modern Western society, initiates ways of being that are inhospitable. Privacy and comfort are only possible to the extent that one denies access to others. The sovereignty of one's self and one's right to 'be oneself' depend on a denigration of the other, and of the infinite hospitality one should offer him/her. In the process, what one disavows is that which is unknowable, illegible and, just possibly, revolutionary. If indeed the other is the future, I would say that the home is the past. It is a construction which belongs to a long, sad, repetitive history of violence, dispossession and disregard. In its dusty air are the remnants of colonialism and apartheid, inequality and genocide. The only alternative to such a construction of home is one which cannot be defined, known or put in its place. Consequently, the choice between home and unconditional hospitality is frightening, disturbing. It is uncanny; it is un-home.

Travel and Cosmopolitanism

One of the most obvious commonalities in the three novels under discussion is that at some point in each of them, the main character travels between the United Kingdom and South Africa. I would argue that travel is a dominant trope, and is related, in various ways, to concerns about the home, hospitality and the cosmopolitan.

Of course, the idea that cosmopolitanism designates a stable, unified field of study is fallacious, but most critics would agree that it is one which, in the words of Steven Vertovec

and Robin Cohen, "(a) transcends the seemingly exhausted nation-state model; (b) is able to mediate actions and ideals oriented both to the universal and the particular, the global and the local; (c) is culturally anti-essentialist; and (d) is capable of representing variously complex repertoires of allegiance, identity and interest" (4). Consequently, cosmopolitanism is seen by many as a framework with which we might reimagine the world as a more hospitable place. In point of fact, Derrida argues quite persuasively that the realisation of the cosmopolitan society is dependent on the establishment of unconditional hospitality. He therefore calls for the creation of "cities of refuge", which could offer a haven to "the foreigner in general, the immigrant, the exiled, the deported, the stateless or the displaced person" (*On Cosmopolitanism* 4). In order to construct such cities, what would be required is the development of new laws of hospitality which would draw on "*the* Great Law of Hospitality – an unconditional law, both plural and universal, which order[s] that the borders be open to each and every one, to every other, to all who might come, without question" (18). Clearly, then, there can be no transcendence of the nation-state model if there is not also a hyperbolic hospitality which informs the new cosmopolitan society that is so sought after.

It seems to me that there is thus an obvious connection between home and cosmopolitanism, which it is necessary to theorise more fully. In *The Silent Minaret*, *Double Negative* and *Playing in the Light*, one encounters a lack of 'at-homedness', which could be described as a product of the cosmopolitan life that the characters lead. However, what I will show in the chapters on these novels is that, while these characters are all able to travel, and experience new cultures and ways of being, they are not necessarily the cosmopolites they appear to be. What I suggest is that travel is not, in and of itself, that which creates 'cosmopolitan subjects of the world' because one can certainly move between places and states without an experience of that which is truly different, unknown – other, as it were. What the novels imply is that when one travels without an experience of alterity, one takes the mindset of home along on the journey, and imposes it on that which is outside of one's frame of reference. This form of travel amounts to *domesticating* the world, and therefore places no value on alterity, offers no real hospitality, and cannot lead to the establishment of the cosmopolitan "city of refuge" for which Derrida has called.

The traveller who really wishes to transcend the hostility of the nation-state model of the world is consequently obliged to voyage out to and for the other. His/her displacement must be radical in that it must abandon the idea of a return to the home from which s/he departed. That space is rendered profoundly un-homely by the other who one allows in "without question" (Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism* 18). In effect, the cosmopolitan world

would have to be un-homely, and one's travels in it would have to be like those of the vagrant who wanders restlessly, tirelessly, and without the promise of a return to a place of safety, comfort and belonging.

The Way Forward, or the Impossible Space of this Research

Much like conventional notions of travel (that configure home as their destination), it seems to me that research is often informed by a teleological belief in progress. One begins with a question, then investigates it in the hope of affirming one's main thesis. In other words, one travels out in the hope that eventually one can arrive back at the point at which one started. In a very practical way, this predetermined form of analysis is simply incommensurate with the fiction that is here under discussion. My sense is that these novels announce their desire to critique the violence that underpins home and *telos*. They seek to shake the very foundations of society by suggesting that it must reorient itself for the other. As this work of respecting the other is endless, the texts themselves are necessarily incomplete. Accordingly, my chapters all end by discussing the unfinished nature of the works under discussion.

In *Playing in the Light,* for instance, I consider the idea that Marion's journey of self-discovery, sparked by her realisation that her parents are play-whites and that her life has been over-determined by race, is complicated by her discovery that Brenda has begun to write the story of her family (and might, in fact, be the narrator of the story that we read). Marion's reaction to this news confirms that there are still limits to how hospitable she is willing to be, and that she, effectively, continues to desire safety and a sense of control over herself (and her story) at the expense of the other. It is as if the novel's conclusion suggests that it is impossible to be utterly hospitable, in the same way as it is impossible not to let race define one and one's interactions with others to some extent. And yet, as we see with Marion, to accept this as fact does not lead to either an ethical or a fulfilling life. It means that one condones that race un-homes one by defining one in its terms. What is irrevocably lost in the process, then, is the possibility of an encounter with the other that does not occur along racial lines. Marion learns, in the course of the novel, that there are clearly limits to race – that it is not, nor should be, boundless. Unmasking these limits to (and thereby the history of) race points to the excessive nature of the other to which she is initially blind. As I have already intimated, though, this process of understanding and discovery is unending and, consequently, the text concludes by suggesting that Marion still has much to learn.

A similar problem is evident in the conclusion of *Double Negative*. Like Wicomb's text, it presents a character who is searching, journeying really, to find a better, more humane way to live. Neville's journey leads him out of South Africa, and to photography, a preoccupation which stems from a crucial day he spends with legendary photographer, Saul Auerbach. He sees this man as an artist, and finds that his own work fails to engage with others in the same powerful way as that of his mentor. It is thus no surprise that, by the end of the novel, Neville has settled in to a comfortable and solipsistic form of existence that makes no room for that which might disorient him or disturb his sense of his place in the world. While this is so, the novel's self-reflexive focus on art suggests that the idea that one can ever completely be captured or placed is inaccurate. Even though Neville seems sure of himself, the text itself is troubled by what lies beyond its borders – that is, by the real which no photograph or novel can absolutely capture. By extension, the phenomenal real world both inspires and defeats Vladislavić's work, and exceeds it, much as the other exceeds Neville's limited understandings of him/her. Unconditional hospitality, it follows, does not and cannot be extended from within the confines of representation, and is, ultimately, only possible when the latter fails. Vladislavić's 'failed' ending, its incompleteness, thus allows him to gesture in the direction of the other who has always slipped his grasp.

Finally, my analysis of the last chapter of *The Silent Minaret* focuses on the form of love which Katinka extends to those around her, and even to the absent protagonist, Issa Shamshuddin. In the course of my reading of this novel, I focus on the ways in which historical discourse invades, disrupts, and harms the homelife of its protagonist. Issa's reaction to this intrusion, I posit, is to make himself illegible to history, the state and its measures of control. My feeling is that this decision also makes him illegible to the reader. That is, his disappearance makes him impossible to follow. In effect, the reader of this work is obliged to follow Issa off the pages of the novel, out of history, to a 'place' which might, possibly, offer safety from the violence that so disturbs him. This impossible form of following is beautifully encapsulated in the kind of love which Katinka offers. It is a selfless form of care, given for the other with no promise of reciprocity, or even assurance that it will reach its intended recipient. The incompleteness of such a gesture is ineluctable since completion would surely confirm that Issa is found (by Katinka, for instance) and that he receives what she has offered him. But this novel cannot provide one with such comfort and, as a consequence, reading it is a profoundly un-homing experience.

In my estimation, these novels all do this work of un-homing. They are stories of the dangers and hostility which inhere in the modern concept of home. And, troublingly, they

imply that in order to reject this violence one is obliged to be un-homed, and to give oneself over to the other, without respite. There is no end to this work, which is implied by the ways in which the texts 'conclude'. Each gestures to that which is beyond its grasp, namely the infinitely hospitable treatment of the other. Furthermore, as a result, they are all singularly difficult to analyse. Implied in their content and form is a critique of the kind of criticism which sets out to 'prove' a thesis, as if it were trying to find its way home. For this reason, I must reiterate that following the tropes of un-homeliness and hospitality as they emerge in these novels has not amounted to a proof, or an affirmation of an already-existent thought. Rather, what this thesis attempts is to be astonished by what is seemingly impossible and yet utterly necessary, which is a literature that is excessive, speaks beyond its own borders, and suggests a South Africa more just than violent, more hospitable than policed, and more un-homely than any home we have yet imagined.

Contribution to the Field

Three works of literary study form a kind of gateway for any critic who would like to consider the issue of the representation of space in post-apartheid literature. Two of these studies, namely Meg Samuelson's work on home and Rita Barnard's book *Apartheid and Beyond*, have already been mentioned. One particular area of difference between my own work and Barnard's in particular, is that she gives far more attention to the "black township" which, she argues, is "one of the most compelling [spaces] from a political, literary, and theoretical perspective" (6). I cannot deny that the township home deserves more consideration than it is afforded in this study. The limited attention which I am able to give it is due to several interrelated factors: first, as I say, Barnard's work does an admirable job of delving into the literary representations of this space in a diverse range of texts and a duplication of her conclusions is unnecessary; secondly, the specific locale of the township is simply not a focus of the writers under consideration; and thirdly, the township is, as Barnard says, the uncanny and often unseen double of the suburban or urban home. Accordingly, one of my main interests is to think about *how* that space is ignored or disregarded by the affluent and privileged. In a similar vein, I wish to consider what it might take to make the deprivation and oppression of the poor of this country visible to those who have a great deal to lose should they become capable of seeing the cost to others of their lives. My work is not an attempt to reproduce the structure that has silenced the voices of the township dwellers in so many ways. Rather, the lack of 'space' it affords to the township is due to an overt

decision to interrogate the privileged, there, in their home, where they think they are safest, and least responsible for harm. What I try to show is that sophisticated, middle-class writers, such as Wicomb, Vladislavić and Shukri, are all too aware that it is behind a veil of comfort, homeliness and apparent domesticity that untold destruction is wrought.

The third study of space which I think is influential is Shane Graham's *South African Literature After the Truth Commission: Mapping Loss*. Like my own work, his is premised on the idea that "the sense of collective disorientation has only intensified", not subsided, in the post-apartheid era. I must also acknowledge that Graham's thoughts on the effects of global-capitalism on the depictions of space in South African fiction is impressive, and informs my own thinking (*Mapping Loss* 2). His work is primarily concerned with the aftermath of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and seeks to articulate "new forms of literal and figurative 'mapping'" by asserting the interconnection "between the body, memory and social space" (2). Another determining aspect of his work is that it provides "a cultural materialist reading of post-apartheid literature" (7). Both his theoretical framework and his emphasis on memory are therefore quite different from my own interest in home as a symbolic space in which issues of hospitality become important. Finally, Graham does not analyse any of the novels which I do, and, for this reason, his ideas form more of a backdrop to my own than a regularly used source.

A body of criticism of *Double Negative* has yet to be produced. Nonetheless, I draw on Leon de Kock's article, which deliberates some of the same concerns that have preoccupied my own analysis. In my chapter, I point out that, while his argument is interesting, especially as it details how Vladislavić discusses the connection between art and the 'now' (what I call the real), there are nonetheless gaps that my own work addresses. Of course, this writer's other works have been more thoroughly discussed than *Double Negative* has. As I show in my chapter, however, one of the problems is that scholarship on his *oeuvre* has focussed on the cityscape, and, as a result, has shown limited interest in the importance of the home. I would argue that it is therefore necessary to recognise that Vladislavić has always been a writer who is fascinated by the domestic scene. Moreover, I would contend that a focus on this space allows one to better understand an aspect of his work which has been noted by several scholars, namely his interest in the vexed issue of subjectivity. One article which addresses this matter (in relation to *The Exploded View*) is by Gerald Gaylard, who writes that "the urgency of South Africa's socio-political dispensation forces [. . .] incommensurable individuality into dialogue with the social" (73). In other words, the nature of the country demands that the self, who is singular, must interact with the broader social

world for ethical reasons. Equally valid is Gaylard's reading of the role of art as it relates to subjectivity. His conclusion, that Vladislavić's writing does not divorce the aesthetic from the political, and that "an aesthetic emphasis upon the subject is almost invariably political within a hegemony because it refuses that hegemony", has merit. Nonetheless, he neither considers how the home might be a structural metaphor for subjectivity, nor takes into account how a radical hospitality might undermine it. In effect, the ways in which the hegemonic is challenged is only partially analysed by this critic.

Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* is the most widely discussed text under consideration. Several articles by the likes of Stéphane Robolin, Andrew van der Vlies, Sue Kossew, Dirk Klopper and M. J. Daymond have contributed to my analysis of this novel. Again, the particular focus on hospitality is essentially absent from all work done on the novel thus far. In very general terms, I would say that what many critics have focussed on in her work, namely the issue of race (and coloured identity in particular), can be explored quite differently when considered in relation to hospitality. This, I hope, differentiates my work from those who have come before me.

Finally, *The Silent Minaret* is a relatively recent text, and a debut novel. As such, it has not yet been extensively written on. Four important pieces on this work are referred to in my chapter, and have influenced my reading of it. For instance, Jane Poyner and Ronit Frenkel's respective discussions of its cosmopolitan concerns are important. While I do not read this aspect of the novel in quite the same way as either of them does, I am nevertheless indebted to their illuminating thoughts on the matter. M. Neelika Jayawardene also writes on this text, focussing on the way in which Issa's body is monitored and controlled in a world rendered hostile to Islamic people after September 11 2001 (50). Her suggestion that Issa may have decided radically to reject these procedures of control and surveillance is astute (49). I take that conclusion further and base much of my reading of the novel on it. Tina Steiner's article also pointed me in the direction of the "pockets of connection" (53), which she feels Shukri depicts as developing in the face of the violence of anti-Islamic sentiment, especially the 'culture talk' that simplifies the reasons and nature of modern terror. What she calls 'community' is, in my opinion, the effect of a love which is given for the other, at the expense of the self. Finally, I must add that none of these scholars focuses on Issa's un-homeliness, which I feel is important in understanding Shukri's ideas on history and its influence in our lives.

A Personal Journey

The writing of this thesis has been a personal journey. Although I only vaguely understood why I desired to become more uncomfortable in my life, I knew that work such as that of Wicomb, Shukri and Vladislavić would be my focus because their fiction made me feel un-homed, discomforted, even accused. They write as if there were no other world but this one, and yet, by making it strange, they imply that it could change. I wanted, above all, to understand this strange paradox, and grasp something of the tantalising possibility it suggested.

I now realise living comfortably in one's home is incommensurate with the ethical demands of an unequal and violent society. And yet, some days I do feel very comfortable indeed. So this thesis is a journey that I cannot claim has yet ended. Still, what has happened is that I am now also unable to imagine a *telos* for my journey. Considering where I started, this is more than I foolishly and arrogantly thought I would need to do, and it is not nearly enough. There are days when I wish to go home, when I am even able to dupe myself into thinking that I am back there again. But, as I have found, some literature un-homes the reader in a profound and irrevocable way.

Notes

[1] See Frenkel and Mackenzie ("Conceptualizing 'Post-Transitional'" 2) and Rita Barnard (*Apartheid and Beyond* 5–14) for more on the importance of space/place in South African fiction.

[2] Dirk Klopper notes that more recent scholarship on Pringle accepts that while he is an important figure in South African literature, "the origin and development of South African poetry in English is more complex and diverse than allowed for by the teleological notion of Pringle as its progenitor" ("Thomas Pringle" 370). I mention Pringle's work not because I think it the 'origin' of the country's literary output in English, but rather because the tensions inherent in it suggest the difficulties faced by colonial writers.

[3] Later in *White Writing*, Coetzee explains the problem in the following way: "[t]he questions that trouble the white South African poets above all are, as we might expect, whether the land speaks a universal language, whether the African landscape can be articulated in a European language, whether the European can be at home in Africa" ("Reading" 167).

[4] For more on the pervasiveness of realism during apartheid and the ways in which this is slowly changing, see Mkhize ("Literary Prospects").

[5] Prime Minister D. F. Malan claimed that the Group Areas Act (which, in essence, determined where people could make a home) "is apartheid. It is the essence of the apartheid policy" (qtd. in Giliomee and Schlemmer 87). Noted apartheid historians Hermann Giliomee and Lawrence Schlemmer thus argue that "nothing symbolizes the oppressive nature of apartheid more than the massive scale on which population relocation occurred" (107). The home and its policing was clearly central to apartheid ideology and practice.

[6] Throughout this study I will distinguish between the radical alterity of the other which resists totalisation within any form of culture or discourse and an 'other' (in scare quotes), by which I mean to signify the post-colonial 'other' constructed as different or unknowable *through* discourses (national, gendered, racial, cultural in particular). Alterity is therefore disavowed in being constructed as 'other' in the sense that s/he is circumscribed by the terms of a discourse. This constructed 'other' is the effect of violence done to the other.

[7] Emmanuel Levinas depicts the advent of the other as a form of liberation, even salvation: "[s]ubstitution frees the subject from ennui, that is, from the enchainment to itself, where the ego suffocates in itself . . ." (*Otherwise* 124). Even more explicitly, Derrida describes this visitor as a "liberator," an "emancipator" (Derrida, *Of Hospitality* 123).

[8] The phrase "future-to-come" is Derrida's *Specters of Marx* 45). He uses it to distinguish the future which is merely a linear progression from the present (tied up with a teleological notion of time) from the future that cannot be identified.

[9] I shall from now on refer to the armed resistance of apartheid as 'the Struggle 'or 'the Movement'. Both of these terms are widely used in South Africa, and are accepted as having a fairly stable field of meaning.

[10] I am, of course, aware that Levinas's ethic is one of hospitality. After all, he describes the subject's ethical relationship with the human other as an "unrelating relation" between "separated beings" (*Totality* 295), that is, as one that is defined by unconditional hospitality. By his own admission, Derrida's work on hospitality has been strongly influenced by Levinas's. For the purposes of this study, though, what interests me is the way in which Derrida departs from this Levinasian conception of ethics in his postulation of an aporetic tension between conditional and unconditional hospitality.

Chapter One: Limitless Whiteness, Limited Hospitality and an Inescapable Home in Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*

Crossing Over: An Introduction

When Marion, the protagonist of Zoë Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, confesses to Geoff, her sometime boyfriend, what she has recently uncovered – namely, that her parents are play-whites[1] – his patronising response to her sense of a loss of identity and certainty is to declare the issue unimportant in this "New South Africa" (Wicomb, *Playing* 105). He contends that "it doesn't matter" since "he along with the entire country has got beyond all that old stuff about race", and advises her that "she too should put it behind her" (105). Geoff is expressing precisely the sense of comfort and homeliness of which I was critical in my introduction. His smug attitude is informed by certain well-worn sentiments all too pervasive since 1994: race no longer matters; now we can all be comfortable in our own skins; we can all just get along; we know who we are and where we belong; and so forth.

What most interests me is Geoff's choice of words: race is like a place since, clearly, "the entire country" can and has moved "*beyond*" it (105, my emphasis). Marion too is upset by this aspect of Geoff's words, and responds by saying: "[m]y parents were the play-whites; *they* crossed over. I was white, now I will have to cross over, but if those places are no longer the same, have lost their meaning, there can be no question of returning to a place where my parents once were. Perhaps I can now keep crossing to and fro, to different places, perhaps that is what the new is all about – an era of unremitting crossings" (107, original emphasis).

Marion, who has always had an aversion to travel which borders on a phobia, is not, I think it fair to say, excited by the prospect of "unremitting crossings". Nevertheless, her language betrays a point of agreement with Geoff, as she too conceives of the old as a place that once, once upon a time, had stable meaning, of which she seems to mourn the loss. And, not coincidentally, the stable place she wishes she could cross (back) over to is an imagined place of (racial) belonging, or home: that is, a "place where [her] parents once were". At some level, she knows that this "place" is a fantasy, since she, throughout the novel, travels back to her childhood home (where her parents once were), without ever finding a place of stability, readily accessible meaning, or privacy, comfort, and belonging. Her childhood home instead registers a profound sense of loss, emptiness, dis-*place*ment, discomfort – in short, un-home.

It is in the link between race and home, or, more accurately, race and un-home, that Wicomb's *Playing in the Light* suggests a reconceptualisation of race – one which does not play into the illusion that *then* race meant one thing, and *now* it means nothing or, at the very least, something else. Accordingly, the novel allows one to reconsider the assignation of the so-called coloured race to an un-homed and shameful state (since one is neither white nor black and therefore, presumably, impure), and to interrogate the supposed stability of more historically determined racial categories (such as white and black). I will show that, both in her fiction and her non-fiction, Wicomb has critiqued Homi K. Bhabha's conception of coloured identity as hybrid (and "un-homed", in Bhabha's sense of the word) precisely because he inadvertently essentialises the notion of a pure race by conceiving of a hybridised one. In particular, I will trace Marion's sense of discomfort at home and her family's sense of shame. I do this in order to show that the novel does not perform the usual, ordinary, even domestic or 'proper' historical and conceptual act of aligning coloured people with an ineluctable, race-specific sense of shame. Rather, the text suggests that while shame has always been placed at the door of coloured identity, it would be more instructive to consider this a *displacement* that assists in obscuring the ways in which pervasive racial narratives have themselves displaced our bodies, identities, homes (and, concomitantly, our ability to be hospitable to others).

In re-placing shame more appropriately, I believe Wicomb establishes a conceptual link between home and race. However, I will show that the novel suggests there are limits to the notion of 'race as home'. In particular, it enacts a powerful barrier and a limit to hospitality to the other (though, ironically, this limit functions precisely by seeming limitless, like a house whose walls enclose the entire world). In other words, I will focus on the ways in which race acts as a prism through which the stranger is seen and understood and, as such, limits our ability to respect the strangeness of this stranger or guest. In analysing this aspect of Wicomb's novel, I will attempt to trace Marion's development from an isolated, profoundly inhospitable person (much in the mould of her mother) to a more open, less guarded character as she delves into her family's history (and discovers in the process certain limits to whiteness). In order to address this concern with hospitality, I will draw on Derrida's work, which deals perceptively both with what constrains hospitality, as well as with the inherent limitations of extending only a limited hospitality.

What I hope to argue is that the 'to-ing and fro-ing', the "unremitting crossings", which seem so tiresome to Marion, may indeed be a condition of possibility for a more hospitable encounter with others. This would imply that the notion of home, like its

complementary notion of a foreign world to which one travels *from home*, is fallacious, in so far as both imply that journey between them marks them as fixed and distinct. In the "unremitting crossings" of an un-home, I will argue, there is only one point of destination, one horizon: the other.

Christianity, Sex and Hospitality

The novel opens with Marion "on the balcony, the space both inside and out where she spends much of her time at home" (Wicomb, *Playing* 1).[2] A guinea fowl dies unexpectedly at her feet, which leads her to wonder if "the others, the enemies, [will] line up on her balcony" (1). She is right to fear that "others, the enemies" outside of her frame of reference will soon invade what she considers her private space. What she has yet to comprehend, however, is that her 'private space' is already invaded, and that the enemy she fears is unspeakably close, within her. It is only by means of a displacement, that is, by conceiving of the liminal space of the balcony as belonging to her only, as being 'inside' as it were, that she can think of others (like the bird) as enemies, trespassers invading her home. To be "both inside and out", as Marion is, means one must contend with a certain sense of un-homeliness, which renders one a trespasser, an enemy, *in one's own home*. Her faith in private space is therefore ironic: she is 'at home' within a space (the balcony to be specific) that renders her home violable, un-homely. As such, Marion's 'at home' envelops the space outside, as if it is not outside but just another room in the vast, endless expanse of a home without end. She does not recognise the violence of her appropriation of the outside world because she does not register that she is the stranger, the other, *at home*. Instead, blind to her own strangeness, she considers those who are other or strange to her enemies and thereby, in effect, attempts to render her home inviolable. In the course of this chapter, I will attempt to show that Marion is unable to prevent the 'outside world' – in the form of race and racial discourse – from intruding on what is most intimate and private (namely, her sense of self). Her troubling response to this invasion is to close off her home to others by containing all that is outside within the extraordinary confines of her notion of being 'at home'.

The first major disturbance of Marion's insular sense of self is the discovery that her parents are play-whites. Her mother, Helen Campbell, is forced by a white bureaucrat to exchange sex for this white identity.[3] As Sue Kossew rightly observes, "the border between whiteness and 'non-whiteness' and the cultural construction rather than essential nature of race, is clearly illustrated by this process of reclassification" (200). Yet I think the violence

done to Helen implies even more than this. Wicomb is here, as in *David's Story*, not only linking coloured identity with a discourse which represents the female as sexually promiscuous, but also suggesting ways in which discourses on race seem to overshadow (dare one say displace?) discourses on gender (see Samuelson, *Remembering the Nation*, and "The Disfigured Body"). The white, male councillor Carter, whose advances are wholly unwanted, reads Helen's nervousness as evidence of desire. For instance, when "[h]er right hand pluck[s] nervously at her throat, then at the plain gold wedding ring", he believes it "indicate[s] [. . .] that she [is] not immune to his admiration" (Wicomb, *Playing* 139). He constructs her as concupiscent, sexually promiscuous, precisely because those are qualities which have always been associated with the coloured female. Race-making and a certain sexual violence are thus inextricably bound. The discourse of shame, which leads Helen to think of her colouredness as unworthy, means that she is willing to allow her racial identity as white to come at the expense of her female identity and female pride – "the old [her has] to be obliterated", she thinks (142).

Because this violation is done to the 'other' in the name of whiteness, it is inconceivable, non-existent, non-justifiable to (and within) what Robert Young has called "White Mythologies", which is a term he uses to describe the Western history that systematically conceals the violence done by (patriarchal) Western culture to others (in the name of history).[4] Carter undoubtedly represents this Western culture, and his violence is rendered all but invisible as he displaces the source of the sexual degradation by construing Helen as a sexually promiscuous non-white female who desires, above all else, the white man.

But Carter cannot be more wrong; it is not white men Helen desires, but whiteness itself. In this sense, she is desirous of a 'white mythology', that is, of the very form of Western history that condones Carter's blatant and violent abuse of his position. Her silent, heart-breaking acquiescence to his sexual demands forms part of a larger pattern in which she always acts in complicity with the very system that deems her 'other', unworthy, shameful, objectionable, and objectified.

Significantly, Helen chooses an image with which to steel herself for her ordeal with Carter. As the narrator observes,"[s]he found a ready example in Christ, who died on the cross before rising as the Saviour, whose love washed away the past, the old misdemeanours, and who would not object to renewal" (142). If she chooses Christ for his suffering, Helen also chooses him for his purity – he who was innocent from the start, and who washes away sin leaving only innocence. Surely, then, she settles on Christ because his purity resembles

whiteness. And, in a sense, this is absolutely appropriate, for she has chosen in the story of Jesus, arguably the 'white mythology' *par excellence*. It is a story so pervasive in Western culture (and those cultures that have had to endure the imposition of Western culture) that it informs all notions of whiteness and 'white history'. I do not mean to imply glibly that the story of Jesus as the Messiah is a myth, though certainly that argument can always be made. Instead, I would suggest that when Helen dreams of the infinite grace of Christ at exactly the same moment that she aspires to the infinite grace and purity of whiteness, the connection is not coincidental. For where whiteness gathers its considerable appeal, it does so in the name of a Christian ethico-politico-cultural notion of purity which, while arguably having little to do with the historical Jesus, has everything to do with the purity he has come to represent. The chapter which describes Carter's abuse of her ends, one should note, by recording Helen's growing confidence within the Anglican Church once she has passed for white. She, for instance, is so much the image of poise, 'civility' and ease that Carter, who only a while ago stared and groped unapologetically, "never again allow[s] his eyes to stray below her chin" (145). This moment is the last time the reader sees Helen display such confidence in her whiteness. That she does so there, in the church, is not so much miraculous as preordained.

I must emphasise that, in considering Helen's complicity with a system designed to abuse her (and others), I am by no means attempting to diminish the harm done to her by Carter, or to imply that she somehow 'brought it upon herself'.[5] To raise the issue of complicity is to recognise the pervasiveness of whiteness, of so-called 'white mythologies', and especially of the mythology of race. As I will show in due course, complicity with race, racialism and its mythologies is an unavoidable subject position. Indeed, I will attempt to argue that adopting a subject position is, in the first instance, an act of complicity with race.

Embedded within this pervasive myth of race is an equally insidious sense of shame – felt acutely, even pathologically, by Helen, and indirectly by Marion.[6] The former must endure a forced sexual liaison with a white man in exchange for whiteness, though at this stage in her life she has little conception of how all-encompassing her shame will be. That is, she cannot imagine that shame will follow her and her family through the door to the (placeless) 'place' of whiteness.

The mixed race(s) of South Africa are originally the product of the "colonial encounter between colonists (Dutch and British), indigenous Khoi and San people of the Cape, and slaves" (Kossew 198). Notably, Wicomb has herself written perceptively on the link between miscegenation and shame. These instances of miscegenation would come to be

construed by colonial discourses as the 'shameful' fault of black (and later coloured) women, who were thus constructed as concupiscent – that concupiscence itself being the 'source' of shame for these women and their progeny. For Wicomb (and Sander Gilman before her), the story of Saartjie Baartman is especially telling, since the contention that Baartman's steatopygia was 'evidence' of such concupiscence gave weight to the alignment of black women and sexual degradation. According to Wicomb, "the display of [Saartjie Baartman's] spectacular steatopygia and [nineteenth-century Europe's] generation of medical discourse on Khoi genetalia established the iconographic link between the black woman and sexual lasciviousness" ("Shame" 91). Medical science thus 'proved' that not only were black people a sub-species of humanity (as Georges Cuvier believed), but that they were also therefore biologically prone to immoral, licentious sexual behaviour, such as the enticement of, and coupling with, white men. As such, the coloured body, which "bear[s] the marked pigmentation of miscegenation" (Wicomb, "Shame" 93), must also bear *the shame of miscegenation*, which is to say the shame of black women.

It is in light of this historical alignment of shame, miscegenation and concupiscence that one should consider the two instances of sexual intercourse in the novel. Apart from Helen's rape by Carter, there is Mr Boshoff's 'shameful' love of a coloured girl, which leads to the even more shocking revelation that the Boshoffs too are play-whites. Both sex scenes are and are not representations of miscegenation. In Helen's case, though she is of course coloured, what the act produces is whiteness, since it allows her to be reclassified and re-imagined as a white woman – indeed, as a woman who has *always been white*. Her old self is obliterated, and replaced with the story of a respectable, white woman. It is surely only such a complete transformation (which transforms even the past) that allows Helen to look with disgust on Mr Boshoff's extra-marital affair. She feels that they have "all been betrayed by the Boshoffs, the whole community" (194). Who can "they" be, this "community" of which she speaks, if not the white community to which she feels she has always belonged?

By contrast, Mr Boshoff refuses to be "charged under the Immorality Act" (whose very name signals the perception that miscegenation must be shameful), "as he love[s] the girl and [has] every right to love her" because, he admits, "he [is] himself coloured, a play-white who now wish[es] to be reclassified once more" (194). Although Mr Boshoff's affair and subsequent decision to assert his coloured identity are morally repugnant choices in Helen's estimation, her own sexual encounter shares qualities with his. In both cases, the sexual acts intimate not only miscegenation but also shame. Even more significantly, they

imply racial 'passing': while Helen's allows her to pass over to whiteness (or so she assumes at any rate), Mr Boshoff's enables him to pass the other way.

I would like to place these 'acts of passing' in the context of the notable lack of sex in *Playing in the Light*. Beds, bedrooms, and things associated with them, are dominant recurring images in the novel. One thinks, for instance, of Marion's bed where she has her nightmares, of Helen's work in a high-end linen shop, or the bed which Brenda and her mother share before the former buys one of her own. Further still, there are several romantic relationships which might make use of such beds. Helen has a child with John, though the only information the reader has about this conception is that she is disgusted by it as she fears it will lead to a baby whose physical appearance is obviously coloured. Helen's pregnancy also signals the end of almost all kindness between her and John, which goes some way to explaining the desolate household in which Marion will be raised. Not coincidentally, then, Marion's adult romantic relations are quite cold and officious. She has a relationship with Geoff and spends nights at his place, but the sexual union of the two is never described, and the relationship peters out into an unremarkable form of friendship. Later, she does have a more passionate flirtation with Vumile Mkhize during which she contemplates sleeping with him but resists, because she does not wish to appear "mad" and "guilt-ridden" – like Magda in J. M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* (207). The 'madness' to which she refers seems to suggest a lustfulness, a lasciviousness, while the term "guilt-ridden" surely connotes shame. Given that the intimacy of the bedroom is constantly invoked, and many romantic liaisons are suggested, the absence of sex is remarkable.

In order to explain this absence, it is necessary to consider one last similarity between Helen's sexual violation by Carter and Mr Boshoff's affair with the young, coloured girl: they both occur *outside* of the privacy of home, in public spaces. Since Carter is a public official, he holds a position of public office, and it is while executing the duties of that office (albeit unscrupulously) that he claims Helen's body as payment for classifying her and John as white. Mr Boshoff, on the other hand, is caught by the police – supposedly agents of the *public* good – in his car. A vehicle is an apposite place for this affair as it is associated with a shuttling between the public and the private home. Clearly, in both instances, what should be most private (what belongs in the home, in the bedroom) is rendered public. The sexual act is deprived of its intimacy, of being a private act of hospitality between consenting individuals.

Interestingly, Stuart Thomas raises the possibility of a sexual union that allows for unlimited hospitality in his discussion of Anne Landsman's 1998 novel *The Devil's Chimney*. He argues that this novel presents a fluid relation between self, other, and landscape, which is

attainable during sex, and that this is particularly apparent in the descriptions of orgasm. According to Thomas, in Landsman's portrayal, sex acts result in a radical "dissolution of the distinction between self and other", which is a profound *ekstasis* (169). In effect, he contends that sex can allow for a welcoming of the other (into and onto the body), which decentres the self and thus allows for an unconditional or absolute hospitality to and for the other. This possibility of sex as unconditional hospitality is certainly not represented in *Playing in the Light*, however, because the public invades the privacy of the encounter. What the public does (and Mr Boshoff knows this only too well) is read the private act in terms of general prescriptions and proscriptions (as 'immoral', for example). To assign the force of generalisation, of law, to the vulnerable and singular sexual encounter is an act of violence. (Indeed, it may be thought of as violence itself, since, arguably, hostility is always predicated on a disrespect and inhospitality for that which is vulnerable and singular.)

It is generally accepted that the Immorality Act was, well, immoral. Yet it is, perhaps, more difficult, given the conventional understanding of what it means to be hospitable, to admit that it was also, in a very real sense, a law of hospitality. It prescribed, dictated, and censured how one (race) may or may not extend or receive a form of hospitality from another (race). All such laws of hospitality act to condition absolute hospitality, and are therefore always both dependent on and a perversion of what Derrida emphasises is "*the* law of absolute hospitality". According to him:

> the express law that governs the general concept of hospitality, appears as a paradoxical law, pervertible and perverting. It seems to dictate that absolute hospitality should break with the law of hospitality as right or duty, with the 'pact' of hospitality. To put it in different terms, absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner [. . .] but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I give place to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking them [. . .] reciprocity [. . .].
>
> (Derrida, *On Hospitality* 25)

He therefore contends that:

> [t]he law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights. Just hospitality breaks with hospitality by right; not that it condemns or is opposed to it, and it can on the contrary set and maintain it in a perpetual progressive movement; but it is as strangely heterogeneous to it as justice is heterogeneous to the law to which it is yet so close, from which in truth it is indissociable.
>
> (Derrida, *On Hospitality* 25–27)

The law of absolute hospitality is the condition of possibility for all conditional laws of hospitality, including laws such as the Immorality Act. This perverse law (in every sense of the word) is but one example of the way in which all laws depend on and are a perversion of *the* law, and of a form of justice that attends to the radical, unknown, anonymous singularity of the other. To say of un-home that it implies the invasion of the private space of home by the public world beyond it, is to imply that those acts thought most intimate are equally susceptible to invasion by the realm of the public. This is the always-present threat of un-homeliness: that what one allows in is not always, not necessarily, respectful, open, ethical, and hospitable in return (hence Derrida's insistence that unconditional hospitality means welcoming in the other *without* need of reciprocity). The public can always treat one generally, prescriptively, even violently. Such threat can only be limited to the extent that one limits access to one's home and private life – in other words, to the extent that one conditions one's hospitality.

Wicomb describes only two sexual liaisons and both are, in their own ways, violent. That is not to say that this writer can conceive of no possibility for intimate connection through sex. In fact, the novel suggests that one must recognise a simple truth, which is that such intimacy requires and is dependent on a reconception of the very notion of intimacy. To equate it with a conventional idea of privacy is to deprive intimacy of the very possibility of a form of hospitality that involves a respect for, rather than an exclusion of, the other (which is what privatising intimacy amounts to). For this reason, to continue to associate intimacy with privacy (as if the two were interchangeable or synonymous) is to relegate it, once and for all, to the inner space of an irreducible solipsism, the consequence of which is only ever violence (against the other).

To risk that would be (to paraphrase one of Derrida's preferred expressions) to risk the worst. Better, though terrifying to be sure, to risk the other, to welcome into one's home that other who may yet bring into that home public judgement, censure, even hostility. Hospitality, in the Derridean sense of the word, is not a *good* state (in the sense of being good for the host, good for his state of mind and sense of self), but an ethical one. And the difference between these two states is profound. To be in a good condition may mean that one is safe, comfortable, assured – at home.[7] By contrast, to be ethical means opening one's door to the world, without limit or expectation of reciprocity. A truly ethical encounter with the other is interminable, as a finite being is burdened beyond measure by a responsibility that is infinite. The desire for a happy, satisfied existence is therefore irreconcilable with the

passion and burden of caring infinitely for every possible guest who may seek refuge in one's home (see Derrida, "Principle of Hospitality" 7).

The world that *Playing in the Light* implies one cannot but let in is populated by racial discourses – hence the racial subtexts which invade and determine its depictions of sexual intercourse. In Marion's desire for a sexual relationship (which becomes more noticeable as she develops a greater openness to the other), one may read a desire for a form of sex that is not so determinedly contained within racial terms. Perhaps there will come a time when to be intimate will mean being open to the public without also being circumscribed by race. Like violence, that too is a possibility on which the novel dares not foreclose. But it is not a possibility for which it can find a language. The long and violent history of colonialism (the 'white mythology' that haunts the post-transitional 'now' in ineluctable yet insidious forms) has bound sex and race via the shame associated with miscegenation. This is as true for those known to be white as for those who are coloured, which is suggested by the two sex scenes, in which what appear to be acts of miscegenation between white and 'non-white' people reveal themselves to be far more complex. Miscegenation does not simply refer to that which has produced the coloured race but the process that produces race (as we know it) in general (a contention that I shall discuss in greater detail in due course). The novel yearns for a new language which is free of this colonial history, or 'white mythology', but is reluctant to attempt to create it out of thin air. Tellingly, in this regard, Helen's only response to her violation is to be silent about the abuse – both when Carter puts his hands on her and later. Obviously, then, she never reveals what was done to her to anyone. Words which could disentangle her feelings about her sexual humiliation from her desire for whiteness are not available to her. Indeed, they are not available to the novel either.

In order to register properly this notion of race as a condition of hospitality, and therefore as that which (always) renders hospitality conditional, I think it necessary to consider the reader's responses to the scene of Helen's abuse. S/he must *look on this scene* that Helen would have kept secret, hidden, and private. It is worth recalling, she would rather that no one is able to see what is being done to her. Although this abusive encounter with Carter cannot be characterised as intimate, the reader can be certain she would hope, at the very least, that it remain private. Helen, surely, would not want anyone to know the graphic details, such as the way he "licked and pummelled and muttered", or the way in which he "with his right hand on her left buttock [. . .] pressed his hardness against her" (Wicomb, *Playing* 143). [8] She would not welcome the reader's intrusion into her ordeal. Yet intrude s/he does. Neither is the reader the first to do so, for this scene is only available to him/her to be

read because Marion and/or Brenda have looked into Helen's private dealings with Carter. So each reader is forced to collude with that invasion in the act of reading. S/he is obliged to intrude by comprehending what should not be legible, and was, for Helen, the unmentionable price of 'freedom'.

More terrible still, the reader does so at precisely the time that Carter intrudes most violently. It is as if s/he were Carter, and were watching him/herself do that of which s/he had never imagined him/herself capable. It is as if, in reading of Carter's behaviour, one saw one's most violent self; that self one would prefer were always secret, locked away, behind closed doors. One wonders if perhaps what one has intruded upon were not so much Helen's dark secret as one's own. Consequently, the reader cannot stand to look upon this scene: not only because of the appalling things done to Helen, but also because s/he senses that what Carter is doing is a little too close to home. As one reads it, one senses that this scene implies that one is embroiled, implicated in, subjected to and subject of, the grand and terrible narrative of race and race-making. That narrative inhabits one, a subject of a racialised world, as one inhabits one's home. That is, it inhabits one placelessly, without comfort or privacy, in an un-homely fashion. No empathetic reader would wish to do as Carter has done, and to be positioned alongside him. One does not want to inhabit the role of the violator, and perpetrator. Yet still one looks on the scene of Helen's violation and feels, implicitly, that reading gives one a right to look. It is as if what one is looking at is his/her property (by right). The room where Carter violates Helen is appropriately a public office (in the literal and figurative sense of the phrase), for he is a representative of a public body (made up of subjects of society) which is responsible for that office and all that happens within it.

My sense is that Wicomb plays on the reader's closeness to Carter and the violence he represents. She is aware that most readers would wish to act differently from him, to look with different eyes, and speak an-other language. For Helen, especially since she must endure so much anguish so silently, the reader hopes, above all, to extend a form of hospitality worthy of the name. Wicomb is cognisant of the probability that in the face of such violence, the reader would like to say to Helen, as gently as possible (in words that will have no part of the wreckage of history), with tenderness infinitely more gentle than the gentleness of Christ in fact: 'Come in, and find solace here, in my home. Here I will not judge, or shame. Here you are safe from those who have harmed you. I will never allow the Carters of the world in'. Such sentiments seem proper because all who own property believe implicitly that they have the right to include some, and to exclude others. It is, in fact, one's fundamental right of property. However, what if, as I will argue throughout this study, the right of property always

designates a form of violence or, more accurately, designates what preconditions all forms of violence? When one identifies so closely with Carter, one is horrified by the realisation that this violator stands nearby, *in one's home*.

Since Carter believes in ownership, in laying claim (to Helen's body, for instance), his behaviour accords with a notion of violence as inhospitality, although, ironically, he is obsequious in his desire to appear hospitable and welcoming. Nevertheless, his is a formal hospitality, and, as such, is limited, conventional, a corruption of a hospitality worthy of the name, which would welcome the guest in beyond convention and formality. The reader who sides with Helen would wish to exclude Carter from his/her inviolable space because he has violated an innocent person. Ironically, the attempt to exclude invites him in as it welcomes in the violence which he represents. The novel forces its readers to recognise that this violence is indistinguishable from Western history and, by association, from the discourses of race and the unspeakable, unending harm they have perpetrated in the name of whiteness. Subjects forged by these discourses, such as the readers of Wicomb's novel (unknowingly perhaps), welcome this history in with every act of exclusion. One keeps it incalculably close, in one's home, as an (un)welcomed guest.

Homes are always vulnerable to such invasion. Accordingly, in order to understand the nature of the domestic space (particularly in a cosmopolitan, post-transitional society), it is necessary to consider who or what has entered the home. One may welcome some in at the expense of others, but that presupposes that the barriers one constructs will hold. Even as a person establishes his/her home based on such limits, s/he must be aware that something un-homely may yet enter. This is the double-bind of home: while it must be an inviolable space (if it is to accord with the most ubiquitous ideas on home), its inviolability must be violable. Were it not susceptible to invasion, one could not welcome others in. It follows that if one is unable to welcome others in, one also cannot exclude them. If this is the case, one will have created a home without doors or windows. The desire to be inhospitable to some, ironically, requires a door through which they might pass (were the host not denying them right of access). On a conceptual level, home is therefore violated by its opposite, its enemy – un-home. Actually, I would say that since un-homeliness makes the notion of home possible, it is not really its opposite but its foundation, metaphorically speaking. This violation by an un-homeliness that can never be excluded is the first violation, and it allows for all others.

Playing White and a Shame that has no Place

The reader is, justifiably, ashamed to face what s/he has inadvertently welcomed into his/her world, and this shame connects him/her, in a profound sense, with Helen. In the following section I would like to focus more on this issue of shame, and the reader's connection to it. The shame of miscegenation, argues Wicomb, is evident in "apartheid's strategy of the naming of a Coloured race, and recur[s] in [. . .] attempts to establish brownness as a pure category, which is to say a denial of shame" ("Shame" 92). Helen, though, is interested not in a 'pure' coloured identity, but a 'pure' white one. Yet her passing for white is also obviously in some sense "a denial of [the] shame" associated with coloured identity. She is, understandably, ashamed of her sexual violation at the hands of Carter (however necessary): at the time she wants "nothing more than to hide under the rough grey blanket of childhood and to sob" (*Playing* 140). But the idyllic safety of a childhood home is not ultimately her solace. Instead, she chooses the "image of a door" which she thinks represents "opportunity as a threshold over which you stepped lightly, without fuss" (142). For Helen and John, miscegenation will produce whiteness and purity, not brownness and degeneracy. The door, she imagines, will open on a home both safe and welcoming. How different the reality of her homelife is: "[Helen and John] did not exchange anecdotes about close shaves. If there were cold shivers when colleagues talked about hotnos or uppity coloureds, they did not tell each other, did not giggle about it in their bedroom, for that space had lost its privacy too" (124).

Although Helen's endless vigilance ensures that even her bedroom is not private, this clearly does not correlate with an ease in public. For instance, when she begins to suspect her neighbours of being coloured, there is "nothing to be done but to hold her head high and refuse to socialise" (131). Similarly, one of the things that causes the deepest resentment between Helen and John revolves around her refusal to allow his family to visit. Elsie, John's sister, in particular, is extremely close to her brother, and at first Helen is delighted to have her over. Soon, however, she is barred because her manners are obviously a sign of what Helen considers coloured vulgarity. Her lack of refinement is, to use one of Helen's more telling phrases, "beyond the pale" (167). John pleads with his wife, asking (fairly enough): "who are these people who mind [Elsie's] enthusiastic manners?" He bitterly reminds her that "[t]hey [have] no friends, no visitors, [and can] not have anyone come to the house until they [have] acquired decent things, from decent furniture to decent teaspoons, although, no sooner [will] they get a coveted object than it [will] be superseded by something even more desirable, more decent" (167). Either John or the narrator is then led to conclude that

"[d]ecency, it transpire[s], [is] an endlessly deferred, unachievable goal" (167). In the pursuit of decency, Helen has rendered her home an uncomfortably vulnerable space which is, seemingly, always on display. This sense of the home as a forum for public scrutiny is all the more ironic because they have "no friends", "no visitors", no one to bear witness to their daily lives.

Equally troubling, the objects that make up the Campbell household are ephemeral, insubstantial, and transient since they are always but a poor substitute for what they *ought to be*. To live in a house where even the physical objects seem always on the verge of disappearing, only to be replaced by new ones similarly lacking in substance and permanence, in an endless cycle, must surely be one of the very best descriptions of the home rendered *Unheimlich*, uncanny, and un-homely.

Helen has *no place* for the objects in her home, as that which they are meant to represent, namely decency and whiteness, is "endlessly deferred' to another time and *another place*. The "unachievable goal" – to be white, not simply to look white and act white or even to be generally considered white, but to inhabit whiteness effortlessly – cannot be experienced except as an inhospitable form of un-home. It is the form of un-home in which what Helen has welcomed *to the exclusion of all others* is distinctly unwelcoming. Where, then, will she find whiteness, and when? Like the objects of her house, it (by its very ephemeral nature) belongs in another time and another place. But also, in a ghost-like, haunting way, whiteness is always there, in her house.[9] It will not leave, and it, like every angry spirit, is extremely protective of its abode, or haunt. It will therefore not abide another, any other, any guest to enter (not even a familial, like Elsie, or Marion, who is described by her own mother as an unwanted guest before she is even born). The spirit of whiteness obliges Helen to imagine every possible guest as an enemy, someone sent to spy and do harm.

Ironically, the form of harm which she most fears is the loss of her home, since if she is discovered (if her crime is uncovered, that is), she and John would need to relocate in accordance with the Group Areas Act. She admonishes him for his lack of vigilance, which could, she says, cost them "this life of luxury that [she has] carved out for [them]" (126). If the typical indicators of luxury are the objects in one's home, and these are never good enough for Helen, one cannot help but wonder whether what she fears losing has not already been taken from her. The un-homely home where the spirit of whiteness lingers has surely ensured that. Helen imagines that the uncertainty created by the implementation of the Population Registration Act, which she uses to become white, is a sign that "[h]istory [is] on

their side" (131). Western history is indeed close: it is in her home, sense of self, in the mirror, in every object in her house, even in her language. But it is neither "on [her] side", nor is it ever in her grasp.

And because history is against her, yet also within her, Helen can never be vigilant enough. If she errs on the side of caution, even in her interactions with her husband and child, it is not simply because she is a cold woman, or an uncaring mother. If she struggles to play with her own child, it is not because she wishes Marion anything but the best. It is just that playing is, for Helen and, by association, for her family,

> deadly serious [and] the business of playing white, of bluffing it out, [takes] courage, determination, perseverance, commitment [. . .]. Not even in the privacy of their home, between their own four walls, [can] they let up, act the fool, laugh at those who[ʼve] been duped, or mimic their public selves. In the blinding light of whiteness, they walk exposed [. . .]. Playing – as others would call it – in the light [leaves] no space, no time for interiority, for reflecting on what they [have] done. Under the glaring spotlight of whiteness, they play diligently, assiduously; the past, and with it conscience, [shrinks] to a black dot in the distance.
>
> (123)

How is one to reckon with this form of play? What 'game' is this 'playing white'; what are its rules, its rewards? Furthermore, where is one to situate it? In other words, what are its limits; where does it begin and where does it end? The difficulty in answering these questions is that, ironically, while Helen scrupulously (with "determination, perseverance, commitment") guards her right to play the game, she does so by pretending that she is not playing it, and has no need of it. In other words, because her guard is always up (against the suspicion that she is playing), it is impossible to know when she ceases to participate in the game. When one attempts to place Helen's conception of playing within limits, one is faced with the limitless way in which she creates limits, erects walls, and ensures that none may then enter.

In their "home, between their own four walls", the Campbells are, first and foremost, not allowed to *play a part*; they may not "*act* the fool [. . .], or *mimic* their public selves" (123, my emphasis). Playing is clearly not acting in the sense that it is *not* the work of inhabiting the life and home of another (or even of oneself as other). Helen's conception of play has no place for such foolish behaviour. To act, to imagine the life of another, to welcome in such thoughts cannot be tolerated it appears. So, one must conclude, when they don the personas of "their public selves", they are not acting or playing a part. Rather, they are *playing themselves*. The modern, colloquial use of the phrase 'getting played', meaning getting duped or fooled, is instructive here. Helen and John have *fooled themselves* into

believing they *are themselves*. Yet the reader is assured that this is not simply a self-conscious form of deception, for it is done without the space or time for "interiority", which the narrator qualifies as the space for "reflecting on what [they] have done". In sum, they have played at being themselves, but have never even stopped to consider whether this is possible given that they are guarded and eyed by the "glaring spotlight of whiteness". They play (endlessly) at being themselves but do so deprived of interiority, the private space to consider what they are, or should like to be. This is, to use another modern colloquial phrase, the role of both their lives. They must act, without knowing they are acting, so as to act in accordance with whiteness. It is as if whiteness requires that they act as if they are not acting, and play (seriously) at not playing.

The existential dilemma for the play-white is that playing is never enough. One adopts the position in the hope that one is then free of the burdensome apartheid laws that inhibit freedom for coloureds – in particular, the incessant monitoring, censuring and censoring. Effectively, one assumes this precarious position in the hope that eventually it will engender the freedom to be oneself. 'Playing white' is premised on a belief that sooner or later the playing ceases and one can ease comfortably into one's true, real self. Had John and Helen the time for interiority, however, they would surely see that the game never ends. This couple will never win it, and never feel assured that they are who and where they are meant to be. Instead, their lives become an endless performance in which losing is the only sign that they are even still in the game. For as long as they sense that they are still playing white, they intuit that they are not yet, 'not really', white. This game, in which the winner is the one who is no longer playing it (that is, the one who has somehow figured out how to play at not playing), goes on though, holding out the shimmering, pure promise that one day, in the near future, they will be victorious. And their reward? They will be allowed to stop playing, of course.

It might then seem that the implication of play, as Wicomb describes it, is that there is a real form of racialised identity which exists beyond performance. 'Real white people', people who are 'really white', who are not pretending, are free of the game. Actually, though, I do not think that this is Wicomb's point at all. She goes to great lengths to show that the very concept of whiteness is elusive. The entire novel is informed by the idea that whiteness is never attainable, tangible, and real. John, Helen and Marion's struggles relate to their inability to remain pure, which would allow them to remain white. They are ineluctably tainted by worldliness, which is the heat and life of history itself. To be white is therefore only viable if one is free of the world, and of its history. Anything less than this and one is

playing, putting on a performance. If indeed 'playing white' is a game, then that is its golden rule. So-called 'real white people' are no less subject to this rule than are the Campbells, and thus they too must be performing. Perhaps the one difference is that they do not need to know that they are playing and may, if they so wish, assume they are free. One need not be aware that one is participating in the game in order to lose at it. The loss will simply register as lack, as something ineffable or unidentifiable that is missing. Marion's uneasy lifestyle before she discovers her parent's secret is a good example of the effects of this absence: assured of her whiteness, she is nevertheless unsure of why it leaves her so profoundly dissatisfied. Her mother and father, by contrast, can at least name what they do not have, what they believe they have not yet won the right to own. It is cold comfort but that much, at least, is theirs.

The notion that whiteness functions as a normative standard, a kind of blank clean slate against which the non-white is effectively measured is well established. I will not repeat the argument at any length. To cite but one example, in her influential work on the subject, Peggy McIntosh describes her white privilege "as an invisible package of unearned assets" (94–95). She elaborates by saying that it is "like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances [. . .] and blank checks" among other things (95). While I have no doubt of the earnest, ethical nature of her argument, I cannot help but feel that there is an unresolved paradox which informs it. On the one hand, the knapsack metaphor is useful because it implies that whiteness is external and constructed by society rather than being innate or real. On the other hand, by associating whiteness with a series of privileges (admittedly invisible ones), I would argue that McIntosh inadvertently suggests that it is tangible: a series of things which, if acquired, mean that one *is* white; that is to say, whiteness is phenomenal – available for and as experience – in effect, real. She implies that being white, as she describes herself, amounts to having certain privileges, but is she not then saying that should one (somehow) accrue said privileges, one could effectively *become* white? Might it not be more prudent to say that white privilege is the impure experience of whiteness, or that it is never experienced except as privileges which are always at some level unsatisfying, precisely because they lack the metaphysical purity of whiteness. This is surely the insight one gains when one considers Wicomb's complex treatment of those who play at being white.

Indeed, as we have already seen, John and Helen lose more than they could ever have imagined. For instance, the decision to play the game will ultimately cost them a sense of comfort, the intimacy of old family relations, their love of one another, and privacy, to name but a few. Perhaps, though, the most telling fee is one which they happily pay at the very

outset when they allow "the past, and with it conscience, [. . .] to [shrink to] a black dot in the distance" (123). Helen has no particular desire to return to this distant point. If indeed her past is vanishing, she would surely argue that this is no bad thing.

Yet Wicomb aligns that (supposedly) 'shameful' past with conscience, which I cannot help but read as referring to the ethical, hospitable treatment of the other. I am led to wonder what it is that has been forgotten in the long-vanished past (which Helen readily disposes of as a history to be deplored and rendered unwelcomed). What lessons may such a history (one that is always thought shameful) teach one about hospitality and its relation to race? Helen adopts the costly position of the play-white without any critical distance. Between this position and the "black dot" of the past lies an un-traversable, immeasurable chasm. But what if one were to attempt this journey nevertheless, knowing neither course nor direction? It is worth considering the possible advantages were one to travel out, toward the other, and for the other. My feeling, however, is that one is obliged to undertake this crossing in the knowledge that one cannot then return (home). Wicomb's novel suggests that if such a journey is made, it is possible that one might find the historical origin of the alignment of race and home, shame and colouredness, whiteness and purity. If that were possible, and while it could not negate the long history of race on which I have already said so much, such a voyage would perhaps allow for one form of un-home to be replaced by another. More specifically, the violent process by which race un-homes the subject (in the process creating subjecthood) might begin to be substituted for a more ethical un-home, predicated on hospitable respect for the other (to whatever extent that is ever possible). As I will show, this is in many ways the journey the novel (and Marion in particular) takes. Though this is a journey that has no end (and can never have an end) let us attempt to head in that direction.

Blinded by the Light, (Dis)Placed by the Shame

I start my attempt to locate the shameful origin of race by 'placing' the aporetic form of playing that is demanded of John and Helen. They must, let us recall, always play *in the light*. However, the light in which they must play (seriously) is also that which may expose them. This light is therefore meant to illuminate the 'truth'. In the case of the Campbells, it will expose any small slip on Helen and/or John's part, and thereby reveal what they have kept hidden in darkness and secrecy. As the light is clearly meant to *enlighten*, the suggestion is that light and truth are inseparable. But through a discussion of the trope of light, and its relation to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in *Playing in the Light*, I will

show that Wicomb establishes that this connection is metaphoric or, at best, metonymic (rather than 'real' or 'true', in the conventional sense). Furthermore, it is my contention that, for this writer, the metaphor is itself inextricably bound to the colonial project, and to the European Enlightenment, which placed such extraordinary value both on the concept of truth (which could supposedly be accessed free of cultural bias through rational thought) and of propriety (which amounted to an ideal that constructed the European cultures as true, and therefore, ironically, not as cultures at all). I would like to explore the inherent paradoxes and assumptions that inform this thinking (implied by the notion of the 'truth' and the light) in further detail, and relate it to the difficulties of race that Helen and John must negotiate. By following this path, I hope to close in on the historical origins of whiteness to which they are blind.

The light, if indeed it can expose Helen and John, demands the 'truth', will abide only the 'truth'. It demands, in a sense, a confession. Tellingly, Marion uses exactly this sense of light as a tool for interrogation in relation to Patricia Williams, the ANC cadre who is photographed while 'confessing' to the TRC her brutal torture at the hands of the security forces. And it is this photograph which she sees in a newspaper that initiates Marion's own search for the 'truth' about her past. When she is somewhat futilely attempting to extract information from her reticent father (about their decision to play-white), an "impulse to hurt him throbs deep inside [her] like a heartbeat". Significantly, this impulse manifests as a desire "to place him under a searing electric light and fire questions – like the death squad commandant with Patricia Williams" (119).

There is another passage in the novel that assigns Marion the role of perpetrator, and this similarity demands that we consider the two in conjunction:

> In this world [revealed by the TRC] of accusations and confessions, of secrets and lies, Marion is a reluctant traveller who has landed in a foreign country without so much as a phrase book [. . .]. She does not know why she ventures into a world she has never known, never wished to explore, except somehow it is the least she can do for the demanding stranger, for Patricia Williams, whose face is that of the beloved Tokkie, and whose eyes point at the connectedness of this foreign country with her old familiar world. Marion does not speak to anyone of these sessions before the television screen. Somehow, she bears the shame of the perpetrators; somehow she, who has never had anything to do with politics, has been branded by this business; somehow, her parentlessness has bonded her with the brigadiers. And all this she must endure [. . .].
>
> (74–75)

The "searing [. . .] light" (119), which "brand[s]" the flesh (74), is ineluctably associated in the novel with the atrocities of the apartheid regime. But the revelation of the true extent of the violence and repression of the apartheid state does not lead to any sense of catharsis or comfort, at least not for Marion (such catharsis, healing, or forgiveness was, of course, an implicit goal of the TRC).[10] The stories Marion hears on the television make her feel profoundly unsettled, even foreign: hence the description of her being like a "reluctant traveller who has landed in a foreign country without so much as a phrase book" (74). This "foreign country", her home country of South Africa, generates in her two peculiar and seemingly contradictory forms of identification: on the one hand, she is bonded with the "brigadiers" who "fire questions" and resort to violence if their questions are not answered; on the other hand, she feels an inexplicable connection to the victim, Patricia Williams. Only for her, this "demanding stranger", does she willingly endure these travels through the unfamiliar (74). And only *through her* does Marion experience a "connectedness of this foreign country with her old familiar world". One may justifiably ask what kind of country this is, where one is asked to empathise with both victim and torturer? Williams is indeed a "demanding stranger", if what she demands is that Marion bond with her while bonding with those who have tortured her. Again, one is led to wonder what kind of position this is that she is being asked (forcefully) to adopt. How can one live with(in) the seemingly limitless responsibility of such a 'position'? Is such a place, where the foreign is necessarily connected with the "old familiar world", really to be one's new abode? Can one abide it?

Playing in the Light makes strange demands of its main character which echo the demands it makes of its reader. It is natural to be sympathetic to Helen when she is sexually violated by Carter. He is the perpetrator, she the victim. Later, though, it becomes clear that Helen is responsible for a great deal of her daughter and husband's suffering. Her burdensome notion of propriety and whiteness isolates her entire family and ensures they are never comfortable in their own lives. Similarly, in Marion's identification with Patricia, one senses that the novel is shifting the ground beneath one. In connecting Marion to the perpetrators of appalling violence, the reader is made to relate differently to this character. She is the focaliser of the text, quite literally the one with whom readers identify, but the text would have us associate her with the agents of apartheid. Implicitly, I think, Wicomb is destabilising the distinction between victim and oppressor. For her, both are products of the grand narrative, the 'white mythology', which finds its highest expression in apartheid legislation and state-sanctioned terror. The notion of victim and/or perpetrator is therefore inadequate since it obfuscates the complicity that makes such violence possible.

Furthermore, as far as the reader is concerned, the constantly shifting sympathies which the novel elicits lead to a sense that sympathy itself may be a problematic concept. One sympathises from within the limits of a social dynamic. As such, sympathy or empathy is always a restrictive process. Yet its social dimension makes it dangerously susceptible to abuse. One may well be socialised to sympathise only with those who are like one, that is, those who society deems worthy of empathetic concern. From that perspective, sympathy begins to resemble merely another normative process designed to ensure the constancy of the power matrix into which one is born. Wicomb, however, refuses to let her readers settle down, and connect in an unproblematic way with only *some characters*. The reader finds that all the characters are victims, and all are perpetrators. At some level, then, the text demands that the reader identify with *all the characters*. Either one is able to identify with all, it seems, or one is unable to identify with any. Although the demand may be extraordinary, even impossible, there is no escape from the bind. When the hero resembles the worst of villains, and the monster is unveiled as yet another victim, then the only recourse is unlimited, infinite sympathy. It is only on this basis that one can act in a fashion which is not merely complicit with the hostility and hegemony of racialised discourses. Only if one sympathises outside of the social dynamic might that sympathy challenge and change the status quo.

Yet sympathy which is not informed by society is unimaginable. Of course, as Wicomb shows in her novels, a better world is also unimaginable. Nevertheless, she writes to imagine precisely this world. As Dorothy Driver observes, Wicomb's writings, both fictional and non-fictional, "give virtual presence to a set of more nuanced and non-authoritarian positions for the human subject and nation than were already available through the existing discourses" ("Struggle" 524). According to Driver, the conscientised reader of Wicomb's work develops "new-found capacity to place existing authorities over the subject and nation in doubt, through deconstruction or the 'careful teasing out of warring forces of signification', in a process that operates through irony" ("Struggle" 524). I would say that it is not irony alone that allows this writer to deconstruct the "warring forces of signification". Rather, her work enacts a problematising of the very processes of reading and sympathy (which is an inherent element of reading), so as to show possibilities which collusion with Empire render invisible and unspeakable.

It is also issues of sympathy and its limits that are raised by the invocation of the TRC in the novel. In a very particular sense, the commission itself seemed to demand exactly the double identification (with victim and perpetrator) which Marion feels. Its unique staging, where victim (or the families of victims) and perpetrator testified in the same room in open

hearings, face to face as it were, was predicated on the belief that such an encounter could lead to an empathy with and understanding of the other. While this is so, the TRC apportioned blame on the individual agents of violence and, as a result, was singularly incapable of conceiving of systemic violence. In other words, it could not account for the idea that an agent of violence is, in acting, acted upon. Wicomb's text has Marion watch the hearings, only to find she is bonded to both victim and perpetrator. This character therefore extends the gesture of sympathy on which the commission based itself. Through her, the novel implies that a sympathy which is given only to some individuals, and which apportions blame to others, is insufficient. It fails to address the discursive processes and forms of power which act upon all of us, and is, in the final analysis, an exculpatory gesture.

Another notion which drove the machinery of the TRC was the search for truth. First, and before any other goal, the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act assigned the commission the task of "provid[ing] for the investigation and the establishment of as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights committed" during the period from 1 March 1960 to the election of the first properly democratic government in 1994 ("Promotion"). It is noticeable that the act which effectively established the TRC mentions that the commission must provide "as complete *a picture* as possible". As is the case with Marion, who is set on her journey by Williams's photograph in the newspaper, for the TRC the picture was first; before reconciliation, reparation, or recommendations, the picture had to be created. South Africa's dark, murky past during apartheid was viewed much like a negative that had to be exposed to the light (that is, conventionally, how one creates a photograph). The TRC had to shine a light on the past, as if it carried the light, or was itself the light. There can be little doubt that within the confines of this extraordinary mandate it was monumentally influential. For many, especially white, middle-class South Africans such as Marion, the country they thought they knew was rendered irrevocably foreign.[11] Yet, for all of this, and without in any way diminishing its work, one must concede that the TRC had limitations, many of which were institutional, legal, and practical. The limitations which concern me, though, are theoretical or philosophical.

In Wicomb's novel, one such limitation is implied by the metaphoric, or arguably even metonymic, association of light with truth. The light which Marion troublingly associates with violence is *also* that which searches for the truth. For instance, it is the "searing [. . .] light" which Williams is placed beneath as she is interrogated and tortured by security forces. This makes sense since, in this case, the search for a 'truth', that can be

brought out ‘into the light’, and state-sanctioned violence are inexorably intertwined. More to the point, the construction of Western history is predicated both on a conception of history as truth, and of history as violence (though the latter is generally denied, and is in fact obscured by the former). Hayden White thus argues that history, by virtue of its very form, has assisted in “that panorama of the domination of the so-called higher civilizations over their ‘neolithic’ subject cultures and the expansion of Western civilization over the globe that is the subject of the standard narrative of the world written from the point of view of ‘historical’ cultures [presumably those in the West]” (56).

In effect, White is arguing for a conception of history that registers its ‘truth status’ as conditional, and which further recognises that one such condition is violence. Or, to put it another way, according to Thomas Docherty, history and historicists are

> complicit with the ruling class at the moment of [the] historian’s own writing. The victors in history thus proceed in triumphal procession, bearing with them the spoils of their victory, including those documents which record, legitimise and corroborate the necessity of their victory. Such documents the victors call ‘culture’ [. . .]. Hence [. . .] – in the words of the famous passage – ‘There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism’.
>
> (11)

As it is always written from the perspective of the victor, and because it validates their culture, and the moral and political necessity of the victory, Michel de Certeau refers to historical discourse as “*writing that conquers*”, and treats the colonised body “as if it were a blank, ‘savage’ page on which Western desire will be written” (xxv). Such writing operates through a rupture “between a *will to write* and a *written body* (or a body to be written)”, and this rupture “fabricates Western history” (xxvi). We could talk much more about the role of the body that is written on in relation to Wicomb, and indeed the ways in which race writes itself into history by writing shame onto the coloured body is a primary concern of this chapter (see also Marais, “Bastards and Bodies”). For now, though, it is enough to say that *Playing in the Light* is a novel that implies that the violence of history is unavoidable in the *act of writing*. Wicomb is all too aware that her writing may yet be predicated on the same systemic violence of which it is critical.

The limitations of the TRC with which I am concerned are thus related to the problem of its complicity with history. As the commission went about shining the ‘light of truth’, it certainly did everything in its power to avoid enacting the violence inherent in Western history. The steps it took to this end were both laudable and compelling. For instance, one

could argue that the very nature of the Amnesty Hearings, during which both victim and perpetrator testified, signalled an attempt to break with a monolithic, hegemonic notion of 'truth', which will always do violence (to the 'truth' of others), and finds its most powerful example in the form of Western history. Yet why, despite this and so many other measures, were certain forms of testimony always rare during the TRC hearings? For instance, why did so few female ANC members testify to being systematically raped in Quattro Camp and elsewhere by fellow male comrades? At the other end of the spectrum, why did so few men who testified about perpetrating sexual violence against women use the word 'rape'?[12] More generally, why did the commission as a whole "never resolve the tension between facilitating closure and encouraging debate"? (Gready 160)

These, as well as many other questions which have been raised about the TRC and its functioning, are not easy to answer, and I do not wish to suggest that any one of them does not require, even demand, a rigorous, balanced analysis that recognises the manifold circumstances and conditions which marked each moment of the commission's work. Nevertheless, I still think it is fair to say that one of these conditions was its dependence on 'truth' in a context in which truth is not truth. By this I mean that wherever the TRC shone the light of truth, it was always unavoidably necessary to *endure* the systemic violence implied by the motif of light.[13] Such violence is a condition of possibility for a conception of 'truth', or 'truth' as light more accurately. The kind of violence here at issue is therefore, in its way, perpetual. The TRC could, and did, to a distinctly calculable extent, regulate this violence. It could not, however, arrest it, for as a condition of possibility, such violence reckons with the incalculable. That is, the possibility of this hostility is irreducible to any and all means that are designed to limit or overcome it *precisely* because they share in that possibility, and are made possible by it.

It is in this regard that I would diverge from the path set out by Paul Gready, whose analysis of the TRC and the fiction written in its wake (including *Playing in the Light*) has nevertheless been most helpful to me. He argues that the TRC had, for institutional, pragmatic, political, and theoretical reasons, to limit itself in ways which critics have been too quick to seize upon. Accordingly, he argues that rather than critiquing it, some of the fiction that has addressed the work of the commission has duplicated "the TRC's dominant discourse of 'speaking truth to reconciliation'", while also unpacking such dominant discourse by exploring "the silences and 'unfinished business' of apartheid *and* the TRC" (156, original emphasis).[14] On the whole, in tracing the connection between the discourse of

the commission and the discourses of the novels that address it, Gready is persuasive in accounting for the values (though not the limitations – tellingly) of both.

But his entire argument is predicated on his indignant attitude toward "careless writers and critics" who too easily criticise the commission by reiterating that truth is conditional (as I have done), without considering that such postmodern ideas are informed, he says, by an "unthinking imperialism suggesting that there is only one way of operating – theirs" (166). Such uncritical postmodern interventions are, in his view, therefore "too theoretical and divorced from real life people and problems", and subsequently have "little to offer transitional justice and the furtherance of human rights" (166). These are bold claims, which surely call for some attention. Does it follow that proclaiming truth conditional determines "only one way", the way of "unthinking imperialism"? Would not the opposite be more valid, even truer? One could argue that a conditional understanding of 'truth' *necessarily* determines that there will always be more than one way, since no claim could ever completely speak the 'truth' (which would henceforth need to be written in scare quotes, at the very least). I cannot help but feel it is Gready who has succumbed to an "unthinking imperialism" when he divorces more practical "real life" truth (the TRC's, and his own presumably) from the overly theoretical writings of what he derisively calls "cultural studies" (166). Surely, in postulating a "real life" divorced from culture and its study, Gready is adhering to an imperial, Enlightenment belief in reason, truth, history and so forth?

Such an adherence to Enlightenment thinking goes a long way to explaining the inconsistency which mars Gready's entire project, and is perhaps most evident in his writing on *Playing in the Light*. He maintains that the novel is good, distinctive (for "real life people", I suppose), because it "tackles one complex identity-related issue for blacks, broadly defined, namely situations where those designated 'colored'[sic] under apartheid 'played white'" (170). Wicomb's work reveals, 'sheds light on', a silent part of South African history, that is, the "identity-related" issue of 'playing white'. As an aside, Gready concedes that the novel achieves this mission (if indeed this is its mission, a question we have to leave in abeyance for now) by exploring "overlooked forms of violence, complex identities, difficult relationships between past and present, disclosure and secrecy" (172). Given this concession, I do not think that this critic is averse to acknowledging that 'truth' is conditional – after all, he likes some of the relative 'truths' Wicomb explores, as his parenthetical statement implies. There are, however, simply some conditions he will not abide, and this is most forcefully indicated when he proudly declares having left cultural studies because he is "a realist and not a relativist in the garden of truth" (166). He especially will not tolerate that a perverse

relativism should entail considering truth commissions, novels, even criticism, as being enabled by a similarly relative or conditional relation to truth. Because, according to him, this renders them all useless for "real life people" and the advancement of "transitional justice" (166). For this reason, he, not entirely unknowingly, places too much faith in all those modalities of genre and convention which act to negate the conditional nature of 'truth'. And he is unwilling to see any innate limitations to these modalities.

I have discussed Gready's work at some length because it illustrates how difficult it is to grapple with the incalculable violence of history as one attempts to explore that very history. It is a great testament to the nuance and care with which Wicomb writes that she always shows a self-conscious awareness of this danger. When she painstakingly circles around certain images – such as playing, light, and home – it is not so as to be "overly theoretical", but because within such images (banal, harmless, domestic though they may seem) are forms of violence and repression which, though incalculable, still demand to be accounted for, rather than ignored, and accommodated, instead of being placed aside so as to satisfy a fallacious call for utility, and (Enlightenment-style) realism.

Rather than place her work in the fictitious space that is free of complicity, I would argue that her work embraces what Mark Sanders calls human folded-together-ness. In his book, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid*, he argues, following Derrida, that the intellectual is always faced with a choice between complicities in the narrow sense and complicity in the broader form (10). The latter, he defines as a "basic folded-together-ness of being, of self and other" (11) while complicities amount to choices of affiliation which run the risk of denying the enfolded-ness of self and other precisely because they are "one-sided" and "accept responsibility only in front of their own" (8). What Sanders proposes, in other words, is that a limited responsibility for one's own camp, party, or affiliation is irreconcilable with a more general "responsibility-in-complicity" (11). Such responsibility is infinite, at least in the sense that it is taken in the name of a human folded-ness which cannot be adequately quantified.[15]

In Wicomb's alignment of Marion's search for the 'truth' (about her family) with all the relativity and conditionality of 'truths' exposed (rendered visible, in the light) by the TRC, we find a similar concern for connections which expose the aporia between limited and general forms of complicity. Marion's discovery of her parent's play-white status is not simply the revelation of an until-then silent past. The very nature of the search, together with the terms with which she must conduct it and the methods she must use, implicates her in a very particular (and particularly uncomfortable) fashion. Here, at the very point that she

would like to stand apart, disdainful and shocked, separate and critical (of her parents), she is inexplicably drawn into an almost interminable web of allegiances, responsibilities, and connections. Hence, let us recall, she bears the shame of the perpetrator, even as she is drawn to the world of the victim (Wicomb, *Playing* 74).[16]

Patricia Williams makes the most profound demand of Marion, that is, that she endure a form of existence in which she is not able to disentangle herself easily or comfortably from a history of violence. Accordingly, she must attest, in a language always haunted by this violence, that such endurance should be respectful of, and hospitable to, that which it can never (fully) arrive at, which is the other. For Williams represents that other too (and therefore, ironically, she represents the unrepresentable), and, as such, she is "demanding" of an ethical response from Marion and, in a sense, from the reader too (74). Williams is not (not 'really', if such a language is still applicable) the sum total of her circumscription within the forum of the TRC, or Marion's attempts to place her (in her family, and, by association, the place of family, the home). As we have seen, she is a "demanding stranger" who makes Marion a "reluctant traveller [. . .] in a foreign country" (74). Naturally, the latter would be reluctant to travel out beyond what is familiar, safe, and understandable. She would not wish to be deprived of such comfort – not there, not at home, for that would entail considering her home a foreign territory. And, she cannot welcome Williams as a stranger when her home is strange, foreign, and violated by that which renders it un-homely. For, according to Derrida, there is "[n]o hospitality, in the classic sense, without sovereignty of oneself over one's home" (*Of Hospitality* 61). This is *a* law of hospitality, and it is also a law of home (a law which ensures the home is homely). While this is so, it is a perversion of *the* law of unlimited hospitality. The law which defines the classical form of hospitality by limiting access opposes *the* law which does not, on which it is nevertheless predicated, and therefore "it is as though the laws (plural) of hospitality, in marking limits, powers, rights, and duties, consisted in challenging and transgressing *the* law of hospitality, the one that would command that the 'new arrival' be offered an unconditional welcome" (Derrida, *Of Hospitality* 77, original emphasis).

Marion would more easily open her door to Williams if it did not also mean opening her door to her torturers. The sense of connection with these men (and the history of violence they represent) is a little too close to home. She would like to be hospitable to Patricia Williams, but doing so involves the challenging work of entertaining the idea (as more than just a guest) that she is amongst those who have been inhospitable too. A form of hospitality which is also a form of inhospitality thus emerges. Williams is welcomed by a host who,

symbolically, has held her hostage. This guest metaphorically enters the home of a host who is also her enemy. As 'strange' or foreign as she may be, Williams's strangest quality is that whenever Marion welcomes her in (by identifying with her and her pain), she must do so as her enemy, with a gesture of violence. What becomes clear is that Williams cannot but be welcomed in this way, which is to say violently, in so far as she cannot be received except by a host who desires the sovereignty of her home to remain intact.

Though Williams can never exceed this limitation, in her way, she defies it. She forcibly represents the limits of hospitality, and thus she calls, demandingly, for a limitless hospitality. She makes the familiar foreign, the home un-homely. Neither the TRC, nor Marion, can fully accommodate this woman within their partial understandings of her (primarily because both are marked by the violence implied by the motif of light). In Marion's enduring identification with Williams, the reader is nevertheless exposed to the aporetic interplay of conditional and unconditional hospitality. The violence of the former is predicated on the limitlessness and impossibility of the latter, and the unconditional is therefore only ever experienced as a limited violence to and for the other. This is, to use Wicomb's language, the "interconnectedness of this foreign country with [the] old familiar world" (*Playing* 74).

If Marion is troubled by this hostility – by which I mean the violence one inflicts on the other whenever one limits one's hospitality by attempting to enforce the limits of one's home – Helen is blind to it. She is, as it were, blinded by the light (of history). This is not to say that she accepts the force of history, or that she thinks herself reliant on it. Rather, she attempts what the novel will (and can) not, namely, to separate history from the light of whiteness. In her estimation,

> [t]he pursuit of whiteness is in competition with history. Building a new life means doing so from scratch, keeping a pristine house, without clutter, without objects that clamour to tell of a past, without the eloquence – no, the garrulousness – of history.
>
> If the whiteness they pursue is cool and haughty and blank, history is uncool, reaches out gawkily for affinities, asserts itself boldly, threatens to mark, to break through and stain the primed white canvas that is their life.
>
> (152)

Helen's notion of history is that it is garrulous, "uncool", gawky, entirely too bold and always threatening to "mark" whiteness (presumably with colour). Clearly then, for her, it is marked by the shame and vulgarity that she associates with being coloured. She does not connect whiteness with history (with which it is, according to her, "in competition"), or with colonial

ancestry for that matter. For this reason, she seeks "respectable whiteness" rather than "a destiny determined by the vagaries of their distant European ancestors". So enamoured is she of the potential benefits of passing for white that she imagines she can "redeem" those ancestors who "s[a]nk so low as to consort with hotnos and slaves, as to fuck with hotnos" (131). In some sense, in Helen's conception of race and history, whiteness is very different from white history, which is marred by so much miscegenation. When Carter violently asserts his sexual desire for the 'shameful' black body, this violence has nothing to do with the whiteness it produces for her. (I have already argued that this understanding of miscegenation as the 'fault' of black women is inadequate, and is itself informed by the violence of a 'white mythology', that is, by whiteness itself.)

Similarly, what Helen attempts in what she laughably considers the privacy of her own home (namely, to exclude history without excluding whiteness), is impossible because, in point of fact, her home is not her home, and it is certainly not private. Her house is not, despite her best efforts, "without clutter, without objects that clamour to tell of a past" (152). As we have seen, the things in her house do indeed "tell of a past", though it is not, as she has always feared, her coloured past to which they attest. This is not to say that these objects declare whiteness, or are imbued with its true nature – quite the opposite, in fact. Her household objects whisper of the *ephemeral, insubstantial* 'nature' of whiteness. You may hold whiteness in your hand (as you hold a tea cup, or a vase, or a fake flower, or any of the other inane bits and pieces which Helen deems unworthy of her home), but you can never grasp it. You may buy it (with sex, or money, or at the cost of your entire identity), but you can never own it. Whiteness *moves*. Like the household items that Helen is constantly buying and then replacing, it is restless. It will not lie quietly, or be subdued by anyone. What she fears is what she deems 'shameful' – in effect, coloured. She would like to replace all of that with whiteness. The ability to realise that whiteness will never settle into place is quite literally beyond her frame of reference, and she is incapable of understanding that this placeless-ness is only achieved by the very displacement of shame onto the coloured body and coloured identity that she has herself perpetuated.

What we are grappling with, then, what holds Helen hostage, are the limits of any hospitality which must always, necessarily, be offered from within the confines of a certain history. When Helen places whiteness (or, more accurately, the pursuit of thereof, which is, after all, what it amounts to for her – an endless pursuit) "in competition with history" (152), she is attempting to overcome precisely these limits. She does not welcome whiteness (or its pursuit) into her life in the hope that it will make her uncomfortable in her home or decidedly

inhospitable to the world around her. According to her, it is history which ensures that she is not privileged with the right to invite others into her home as she pleases. It follows therefore that if history is overcome, the villain defeated by whiteness, she will be able to welcome others into her homelife without any restrictions, or sense of shame. A ridiculous, garrulous history (one that is ribald, lust-filled and coloured or stained by miscegenation) has seen to it that, for her, such hospitality is not possible. Her door must be closed, her life limited – unless whiteness can replace history, and win out in the end.

It is for this reason that whiteness must, by all means, be placeless, without position or limit. Any position it might be given would, by definition, inscribe limits. They would ineluctably be the limits of history, or of that which is placed within history, more accurately. When Helen refuses these limits, by refusing to accommodate her conception of whiteness within any historical context, she (unwittingly) limits herself in the most terrible sense. She defines herself in and through an all-encompassing notion of whiteness that effectively becomes her home. And, in as much as it has no limits (or, at the least, none that Helen will accede to), her home too is rendered boundless.

How, then, can she welcome others into her home when it, in boundless fashion, subsumes any notion of the other within its (limitless) limits? In actuality, whiteness has ensured that she will perpetually enact a form of violence against all those who do not belong in her home. That violence is, ironically, that she will read all those who do not belong within the limits and confines of her home in terms of those very confines. She will eradicate any sense of their right to be other to her home, which amounts to nothing less than their alterity and singularity. For example, when she begins to suspect that all her neighbours are coloured and therefore refuses to welcome any of them over, Helen is doing little else than imposing her home upon those guests who should, in a more hospitable world, be free to choose not to be known in terms of (or in relation to) it. Helen's neighbours *must* be coloured, because she *is* white; the colouredness of her neighbours is always in direct relation and proportion to her whiteness. As such, the term that validates her home, which makes it by making it a 'white home', must entirely negate all those who do not belong there. Moreover, it must do so through the imposition of a term belonging to and of Helen's world. Her neighbours *must* be inscribed completely within what amounts to an equation or transaction. If they were to in any way exceed such definition, it would mean that they had exceeded the limits by which notions of whiteness could encapsulate them. Whiteness would have discovered its limits, met its match, and consequently lost in its competition with history.

Inhospitality thus reveals itself to be the most paradoxical of concepts to define (we could just as easily say limit): one excludes all who are other from one's home on the basis that they are already inside, within the confines of the limitless limits of one's home – as if all others always belonged there, were 'part of the furniture', so to speak. Again, one would be hard pressed not to feel one is calculating an equation or transaction without remainder of any kind. But, also, and 'here's the rub', perhaps it is only possible to calculate (with) the remainder (that which exceeds, and is therefore other) if one calculates the limits of this equation. In other words, the work of assigning whiteness a history is a necessary precondition for reckoning with a more hospitable world.

The Uncanny, the Spectre and Justice

In order to appropriately place this 'history of whiteness', I would like to show that Wicomb goes to great lengths to situate the shame that is so readily (too readily in fact) associated with being coloured. The crucial question, here, is the nature of John and Helen's crime. What is it that they have done that is so wrong, or shameful? What would the light expose should they ever drop their guard? Obviously, they must not reveal that they are play-whites who have broken the law, and passed from one race to another. Yet, they must also avoid 'behaving like coloureds', which is to say, in a way that would 'prove' that their true 'crime' is, in the first instance, 'being coloured'. If their 'crime' is being coloured and the action they take to obviate that 'crime', namely their passing for white, is also a shameful offence, then, already, one is beginning to sense how pervasive shame is. In effect, Helen is shamed by being coloured *and* by being white. Actually, this double bind in which she finds herself should lead one to wonder to what extent one can *be* either coloured or white. Indeed, Wicomb's work has always concerned itself with the idea that while race is a ubiquitous marker of subjectivity, there is nevertheless no ontological basis for it.

Helen's inability to *be* a racial subject (coloured or white) without a sense of shame goes some way to explaining why the comfortable home she dreamt of residing in is deprived of privacy, and she is put on show. Here, surely, I am not mistaken in sensing an allusion to another historical figure, since Saartjie Baartman was, literally, *put on show* by nineteenth-century anthropologists. And, as I have already noted, her story tragically encapsulates colonial ideas on concupiscence, miscegenation and shame. Helen would not ever admit to such a connection between herself and Baartman, but that is unsurprising given her suspicion of history. Yet, like her historical predecessor, who was taken from her home never to return

alive, she too has lost her home to shame. For Helen does not simply live *with* shame but *in it*. She experiences shame not as an emotion, but an ontological state. Shame, which she believed could be escaped through the purity of whiteness, it seems, is a blinding light that pierces the thin veneer of white respectability and allows her to be seen for the 'coloured she really is'.

This implies, however, that it is only Helen's play-white status that has discomforted her. As such, Marion, who is reared from birth to "take her whiteness, her privileges, for granted", should be exempt from shame, and from any attendant feelings of discomfort within her home (125). Instead, she too is un-homed (by shame). In her Cape Town apartment, which seems to spring from the pages of *Home and Garden* magazine, she has the following terrifying, recurring nightmare:

> In the dream, Marion wanders through [a] house. It is still; there is no one. But in the kitchen there is the smell of coffee beans just roasted and the palpable absence of a woman who threatens to materialise, first here and then there [. . .]. Marion keeps going to the stoep to get away from the shape of the woman, but cannot tell whether it is the back or the front of the house, and so must return indoors. In the telling, it would seem that is the key to the dream.
>
> (30)

The woman who "threatens to materialise" is almost certainly Tokkie, Marion's maternal grandmother, who she was made to believe was a mere servant. This vision of Tokkie evokes the un-homely (that is, *Unheimlich*) in the Freudian sense. As I have already mentioned, in his essay, conventionally translated as "The Uncanny", Freud elaborates on the psychoanalytic relevance of feelings of the uncanny or *Unheimlich*, and contends that the term, amongst its many definitions, refers to an event from early childhood "which is secretly familiar [*Heimlich-heimisch*] which has undergone repression and then returned from it" (245). Marion was only five when Tokkie died, yet the connection she senses between the old woman and Patricia Williams fills her with an "uncanny certainty" that there is a "mystery about her own birth" (Wicomb, *Playing* 62). The "mystery" is only revealed later in the novel, when Mrs Murray sees the family resemblance to Tokkie uncannily reflected in Marion's features, and expresses shock that Mrs Karelse (Tokkie's real name) is "spooking here by [her] today" (97). As Marion attempts to deal with her repressed memories of her grandmother, and more so to grapple with the ramifications that those memories have for her and her family, it seems that the ghosts of the past are everywhere, calling out to her. For

instance, her father, "his skin waxy like a corpse", becomes "an emblem of the phantasmagoric past" (155). And, in describing the process she undertakes to understand and contain the haunting influence of her mother, she chooses the phrase "lay[ing] the ghost" (80).

Nicholas Royle, in his comprehensive study of the uncanny, provides a reading of the concept which, while drawing on Freud's work, extends the term's applicability in ways which are relevant to my study. In his argument, the uncanny

> entails another thinking of beginning: the beginning is already haunted. The uncanny is ghostly. It is concerned with the strange, weird and mysterious, with the flickering sense (but not conviction) of something supernatural. The uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced. Suddenly one's sense of oneself [. . .] seems strangely questionable. The uncanny is a crisis of the proper: it entails a critical disturbance of what is proper (from the Latin *proprius*, 'own'), a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property.
>
> (1)

In a sense, Tokkie represents the beginning of Marion's story, but does so in a haunting fashion. She is only present (even in dreams, and later in memory) as a "palpable absence" (*Playing* 30). And what she renders most strange, as if she were herself a stranger (though she is not; she is family), is Marion's home. Hence, Marion's dreams of Tokkie are at the very core of why she feels so uncomfortable at home. For instance, she owns an extravagant four-poster bed which was once so comfortable that it seemed like "a house in itself", but due to the dreams, she often feels as if the fabric is suffocating her, and that the bed has "turned against her" (2). If she bought it hoping it would be a place of safety until the world changed "into a better, a more hospitable place" (2), she can only dimly perceive how uncannily apposite her phrasing is. Her bed has indeed formed a kind of house, and it has allowed her, until the dreams began at least, to sustain a decidedly inhospitable form of existence: she has no friends, has never had a guest, and is glad to be alone (or so she claims, at any rate). In order to find a "more hospitable place", she will need to abandon much that she associates with the inviolable space of home. She will need, in Royle's words, to endure a "critical disturbance of the proper [. . .], a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property" (1).

It therefore seems, to me, unavoidable, necessary, even just, that Wicomb should conjure ghosts to fill Marion's home. I do not, of course, refer here to 'actual ghosts' (assuming the word ghost means something actual, or real), but instead to all those uncanny,

haunting presences which assert themselves 'at home' – particularly in Marion's bed, a space she would like to construct as radically private, a home within her home. Wicomb conjures these ghosts or spectres to declare that there, on her bed, where she should be most safe and most private, Marion must come to terms with them. Although, ironically, I would argue that one cannot 'come to terms' or balance the equation where spectres are involved since, by definition, they represent what is never calculable or equate-able.

Moreover, these uncanny apparitions appear in a dream about a house without limits (which explains her inability to escape it), as if to declare that where she is most private, and by extension least hospitable, she will have to welcome in spectres (at the expense of her privacy). She cannot allow herself to be enveloped by a limitless home, for, as we have already noted of Helen, such limitlessness necessitates radical inhospitality. Unless she escapes the confines of her (dream) home, she will never be able to offer a gesture of hospitality (to and for the other) that does not immediately render the other just another inmate of her home (and its terms, its conditions, its inescapable logic). It is also not coincidental that Marion's dream should present itself with the restless, demanding quality of a spectre since, first and foremost, what the ghost represents is what cannot (not entirely, I should say) be encapsulated within the home.[17]

So what is the nature of this haunted house, which keeps Marion inside, and exists only in dreams? It is one from which she cannot escape, where she must always "return indoors". This dream house is described as the "long house of [her] dream that is stuffed inside the house where [she] lives" (30). There are too many homes here, "stuffed inside" each other. When Marion is in her house, on her bed that is a home in itself, she is trapped (by the muslin linen which seems to envelop her), but is also ensnared in a dream house that allows no access to the phenomenological real house. It is as if her dream is stuffed within her house, even as it exceeds it. For this reason, it appears to be an endless inside which renders her actual, real house an endless outside to which she can never return. If the interior of the dream is inescapable, then the exterior reality is unachievable.

We thus have two homes – one 'real', the other a dreamscape – that are mutually exclusive, even though the one is "stuffed inside" the other. These two homes both seem to confine Marion. It is as if they are prisons, which would imply that she is a prisoner (one guilty of a crime), and obviously, at some level, this suggestion that she is an inmate again draws the reader's attention to issues of shame, culpability, and criminal behaviour. The interiors of these homes seem to be everywhere, so that, for example, in the dream house, even when one attempts to go outside, one finds one *must* return indoors. Space inside is

cavernous, without circumference or point of origin. Hence, and at the risk of repeating myself, Marion is trapped in a dream that is "stuffed inside" a house that cannot be accessed, precisely because she is trapped in the dream.

I have shown that Helen too constructs this form of home, in which its limits seem limitless, and consequently delimit her ability to encounter the other as other (without violence). Early in Marion's life, Helen decides not to take her daughter to "strange neighbourhoods", as she fears that such experiences "would only make the child insecure" (132). Little wonder, then, that Marion's mother is outwardly indifferent to, and subconsciously fearful of, "strange neighbourhoods". Like her mother before her, she ensures that nothing she ever experiences within the confines of her (limitless) conception of home can ever be strange, and is thus unable to respect the strangeness of the stranger. Instead, she considers the other, the stranger, a member of 'her neighbourhood' because, as her home's limits appear limitless, the possibility of another neighbourhood (one inhabited by strangers) disappears.

Yet there is a crucial difference between the kind of home Helen constructs for her family and the one her daughter lives in. Marion's home (dream or real) is haunted by the presence of that which does not allow itself to be easily housed, accommodated, limited, or trapped. Unlike her mother, she must "lay the ghost" (80), who is uninvited and unlocatable. Quite literally, her attempts to account for the "phantasmagoric past" (155) will lead Marion away from the confines of her literal, phenomenal home. For instance, in the course of the novel, she will travel, first to Wuppertal, and then to the United Kingdom for an extended vacation. What her dream house suggests, though, in being so all-encompassing a space, is that one may undertake physical journeys and still be confined within the limits of one's metaphoric (or even metaphysical) home. I would argue that this is the reason the novel places ghosts in Marion's dream home.

In order to explain this contention, it is necessary, first, to ask a series of questions that pertain to the ghost at home. For instance, where does the ghost reside? What is its place? Furthermore, what does it mean to "lay the ghost"? Does one put the restless spirit to rest? Where, then, does the restless spirit rest? Where would a ghost consider itself *at home*? Can a ghost, in fact, ever be 'at home'?

Each of these questions could engender a lengthy debate, but I have chosen to group them together because all seem to tremor before the certainty of the answers one might provide. In drawing on some of Derrida's provocative ideas about spectres and hauntology (his playful neologism coined in *Specters of Marx*), I will focus on the irreducible uncertainty

that, quite literally, defines the spectre. It is as if every possible attempt to 'place the ghost' shudders in the face of the very spectre to which it is supposedly giving definition. Ghosts seem to exceed all forms of identification, delimitation, or positioning. They are neither here nor there, which does not mean that they are insignificant, for they come forth at the limits (of one's home).

In his attempt to speak to and of the 'specters of Marx', Derrida considers from where it is that spectres might come. He focuses on the idea that they come back (presumably from the grave, though he will complicate this idea too) and, in so doing, render the present "out of time" with itself. According to him, spectres destabilise the present by presenting it as haunted by the past (and, also, as we shall see, by the future). This understanding of the spectral allows Derrida to contemplate a present which is, in some sense, not present with itself, and thus opens up the space for a discussion about what one, in the so-called 'present', might owe to spectres (and hence to the so-called 'past' and/or 'future'). As with *différance,* I would argue that his ideas on what the spectre destabilises apply as much to space and spacing as it does to time. The emphasis in *Specters of Marx* on a 'time out of joint', what Derrida has elsewhere called the *contretemps,* is an invaluable intervention into the logocentric philosophic tradition of privileging the present moment. Nonetheless, I doubt he ever intended for the *contretemps* to be understood separately from the deconstruction it surely must imply of our notions of space-as-presence. When he gazes so intently at the place of internment, the grave (or, as in the case of *Of Hospitality,* at the grave whose place is unknown), his purpose is to obsess over what responsibility one might have, here and now, to that which comes back (as a *revenant*) from *beyond* the here and the now.

To reflect on this idea of what is due to the *revenant,* I would like to return to Marion's two forms of home (which amount to two forms of prison). The one is 'real', phenomenal, physical, material, and 'present'; the other is dreamed, 'unreal', metaphysical, spiritual, not 'present', not *in* the here and now, so to speak. Disturbingly, for Marion (but also for the reader), where these two homes should limit each other, they instead confine her by declaring themselves limitless. Yet what if we could place the ghost at (and as) the limits of both homes? What are the implications (for Marion and for us) of considering the ghost (which is neither here nor there) as the 'point' where these two forms of home find not only an irreducible connection, but also, in the same breath, an irreducible limit?

For Derrida the spectre is such a liminal entity because

> [t]he specter is a paradoxical incorporation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some 'thing' that remains difficult to name: neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. For it is flesh and phenomenality that give to the spirit its spectral apparition, but which disappear right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the *revenant* or the return of the specter. (*Specters of Marx* 5, original emphasis)

The ghosts which haunt Marion certainly accord with this description of the spectral. In her dream about Tokkie, there is a pronounced focus on the sensuous or carnal elements of the old woman's presence. Marion can, for instance, smell the "coffee beans just roasted" by a spirit who is described as "palpable" (30). But Tokkie's embodied-ness 'exists' only in anticipation, as she "threatens to materialise, first here and then there" (30). For this reason, there is an overt sense that she is always only *on the verge* of materialising, becoming (a body, or material being). Clearly, then, though this spirit is "palpable", she is, paradoxically, never actually there, and, to appropriate Derrida's words, "disappear[s] right away in the apparition, in the very coming of the *revenant* or the return of the specter" (*Specters of Marx* 5). Although she is "neither soul nor body", she is "both one and the other" (5).

When one attempts to place or house the ghost, "first here and then there" (Wicomb, *Playing* 30), one is faced with an entity that resists totalisation within such limits. The desire to distinguish between two distinct worlds, the carnal as opposed to the spiritual, the real (home) versus the dream (home), is frustrated when faced with the spectre that inhabits both and none simultaneously. It is only through this uncertain form of being (a hauntology rather than an ontology) that either world can gather to itself limits and, by association, definition. The spectral apparition that cannot be housed establishes borders precisely by transgressing them, and therefore by being uncontainable. This is to say, without the spectre or ghost that inhabits both the immaterial and material worlds (and, in a sense, belongs to both), even though it can never fully be housed by either (and accordingly never fully belong to either), neither world would have identifiable borders. There can be no meaning without borders, without forms of definition. By the same token, there is no meaning if those borders are not (and have not always been) traversable, crossable, in a sense limited. Ghosts 'come forth' or 'appear' precisely 'at' the aporia of limits that are meaningful only when they are crossed (which is why it is so crucial to remember that they are 'neither here nor there'). Ironically, then, it transpires that only the border that allows the ghost through is able to hold something in. Similarly, the notion of a limit as a horizon one may not exceed is revealed as false since, in effect, limits must be crossed. They must be internally divided between their stated purpose – which is to contain, maintain, even police by ensuring that nothing transgressive

occurs – and the haunting yet always palpable possibility that this purpose might be rendered null and void. Borders that are not in this way bordered or limited (in function and conception) are not really borders – they would allow nothing out and confine everything within. In truth, there would be no 'in' and there would be no 'out'. We would be lost to ourselves, but we would also be lost *in ourselves*. There would be no escape from this radical solipsism, since there would be no border through which we could pass, and hence we would not even know there was anything beyond ourselves.

A crucial corollary of this thinking on ghosts is that there can be no meaning without such entities (since they enact the border between the real and the imagined, the phenomenal and the conceptual, by crossing it). Yet even as spectres engender the possibility of limits, borders, meaning itself, they exceed meaning because they belong to (and at) the limits which they, by definition, exceed or cross. This is why Derrida writes that "this being-there of an absent or departed one [a spectre in other words] no longer belongs to knowledge. At least no longer to that which one thinks one knows by the name of knowledge" (*Specters of Marx* 5). It is also why he will contend that there "was no inside, there was nothing inside before [the specter]" (3). We might as well say that there is and can be no home without ghosts or spectres. The un-homely, the uncanny, haunted house *is the home* – by definition.

Spectres or *revenants* 'come back' from the past, so at least is the conventional understanding of things. The spectre, however, renders time "out of joint", which means that conventional notions of past, present, and future are similarly "dis-jointed, disadjusted" (25). The conventional, chronological, and certainly metaphysical notion that the spectre belongs to the past is therefore problematic, since it maintains the notion of linear time (in which the past precedes the present which in turn precedes the future). Accordingly, while the very idea of the *revenant* should deconstruct one's understanding of time, in relegating such apparitions to the past, one invests it with presence, "substance, existence, essence, *permanence*" – all those characteristics that are undone when one considers the placeless-ness of the spectre (39). If time (past, present and future) is indeed "out of joint", one must concede that what one thinks belongs to the past may well also belong to the future as a consequence. For instance, the spectre is often anticipated, that is, one expects its imminent return, and this implies a futural dimension. Properly speaking, then, there "are several times of the specter. It is a proper characteristic of the specter, if there is any, that no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or to a living future, for the *revenant* may already mark the promised return of the specter of living being" (123).

This thinking of the *revenant* as belonging to the future renders the present "dis-jointed, disadjusted" by that which has not yet come to pass (25). One is thus 'located' within a disjuncture that orients the present (the so-called 'here and now') toward the future. It is important to recognise that this future to which Derrida is referring no longer signifies a future-present, that *will have presence*, but rather a singularly unquantifiable time, a 'beyond' in the most profound sense. For this reason, the disjuncture of the spectre becomes the "very possibility of the other" (26), because s/he too belongs to all that cannot be encapsulated by what is here and what is now. The other (who is of the future) is therefore not limited and defined within the borders of a "calculable equality" and cannot be reduced to (or by) "the symmetrising and synchronic accountability or imputability of subjects and objects" (26). Rather, the disjuncture opens up the possibility of an experience which must not impose all that is here and now on the other (because this imposition always implies symmetrising, synchronising, and the calculating of debts within a reciprocal transaction). The other, Derrida is saying, after Levinas, exists in a non-reciprocal relation to the self. What the future-as-other demands is this non-reciprocity, in which the self gives beyond restitution, beyond the due, beyond any measure. Such a 'gift' would amount to nothing less than radical, limitless hospitality, which is synonymous in Derrida's later writing with an undeconstructible form of justice.

It is enough for the law that it simply ensures 'equitable justice', which is "limited to sanctioning, to restituting, and to *doing right*" (26). By contrast, justice, as Derrida, and also Levinas, conceives of it invokes a relation "to what must (without debt and without duty) be rendered to the singularity of the other, to his or her absolute *pre*cedence or to his or her absolute *pre*viousness", although he immediately qualifies this statement, stating that the prefix "*pre-*" is heterogeneous and "means what comes before me, before any present, thus before any past present, but also what, for that very reason, comes from the future or as the future: as the very coming of the event" (33). While the law must concern itself with calculating the correct punishment for each crime (and as such, is informed by an economy of vengeance), Derridean justice moves beyond simply redressing a wrong, avenging the wrong-doer, or achieving harmony. Consequently, it is the gift given "*beyond* the due, the debt, the crime, or the fault" (29). It does not "come simply to repair injustice" which would imprison it within the limited ambit of the law (29). Justice, true justice that is, is a gift given to the other "without restitution, without calculation, without accountability" (30).

Spectres come forth from the future demanding more than just restitution for past wrongs done to them, or the settling of scores. As they enter the home, and make or define it

in the process, they call from beyond it (and all its attendant limits). They invoke an otherness, or radical alterity, that demands that one treat them with a respect that is not their *due* (in other words, with a respect they have not earned, and which is therefore not reciprocal or given in accordance with an accountable kind of morality). The otherness of the spectre demands an unconditional hospitality since no form of definition (which amounts to a conditioning of one's hospitality, a way of ascribing limits to the guest or stranger) can house it. For Derrida and for Wicomb too, I would argue, this form of justice beyond restitution or limit is the only one worthy of the name.

Spectres make such justice or unconditional hospitality *possible* even as they render it *impossible*. When and where they come (demanding the unlimited, hyperbolic respect due to the other who need not earn it), they *also* limit and therefore define the home (though they create such limits only by crossing them). And, let us recall, the limit of one's home is a limit of hospitality. I can, by definition, only welcome another from the privacy of my home. Yet again, we are faced with the aporia of hospitality, in which our attempts to receive the guest require "*limits*, powers, rights and duties", that necessarily render our welcome *unwelcoming*, conditional, even violent (Derrida, *Of Hospitality* 77, my emphasis).

When Marion admits to Geoff that she must "lay the ghost", she is hoping to place it elsewhere (so that her home becomes inviolable and private). Her desire to be rid of her haunted past is, in other words, an inhospitable need not to have to welcome in the uncanny, strange spectre each night. As I have argued, however, there is no home without the spectre. It makes the home, yet, paradoxically, makes it un-homely too. For this reason, her inhospitality, which amounts to a very limited hospitality, is predicated on that which exceeds the house: that is, the spectre, which exceeds all limited forms of hospitality. I asked earlier whether a ghost could ever be 'at home'. The answer reveals itself as a reversal of the question: there is no 'at home' without the ghost. Moreover, there is no hospitality, no possibility of unconditional, limitless hospitality, without the ghost who haunts the limits of my home.

It is therefore not coincidental that the future should 'appear' in spectral form. And wherever it 'appears', its impossibility must be recognised since it is, there and then, subject to the violence of "translatability, given homogeneity, systematic coherence in their *absolute forms*" (Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* 42). For Derrida, "this is surely (certainly, *a priori* and not probably) what renders the injunction, the inheritance, and the future – in a word the other – *impossible*" (42, original emphasis). Yet, as he has often intimated, deconstruction (both the theory and the unmaking of the home) entails "an *affirmation* [. . .] *if there is any*, to the

experience of the impossible, which can only be a radical experience of the *perhaps*" (42, original emphasis). So *perhaps* there is a ghost, at home, at the limits of one's home, though it is impossible to say. As one says it, one translates the impossible into language; one gives to the impossible an "*absolute form*". *Perhaps*, *however*, the spectre resides beyond such violent *forms* of inscription. And *perhaps* one must affirm this limit of inscription, that is, affirm that it is impossible for forms (absolute though they may be) to absolutely subsume the other, and contain the spectre. Perhaps such an affirmation could engender a more hospitable world. Perhaps.

The Place for Race and the Home for Shame

Playing in the Light asks Marion to endure the radical uncertainty engendered by this 'perhaps'. It is, in truth, an impossible task. Yet the novel suggests that it is easier to endure once one is oneself no longer so fully inscribed. That is, endurance is perhaps a more hospitable option once one is not so wholly limited by racial inscription and definition. When Marion dreams of an uncanny and therefore un-homely home from which she cannot escape, her dream clearly relates to the race she both *is* and *is not*: the "unhomely" coloured race. Homi K. Bhabha has done much to complicate our received views of home. He has also written briefly on the South African coloured experience. Unfortunately, as I have already intimated, and will elaborate on in this section, when he combines these two trains of thought, he mistakenly aligns himself with the racial purists of whom he is critical.

Commenting on the Freudian 'uncanny' in the postcolonial context, Bhabha describes the "unhomely" as a "bridge where 'presencing' begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-ultural initiations" (9). He therefore observes that "[t]o be unhomed is not to be homeless" (9). I am much indebted to Bhabha for drawing a distinction between being homeless and being "unhomed". The latter is, for Bhabha, an "in-between space" that "provide[s] the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation" (2). Accordingly, while being homeless is a lamentable state, the latter, for Bhabha, and me too, is a state *of possibility*. It is a condition which might, perhaps, allow for greater hospitality. As such, the "estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world" is a defining concern of my entire project.[18]

One would think, given the nature of his work, that when Bhabha discusses colouredness his concern would be similar, and would thus focus on the 'estrangement' of coloureds as a condition of their being named and 'homed'. Instead, almost imperceptibly, he intimates that they are themselves strange and that their "unhomeliness" is a condition not of the world's construction, but of an innate nature supposedly particular to their racial identity.[19] Although he rightly describes the 'unhomed-ness' of coloured people as a "historical displacement" (9), the question of whether he avoids perpetuating this exact displacement must be posed. He cites Nadine Gordimer's *My Son's Story*, in which Will describes being coloured as being "halfway between [. . .] being not defined", and then confesses his belief that "it was this lack of definition that was never to be questioned but observed like a taboo" (qtd. in Bhabha 13). Bhabha, following Gordimer, conceives of a lack of definition which cannot be questioned but must rather be "observed like a taboo" (13). It seems to me he is playing, possibly inadvertently, on at least two connotations of the word "taboo" – a word that can suggest a thing either sacred or shameful. Is the "unhomely" coloured the hybrid, positive and true nature of cultural exchange, which Bhabha would surely view as sacred to his postcolonial project, or its silent, shameful effect? The latter implies that he has resituated but not deconstructed the violence of colonial discourse within the framework of his theory.

It is noteworthy that Wicomb has strongly criticised Bhabha's reading of coloured identity on this basis in her own academic work (see "Shame"). I would now like to argue that, in *Playing in the Light*, she implicitly develops this polemic by linking it to the notion of travel and to the trope of home (both of which are central to Bhabha's thought).

Marion often returns (travels, as it were) to her childhood home to visit her ailing father. She finds the house in its current state to be a shameful mess: for instance, her father – once so meticulous in his care of the garden – now only has one dying pot plant. She reads this lack of care on her father's part as a sign of age-related dementia, "the slide into someone she doesn't know" (Wicomb *Playing* 10). But her feelings of unease are not induced simply because the home to which she returns is not the one she remembers. She is also un-homed by memories of how displaced and unwelcome she felt in that house *even as a child*. She recalls the following, for instance:

> As a child she hated their street, the terraced houses so close to the pavement, where families distinguished themselves from their neighbours by painting their doors in violently clashing colours. As if, returning from work in the evenings, tired and absentminded, they feared walking into the wrong house [. . .]. [She] would have

> preferred to live above Main Road [. . .]. Those verandahed stoeps, edged with broekielace, were wrapped around at least two sides of the house, so that people could spend all day outside in the ambiguous space between private house and public street [. . .]. At [her] house, with the mean, verandahless strip of stoep that slipped without as much as a path into the street, they kept indoors, even in summer.
>
> (8–9)

As a child Marion is put off by the garish colours her neighbourhood uses to distinguish one home from another. This seemingly heavy-handed metaphor obviously relates to her own family who have used a white identity to distinguish themselves from the coloured community. Consequently, she has a childish desire for a series of houses with uniformly coloured doors, which leads her to imagine her father foolishly stumbling into the wrong house, and "settling himself comfortably at [the neighbour's] dinner table and plung[ing] into jokes and anecdotes" (9). The suggestion, following the metaphor through to its logical conclusion, is that a utopian lack of differentiation by (or through) colour (the obvious signifier for race) would lead to a greater, more comfortable sense of community and communal hospitality.

However, this dream of a raceless community only further illustrates that Marion's homelife is racially determined and isolated. Any notion that Wicomb is arguing for a simple de-racialisation of society is undercut by the actual vehicle of the metaphor employed: it is *the doors* of the houses that Marion dreams should be monochrome. Yet a door (like the balcony of her apartment) is a liminal space, both inside and out. She may imagine a uniform series of doors that welcome all in without limit (the very definition of unconditional hospitality) but the image is conditioned by the doors themselves, which enact and maintain a precarious link between a safe, utopian space within the house and the dangerous world beyond it.

Perhaps, then, one should instead consider Marion's other fantasy, which is to live in Annie's neighbourhood where most houses have large verandahs. They are, in her estimation, "an ambiguous space between private house and public street", allowing one to spend all day outside (9). This is another utopian vision, and one that is also over-determined by race. It suggests an acceptance of liminality, hybridity, and comfort with the world outside. But both images of home declare a space that is safe (inside the house, or outside where one can play on the verandah all day) and a space which is not. In other words, both domestic fantasies require that one conceive of the liminal space (door, balcony, verandah, and so forth) as a border which differentiates home (a safe space in which one belongs) from an unwelcoming, threatening world on the other side. This construction is fair enough, in so far as all borders

are indeed liminal. In associating doors so closely with safety and belonging, though, these fantasies close off the function of the door and disregard the liminality they sought to valorise. By their very nature, doors threaten the safety of home and the homestead. While they define the limit between the home and the outside, they also already ensure that the former can always be invaded by the latter. They may give the illusion that what is in the house is safe and belongs there, but they also form a point of access for all who are 'dangerous', 'threatening' and unwelcome. All doors are open to this possibility, even if they are 'actually', 'really' (in 'real life', in the conventional sense of the phrase) closed. It is as if what lies beyond the home were ghostly, and could pass through any closed door, without invitation or right of admission.

Neither of Marion's fantasy neighbourhoods is open to this notion of the door, however. A door that cannot keep out others is one that is 'off its hinges', "out of joint" (again). It is a pathetic, *shameful* excuse for a door. The de-racialised or non-racial vision of society (suggested by a community with monochrome doors) and the hybrid community (symbolised by Annie's verandah) are both, necessarily, dreams, or idealised fictions. They both conceive of race (either as a whitewashed purity where all who belong to the community are the same, or as a celebration of hybridity) as being able to enact a safe space, along with a concomitant sense of belonging, which is inviolable. The vision of purity is therefore a variant of the impure, hybrid vision implied by Annie's neighbourhood. In both, race is a space to which one can *come home*. It is, in this sense, an endless narrative promise of belonging, of home, that displaces any sense of one's actual place of residence (as it does for Marion who has never been comfortable 'at home'). One is always 'coming home' to the dream of what it should be (safe, inviolable, private, and so on), and in the process one is always trapped outside of reality (staring at the door, hoping it will open).

It is understandable that Marion should turn so often to fantasies of other homes. Her mother scarcely made her homelife welcoming or fun.[20] She thinks of her childhood as a "barren world [where] secrets engender[ed] secrets with abandon, wantonly productive, so that now, looking back, the past is contained in endless dreary rows of parcelled days, wrapped in tissue paper, each with its drop of poison at the core" (61). Wicomb's deft use of irony is apparent when she mentions Helen's secrets being "wantonly reproductive". Marion's mother has developed a pathological need for secrecy so as to inhabit whiteness rather than be what she has been socialised to think of as a wanton, sexually lascivious coloured woman. More crucial to my argument at this stage, however, is the way in which John tries to protect his child in this "barren world". Sensing the harm that his wife's secrets

may cause his young daughter, he "draw[s] her [. . .] into the nonsense of myth" (58). But myths are not "nonsense" for John, or for Helen for that matter (though she would never concede that whiteness is a myth). Neither of them can live without fiction because they have invested too much in the myth of whiteness (and race more generally) to suddenly conceive of any limits to myth and fantasy.

Significantly, Marion's father refers to his daughter as a creature of mythology – his "meermin, his little mermaid" (22). Mermaids are, of course, hybrid, both human and fish. Once again, the metaphor might well seem rather obvious in its relation to the mixed race Campbell family, although I would argue that it takes on other, more complex meanings in the course of the novel. John mesmerises his daughter with tales of mermaids who employed "their siren-songs" to lure "sailors to their islands, from which the lucky men never returned" (46). He goes on to tell her that "Robben Island [. . .] was such an island" (46). While the famous prison island is mentioned often in the novel, it does more than just add a local, Cape Town flavour. The first reference to the island, which imprisoned Nelson Mandela and numerous other political dissidents during apartheid, appears early in the novel and is very suggestive: "[s]ecurity – you have to pay for it these days, especially if you are a woman on your own [like Marion]. No point in having a glorious outlook on the sea, with the classic view of Table Mountain on the left and Robben Island on the right, if you are not secure" (2). Marion's costly security allows her to think the following: "[h]ere [where she stays], your property is inviolable" (2). Clearly, a view of Robben Island is a cultural marker of success and affluence which is, and must be, accompanied by security, and a sense that one's "property is inviolable" (2).[21] It is as if this infamous former prison – a site that might for others signify a kind of national wound, or a place of suffering – is associated in Marion's mind with the security it offered, presumably either to its inmates or to the rest of the country by keeping seditious men behind bars.

The notion of the island as a place which protected innocent South Africans from danger would be entirely in keeping with Marion's political outlook which is, unsurprisingly, conservative, particularly at the beginning of the novel. It is surely this conception of Robben Island that John is invoking when he tells his impressionable daughter that "lucky sailors" were allowed to stay on mythic islands, inhabited by beautiful mermaids, and never go home (46). Of course, he has reimagined the story to suit his purposes. More commonly, tales of mermaids describe *homesick* sailors who are duped into leaving their ships (arguably liminal vessels themselves, designed to move between destinations) to their doom. The idea (and functioning) of race (John's other favourite myth) is like these imaginary islands, I would

suggest: whether one values the 'pure' or the 'impure', hybrid form, race always beckons one with the promise of a mythic home. It is as if the song is so hypnotic that, like the sailors, one leaves the ship, envisioning that it is the rocks and the waves that are secure.

Marion and John are invested in dreaming of an island that is close by, almost on their doorstep, onto which they can project their desire for safety. That they choose a *prison island* is sadly apposite because this 'investment' that they have made is indeed a form of incarceration. Their commitment to spaces that remain inviolable will trap them within the limitless (dare one say mythical?) breadth of a vision. They will ensnare themselves within notions of home and security, in the belief that, as a result, comfort, affluence, and safety are theirs (to own). As she sits on her balcony and stares out at Robben Island, Marion looks on the idea of security taken to its logical, terrible limit. Her hope is to take all that is other, and therefore dangerous, and lock it up. In her mind, she believes that then, and only then, will she be truly safe. Then, and only then, will she be 'at home'. However, what she fails to understand is that being 'at home' without the possibility of escape can come to feel very much like a form of imprisonment. The walls begin to close in, the linen starts to suffocate you (Wicomb, *Playing* 2). You try to go outside and find you "must return indoors" (30).

So security does, as Marion is only too happy to admit, 'come at a price', which is the freedom to experience the impossible otherness of the other. This is to say, she forgoes the right to offer a form of hospitality that exceeds all forms of investment or economic exchange. Particularly early in the novel, she does not favour this asymmetrical form of exchange in which one exceeds the fair and even trade of reciprocity. She is far more willing to deal in the absolutes of a transaction without remainder, as "she is *uncomfortable* about accepting a favour" and feels it is "far better if [. . .] the venture [is] *reciprocal*" (79, my emphasis). Marion cannot stand to be uncomfortable and would much rather exclude from her life any encounter which necessitates this. At another early stage on her journey toward understanding her family's history, and comprehending some of the ways in which it has determined her responses to the world around her, the narrator notes that she feels she is unable to "put herself in a vulnerable position" (56). It is as if vulnerability were the opposite of comfort for her. Actually, I would say that the desire for comfort and safety has made her not simply invulnerable, but also inhospitable. If she is to 'escape' the prison of her own home, she will need to abandon safety to some extent and accept the vulnerability concomitant with a loss of position (by this I mean her home, but perhaps also the social status with which she so closely associates protection). Indeed, Marion will need to bear the unbearable deprivation of positionality itself, since any position she might adopt would

amount to a place from which to defend herself against the other. There is surely nothing that renders one more singularly vulnerable, exposed, and defenceless than the realisation that the other has entered one's private space and that, perhaps, there is no such thing as safety, or "inviolable property".

Clearly, then, it is not coincidental that John and Marion should choose to project their notions of safety and 'at-homed-ness' onto Robben Island. It represents the very worst aspects of a history of race and racialism, as well as race's relation to violence, inhospitality, criminal (and by association 'shameful') behaviour. What every ideal vision or dream of home reveals (be it John, Marion, or Helen's), is that a particular history of race informs what one thinks of as ideal (in particular, the notion that the model home is inviolable).

When one feels safe and secure (which Marion rarely does, though she associates these characteristics with her ideal of home, to the detriment of her homelife) one is, in fact, trapped, and imprisoned. The 'escape' from such imprisonment necessitates being "uncomfortable" and "vulnerable". What Marion's example reveals is that vulnerability requires that you *welcome* another into the space you call your own, though it is then by definition no longer yours, and that you do so without even the hope that s/he will afford you a proportional respect. This disproportional, non-reciprocal encounter is, we should recall, the very form of 'exchange' which causes Marion so much discomfort.

I would argue that we must retain this word 'welcome', despite the fact that it implies anticipation (a sense that one knows who or what will arrive and when) and agency, which is to say, the illusion that because I extend the welcome, *I am in control*, I am still an 'I' after all. It seems to me that if the term infinite hospitality is to be more than a mere hypothetical, neo-platonic ideal, one must negotiate its possibility from within the problematic language of conventional hospitality. One is therefore obliged to welcome that which if it were to arrive, would do so unbeknownst to one. Only such a welcome, in which one's sense of anticipation is immediately and eternally frustrated, could be considered infinite, selfless, welcoming.

Wicomb too is often driven to use phrases and images that carry with them connotations and associations she distrusts. Her use of the motif of light, for example, focuses on the violence that is sometimes done when one sheds light on a matter. Nevertheless, Marion could not show any of the (admittedly limited) vulnerability to others which she does as the novel progresses, were it not for her discovery of her parents' secret. For this writer, then, there are possibilities which one denies if one chooses simply to abandon the old world and all its forms of expression. Her work suggests that in some instances it might be better, though perhaps even more challenging, to negotiate new ways of relating to one another

using the language we have inherited, which is subject to history and imbued with its violence.

This is also why I think Wicomb chooses Marion as her protagonist. Rather than Brenda, who is less politically dogmatic, more open and vibrant, she has the reader follow the halting journey of a woman who is conservative, isolated and blind to others. This voyage, which is incomplete even when the novel ends, gives the reader a far more accurate picture of what it takes to reject privilege and race. One sees how difficult it is to overcome prejudice and the traumas of the past. The immense costs and terrible burdens are clear in every step that Marion takes. If indeed the post-apartheid era is one of promise, her tale reminds one why no ethical reconfiguration of the country can be achieved without great sacrifice. Will privileged South Africans change their notions of safety and privacy? If they do not do so, will they imprison themselves behind high walls, numbed by a false sense of comfort?

This is also why it is crucial that Wicomb deconstruct the insidious connection between race and home. It is, for example, exactly this association between the two concepts that Bhabha draws on when he writes of the "unhomely coloured". While he is critical of an idealised homing of race, he cannot help but assert its existence, for only such an ideal, 'pure' race can validate his ideas on racial hybridity. According to Wicomb, the relegation of coloured people by Bhabha to an "unhomely" state "relies on an essentialist view [of racial identity] which posits a 'pure' reality that is experienced *in the space inhabited by the racially pure*" (Wicomb, "Shame" 101–102, my emphasis). Miscegenation, which in *Playing in the Light* produces whiteness for the Campbells, has always produced whiteness. It is only with the 'creation' of the 'impure', mixed race that a 'pure' race becomes tenable. In the words of Marais (discussing *David's Story*), this discourse on race "legitimizes the hermeneutic procedure through which the somatic traces of what is assumed to be tainted [coloured, that is] blood constantly invoke the moment of original sin which brought with it a lapse from racial purity" ("Bastards and Bodies" 26). How, though, can one conceive of such 'purity' without, at the very least, entertaining the possibility of its being "tainted", mixed? As with all logocentric thought exposed to Derridean deconstruction, race's moment of 'original sin', and the mythic notion of a pure version of itself that is thus created, is only ever achievable because of the internal threat of that which will come after, is supplementary, subsequent to, 'original sin'.

Derrida refers to the supplement as that which "supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself *in-the-place-of*, it fills as if one fills a void". Hence, he observes, "somewhere, something can be filled up *of itself*, can accomplish itself, only by

allowing itself to be filled up through sign and proxy" (*Of Grammatology* 145, original emphasis). At the moment of miscegenation, or 'original sin' if you will, purity becomes possible because at one and the same instant it is *re-placed* by the 'tainted', 'impure', mixed race. The 'tainted blood' replaces the 'pure blood'; the mixed race replaces the 'pure' one(s). Before this replacement there was a void, "the mark of an emptiness" (145). The replacement of race by race, the void "filled up *of itself*", allows what was non-existent and empty (namely, the notion of a 'pure' race) to come into existence within the void that is already filled by its own supplement. To hide such a supplementation would require a veil, a covering which averts our eyes – presumably from that which it would be *shameful* to see. Ironically, the veil that hides this shame is, in this case, shame itself.

Helen, John, and Marion, who experience almost overwhelming guilt and shame as a consequence of becoming white, literally embody this shame – the shame of whiteness. The sexual encounter between the colonist and the 'other' (s/he who is rendered strange not because s/he exceeds cultural inscription, but rather by being inscribed within terms of difference devised *by* culture) was marked by shame precisely because the colonist was ashamed. His displacement of that shame onto his progeny allowed him a mythical purity, a whiteness that could look with disgust on what it had produced without ever admitting that whiteness was itself a child of miscegenation. In my opinion, this history which has been concealed by shame is crucial, for Wicomb, because when it is denied, whiteness is able to appear pure, or limitless. This limitlessness allows for not only the inestimable violence which Helen is subjected to at the hands of Carter, but also the aggression or inhospitality to which she subjects others.

Moreover, in recognising the historical context which produced whiteness (and its shame), we are dealing with a series of displacements that, in effect, define or limit race. Its narrative or discursive nature becomes obscured by a biological referent determined by a pervasive biologisation of blood, in which the mixing of 'pure' white blood with that of other races produces coloured people as "conduits of tainted blood" which, in turn, identifies the 'pure' through the identification of the mixed or "tainted" blood of coloureds (Marais, "Bastards and Bodies" 25). Racism and racialism more broadly are thus also created by a displacement of biology from its proper place as discourse to a pure science. As such, Stuart Hall argues that rather than assume biology ensures the validity of racial discourse, one must realise that race "function[s] not through the truth of the 'biological referent' but as a discursive logic. That is to say, as a logic in which, of course, the biological trace still functions even when it's silent, but now, not as the truth, but as the guarantor of the truth"

(290). Little wonder then that race is so all-encompassing a narrative of the modern world: scarcely have we peeled away one layer of its fiction than we are faced with another, all functioning instantaneously to hide the fact that race too is a fiction.

At no point in *Playing in the Light* is this series of displacements invoked more accurately than when Marion goes to the public library to trace the meaning of a section of biblical verse printed on a Sunday-school card kept, inexplicably, by her mother since youth. While she discovers that the verse refers to a eunuch converted by Philip,[22] she suspects that her mother never knew its meaning and "learned the texts by heart without questioning". This, she thinks, must ultimately be "the point of Sunday-school cards: that memorising texts would displace impious thoughts and so cleanse the soul" (Wicomb, *Playing* 119). The text – if it is never questioned ("but observed like a taboo" as Gordimer and Bhabha would say) – will *displace* impious, in a word shameful, thoughts. Moreover, the text in question is a Christian one, and I have already elaborated on the connection Wicomb draws between whiteness and a certain form of Christianity. Consequently, what Helen must 'learn' is whiteness (its value and purity) without ever questioning, and thereby limiting, this discourse, so that she can displace shame.

Little wonder then that Marion next chooses to research apartheid classifications of race. She attempts to look up play-white, finds nothing, so she and the librarian begin to suspect that play-white "must be a condition of whiteness, but whiteness itself is not a category for investigation" (120). The librarian guesses that they "will have to look up coloureds" which they both realise "doesn't make sense", but they are at a loss as to what else they can do (120). This research also leads nowhere, and all they are finally able to do is read the apartheid regime's various amendments to the category of "white". These confusing and patently contradictory definitions are both laughable and unhelpful and the librarian concludes that it must "have been a hell of a confusing time [. . .] when whiteness was not yet properly defined [. . . and] might be undermined if people go about speaking of their black blood" (121).

I have tried to show that it is in the nature of whiteness to be undefined (and therefore to have no nature, no innate, biological, phenomenal reality). The lack of definition allows for its limitless scope, power, and 'purity'. That which has unlimited borders has ones that are not and cannot be crossed or traversed. Whiteness is indeed "undermined if people go about speaking of their black blood", since this suggests that it is internally invaded by that which it claims it is not (a certain kind of crossing of its borders having therefore already happened). It is no great surprise that "according to the library's classification system, [whiteness] is not

a category for investigation" (120). The official systems of recording, defining, classifying – systems that will always, ineluctably, be associated with an Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment model of history – are complicit with whiteness. For this reason, they are invested in ensuring that whiteness remains beyond reproach, beyond questioning, beyond limits and definitions.[23] Shame plays a singular role in all of this: all that might give to whiteness its limits and its proper historical context is rendered improper, indecent. All those other races which may undermine it do not belong on, and especially not in, the private property of that which is *proper*. The property proper to whiteness cannot ever endure such shame.

Marion's visit to the library is worth considering for another (not unrelated) reason: she is dealing with language, looking for the meaning of certain words (play-white, white, coloured, and so on). If race presents itself to us with the allure and comfort of home, it would not be far-fetched for me to suggest that this search for meaning in language is a search for a "more lasting home" (298).[24] When she looks up the textbook definitions of white or coloured, for example, is she not looking for a *proper* definition? Does this not suggest that she wants to know the *proper limits* of the *property proper to race*? That these words seem to have no clear meaning implies both their pervasiveness as well as their lack of inherent biological, scientific basis. Indeed, the unparalleled influence of race is a consequence of its lack of scientific grounding. As such, race must suggest biology but it must not be *limited* by it in order to function so comprehensively as a determinant of individual lives – Helen's for example. When Stuart Hall writes that race functions as a "discursive logic" in which the biological stands not for the truth but as a "guarantor of the truth", he is attempting nothing less than to reconceptualise it as a discourse which only intimates biological origin so as *to appear* grounded in fact (290). The biological functions not as a referent of the order of the real, but as a *sign* of the real, this is to say, what is considered to be real, what has come to displace the real: in a word, race. Furthermore, race functions as an internal distance between the phenomenal, real, biological body (which, I hasten to add, is in any case inaccessible in its 'real' form given this distance) and that which the body has come to represent. With race what you 'see' is not there, does not exist, and what might be seen were it not so insidious is displaced, and thus rendered invisible.

The Proper English Language: A Home One Cannot Enter

The issue of biological definition in language is absolutely crucial in all we have been attempting to consider. Certainly, it is never far from the minds of the Campbells. For instance, Helen wants to speak English (properly, of course) once she has secured a white identity because, she feels, "to advance [. . .] you must be able to pass as English" (130). It is as if Englishness were the ultimate point of arrival since, clearly, the process of 'passing' is not complete until one can "pass as English". Conceived of in this way, Englishness would need to be an even purer form of whiteness, though, as we have seen, the latter is purity itself.[25] Helen considers her family's English (or more accurately Scottish) ancestry proof that inhabiting the English language amounts to them "taking their rightful place in the world" (130). Indeed, one of her more lasting reasons for resenting John is that he is unwilling or unable to put in what she feels is the necessary effort in learning the English language. He remains a poor 'Boer' (an Afrikaner) and hence falls "short of her vision" (126). This "vision" of "their rightful place in the world" is an inexhaustible projection both of Englishness and home. Their "rightful place", a place or property that is theirs by right, can only be occupied by inhabiting the English language.

I cannot help but be reminded of Derrida's contention in *Of Hospitality*, that exiles "often continue to recognise the language, what is called the mother-tongue, as their ultimate homeland" (89). Furthermore, he argues that the mother-tongue, "the language you carry with you, the one that also carries us from birth to death", signifies or names "the proper of property, at least the *fantasy* of property that [. . .] would give place to the most inalienable place" (89). In so many ways, Helen's desire for the English language corresponds with this description. But in one crucial respect it does not: it is not her mother-tongue, her 'home language' if you will. She wants nothing more than to escape her mother-tongue, which Derrida describes as a "second skin you wear yourself, a mobile home [. . . but] also an immobile home since it moves about with us" (89). Helen believes her "most inalienable place", her homeland, to be a place of exile, perhaps of sanctuary – it is the place which belongs to the English language. For this reason, she does not want to feel at home in her mother-tongue; she wishes it could be left behind. It is as if she would like to testify in her 'home language' (of Afrikaans) – for she must testify in that language as it is her "mother-tongue" and it carries her "from birth to death" – that she no longer speaks it and, moreover, that it no longer speaks for her. She would like to tell the outside world (in her mother-

tongue) that her 'home language' is no longer able to define her, limit her, or accommodate her.

In another text in which he elucidates his ideas on language and ethics, Derrida asserts that the "first act of violence" – in other words, the first condition or limit of hospitality – by the host against the stranger or foreigner is that s/he imposes his/her language on the guest (*Aporias* 15). How, though, can this account for someone, like Helen, who *welcomes such imposition* and would impose it on herself? She wants the reciprocity of a translation without remainder (into "absolute forms", as Derrida writes in *Spectres of Marx* [42]). She has a "vision" of being translated so thoroughly into English that she will be transformed from a guest or foreigner into the master of the house. It is as if this is what it means to 'master a language'.

Is such a transformation possible? How can one disavow one's language using its words? And also, how can one become master of a home (language) that always, necessarily, situates one as a guest and foreigner? There is no language that can house these aporias. This is precisely because Helen has no language, by which I mean she has no mother-tongue, or 'home language'. In its place, in the place where her language should be, she endures the aporia of a 'home language' not her own. For Derrida, aporia is not simply a special form of antimony or contradiction, in which the terms do not adequately equate, which is to say, do not translate in an "absolute form" (*Spectres of Marx* 42). Rather, aporia is experienced as "endurance or as passion, as interminable resistance or remainder" (*Aporias* 19). This term which he uses so often (in no small part because of its long history in Western thought), therefore signals the experience of an "irreconcilable alternation" (Culler 96), in which something singularly unknowable always remains (to be endured). According to Carolyn D'Cruz, at "the point of an aporia the logic of for or against arguments, or yes and no position taking, reaches a point of exhaustion" (6). Aporia names the 'place' of nonpassage – the aporia "had to be a matter of [. . .] the nonpassage", writes Derrida (*Aporias* 12) – and therefore it marks the absence of a destination, that which makes my journey a journey, my quest a quest, my possibility a possibility. It is thus where "position taking reaches a point of exhaustion" (D'Cruz 6), and where exhaustively, interminably some thing (nonpassable) remains.

It remains to be seen whether that remainder can be accommodated hospitably within language. For now, let us say simply that Helen wishes to pass from one language to another, even as she passes from one race to the other. But this 'passing' is a nonpassage, or aporetic passing. As she declares in her 'home language' that she is leaving it behind, she intimates

what might be called an ‘un-home language’. Yet, perhaps, this is all her mother-tongue has ever been. From within the confines of her ‘home language’, she has felt the cultural force of a language (not her own) which functions by declaring itself more decent, and more proper as her private property. English is, according to her, let us recall, her “rightful place in the world” (126). So, she is uncomfortable in her own language, which is her “second skin”, and this mirrors her discomfort with any somatic traces of ‘tainted blood’ that might be readable on her actual skin.

In a way, however, she is right to feel that her language does not define her adequately, since no language can be *anything but* an ‘un-home language’. For instance, Derrida considers the uniquely French sentence *Il y d’un certain pas*. He contends that this phrase has so many subtle, manifold meanings that it is ultimately untranslatable as “any translation into a non-French language would lose something of its potential multiplicity” (*Aporias* 9). In other words, this sentence is French: it belongs (only) to those who belong to the French language. While this is so, Derrida also notes that within this sentence, and *even when spoken in French*, a degree of untranslatability persists. To know which of the sentence’s meanings is being implied, one would have to pick up on “gestural operations and contextual marks that are not all and thoroughly discursive” (*Aporias* 10). These contexts are not saturated within the sentence and therefore it can always be spoken in the absence of the non-discursive contextual marks which would allow one French-speaking person to understand another. For Derrida, this example marks the structure of a rule which he characterises in the following way:

> The identity of a language can only affirm itself as identity to itself by opening itself to the hospitality of a difference from itself or a difference with itself. Condition of the self, such a difference *from* and *with* itself would then be its very thing, the *pragma* of its pragmatics: the stranger at home, the invited one or the one who is called. The *at home* [*chez-soi*] as the host’s gift recalls a being at home [. . .] that is given by a hospitality more ancient than the inhabitant himself.
>
> (*Aporias* 10, original emphasis)

Where language functions to home us, it also functions to un-home. Language is open and hospitable to a difference with and from itself, which ensures that it always inscribes us imperfectly. As it gives to us the gift of a home, it also welcomes the stranger into that home. This form of hospitality is the very condition of possibility for a language we can call our own, and hence is more ancient than any inhabitant who might host it as host.

Helen cannot adopt the English language as her own (as her adopted homeland) because she already has a 'home language'. By the same token, she cannot not adopt English as her language, since it functions as the very definition of the 'home language' – it is the 'proper language', the one that defines all that properly makes one's property a home. Its "rightful place in the world" is as the guardian of all that is right and proper in order to make oneself 'at home'. All those things which define the home (such as privacy, inviolability, safety, security, comfort, and a sense of belonging) of which I have been critical while always acknowledging that there could be no home without them, reveal themselves to be English terms. Even when they are translated into any other language, their *proper place* is in English. This means also that no one (not even the English, those for whom English is a mother-tongue) can inhabit these terms properly. In order to affirm themselves as language, these terms must be hospitable to difference from and to themselves. Even as they proclaim limits, privacy and inviolability, they are violated, and are internally (and eternally) open to that to which they would rather be wholly inhospitable.

This goes some way to explaining the impasse of Helen's attempt to pass from Afrikaans to English. She is inhospitable to her own language in being hospitable to English. However, the colonial language cannot be her own.[26] It is necessarily inhospitable to that possibility because it is hostile to all that it deems improper, indecent, and 'other'. Paradoxically, though, even as English declares that all other languages are improper (to the notion of a proper home and a proper 'home language'), it also declares itself improper – that is, it announces that it is violated by all those other languages which would be 'improper' were they housed within English. Helen cannot welcome the other except in a language which does not completely house him/her. But she cannot know this, recognise this, or respect it. She is far too invested in the belief that English will make her feel 'at home'. According to her, it can be taken on in an absolute way, and her translation from one language to the other will therefore leave no remainder. In effect, she assumes that if she gives her 'home language' away (completely), she can then inhabit English (totally) as her own. There can be no remainder, no other terms to the equation. If there is (and I have tried to show that there always will be), she must obliterate this remainder by housing it within the terms already at her disposal. Yet, one wonders what else Helen can do. All she wants is what is implied (forcefully) within her (home) language: to inhabit (fully) the language proper to home.

There is another layer of complexity to consider regarding this attempt to pass into the English language, and it relates to the fact that Helen feels she has *the right* to inhabit

Englishness. According to her, she has the right of the name, the Campbell name. The surname reminds both her and the reader of earlier generations of British Campbells (John's ancestry, who he is only too happy to claim) and their sexual unions with people of other races (ancestors John Campbell is conspicuously quiet about). These ('white') Campbell ancestors are Scottish, though, not English. So the name that Helen would use as a kind of title deed, a right of property to inhabit Englishness, intimates miscegenation, and is, in any case, not English but rather a name belonging to yet another people subjected to English rule. The name Campbell therefore names the long and terrible history of colonial violence which we have already discussed, and which can never easily be separated from the English language. Their surname marks Helen and John not as subjects (which should, surely, be the primary purpose of any name), not as agents of their own sense of identity and destiny, but instead ensures that they are *subject to* Western history. Hailed, called by their own name, they are forced to respond accordingly, and, as Althusser has pointed out, in so doing they are interpellated, blind to the ideology which they nevertheless serve. It is as if this *family name* proved that the Campbell family were guilty, culpable, therefore complicit with history, and thus entrapped by it. As Helen suspects, her husband's ancestral name does, in a sense, ensure access, but it is not to a comfortable or safe home. It determines, instead, that they are branded as 'criminals', trapped within the 'prisonhouse of language'.

How, then, does language imprison one? Or to put it slightly differently, what experience is negated or lost in the act of naming? It is, in my opinion, the experience of the other as other, which is the impossible experience of the radical strangeness of the stranger. Language negates the very possibility of experiencing or offering unconditional hospitality – which is, of course, why it is, we should recall, "the first act of violence" (Derrida, *Aporias* 15). The inhospitality of language stems from the work of naming because when one names him or her, one gives to "the stranger who is, precisely, unknowable" a "recognizable form" (Marais, *Secretary* 8). For this reason, as Mike Marais explains, "[i]n being named in this way, the stranger is addressed and thus required to reply to the name with which she is addressed. By extension, the name seeks to pre-determine the reply; it exacts from the stranger a response that confirms the expectations which it from the first has inscribed" (*Secretary* 8).

The world is made knowable through language, in the act of naming, but this is done at a great, incalculable cost. When we name (as we must), we refuse the stranger his/her right to be strange. Language therefore always implies and does violence. There are, of course, limits and conditions one can place on this violence (which relate to how one uses language

and how one chooses to limit one's home) but they cannot be extended indefinitely. This is *because*, by definition, these limits are inscribed *in language* and are therefore conditioned by its primary violence. Always, at the very limits of hospitality, there is language.

Sadly, Helen becomes less and less concerned with using her language respectfully, which is not to say that she is ever rude (oh no, that would be improper), but rather that she is coldly unwelcoming in her employment of language. For instance, she stops calling John by his first name, and instead refers to him simply as Campbell, as if the surname were an insult. As the narrator observes:

> he heard his name as no more than fibre caught between her teeth, stripped of his status. The syllables summoned the past; the smell of the ash heap, the longdrop lavatory [. . .]. She brought back the horror of schooldays, of the barefoot boy in khaki shorts stuttering over the r's of the English verse he could not recite: I re-remember, I re-remember/ The house where I was born/ The little window in the ere r brow . . .
> (Wicomb, *Playing* 124)

In this passage, John is being subjected to several interrelated kinds of inhospitality. Since Derrida considers the imposition of language the first violence, let us follow his example. Poor John cannot master the English language, and while it is imposed on him, at school in this case, it does not yield to him. He is humiliated and made to feel inferior, because his language is inferior. Also, the poem he is forced to recite (almost certainly from memory, suggesting a connection to the biblical verse Helen learnt in Sunday-school) is Thomas Hood's "I Remember, I Remember", which is about the recollection of the idyllic childhood home of its speaker. In his memory, the sun is always shining and the flowers in the garden are "made of light" (12). The home is so enchanting that his spirit is absolutely free – he claims his "spirit flew in feathers then" (21) – and the loss of that home is a "heavy" burden, one that, seemingly, traps him "farther from heaven / Than when [he] was a boy" (31–32).

Another reading of the poem presents itself when it is placed in the context of Wicomb's novel. Perhaps it is the idyllic home, not its loss, which burdens the speaker so. This would mean that it is the persistence of a desire for that never-achievable dream which ensures that the speaker feels farther from heaven each day. Certainly, the home that Hood describes exists only in memory, and its prelapsarian qualities cannot but be contrasted with John's memory of his own childhood home – memories dominated by the smell of ash and the indecency of having to use a "longdrop lavatory".

Clearly, when Helen wants to make John feel inferior and unwelcome, she need only remind him of a past in which his home never matched the notion of it that he was taught (in

English no less) was proper. And all of these forms of inhospitality can somehow be encapsulated in one word, a name, his name, Campbell. As we have already seen, this name intimates a colonial history which is directly responsible for making John (and Helen for that matter) an unwelcome guest in the home of the English language (and the idea of Englishness with which it is so closely associated). In the process of being named and insulted by his wife, he is indeed "stripped of status" (124), in the sense that the status he is accorded is that of the inferior, shameful coloured who should never be welcomed into respectable homes. The greater irony, which never dawns on Helen, is that even as she sneers at the name Campbell so as to humiliate the father of her child, that name humiliates her too. It belongs to her too, which implies that the proper house has no more patience or room for her than it has for her husband.

Outa Blinkoog and the Impossibility of his Hospitality

I would argue, then, that language functions much as the metaphor of light does – that is, as something which always implies violence, a certain form of inhospitality, and a history which cannot but be Western in form. Yet, there is a point in *Playing in the Light* when all such claims regarding language and light are refuted (though perhaps not silenced). When Brenda and Marion are travelling to Wuppertal (the small settlement where they meet Mrs Murray and Marion learns the 'truth' about her family), they encounter a man who is strange in every sense of the word. He carries through life a cart filled with fabulous wares made of tin, glass, rags, and other discarded items. The objects which catch and/or reflect the light (such as the lantern he gives to Brenda and Marion) are arguably the most enchanting of these items, his "pragtige Goeters" or "Beautiful Things". He makes them, he tells the women, because people take light "too much for granted", so the "coloured glass helps us remember the miracle of light" (89).

He is similarly unburdened by history or language. His name is Outa Blinkoog and when Brenda attempts to correct him for referring to himself by a name as charged with racial insult as "outa", he joyfully dismisses her, saying that "that's always been my name and it's a good name too" (87).[27] Later, dazzled by this traveller and his stories, Marion has the giddy sense that "[w]ith this man, one can say anything: outa, miesies; here language is not the fraught business she has come to fear. Words are fresh, newborn, untainted by history; all is bathed in laughter as clean as water" (90). Given all of this freedom, it should come as no

surprise that Outa Blinkoog has no real home either. Accordingly, he informs the two women that he "doesn't like being in the same place all the time, has always kept on the move" (89).

With Marion and Brenda, he shares a hospitable relationship which seems boundless. For example, the cautious women have the "instinct to lock the car door" when they first see him but the fear of the stranger "comes and goes in a flash" and rather than drive off, "the women get out [of the car] mesmerised by the man" (91). Marion then shares all the food she has, and when Outa Blinkoog gives them the extraordinary gift of the lantern – made "especially for when the candle grows short" so that "the last hour of candlelight is sweetened with bright colour, so there's no place for sadness" – the two travel partners know instinctively not to offer to pay, that the gift is given without any desire for reciprocity (91).

At first glance, it all seems too good to be true. It seems impossible to reconcile the limitless hospitality and freedom from history which the reader finds in the euphoric encounter with Outa Blinkoog with the concerns apparent in the rest of the novel. The time spent with him seems somehow unreal, a fantasy, and an ideal in which one is able to resist entirely the force of history and use language in new and unconditionally hospitable ways. As Andrew van der Vlies notes of this incident in the novel, "[t]he narrative here tests the limits of its own hospitality, or the ability of any narrative to host the otherness of others' narratives without doing them harm" (587). This is, I think, very much the case and very much the point. Outa Blinkoog is not a real man; he is 'a brightly coloured creature from mythology" (Wicomb, *Playing* 87). He is self-sufficient in a way that seems implausible – for instance, he has no need of money and relies entirely on the kindness (or hospitality) of strangers. Just before they meet him, the two women feel jubilant, as if drugged, and Brenda says as much (86). They are "transported to another world; they eat and talk and laugh and pass the time of day with the man out of the storybook" (90).

Unsurprisingly, the unreal encounter (uncanny in its way) can also not easily be recuperated later. When Marion tries to inform Geoff about him, "it is surprising how little there is to tell", and she begins to suspect that any account she gives will be "silly, a betrayal" (106). A similar problem relates to the lantern that is given to both Marion and Brenda, so "that neither one or the other will own it" (92). It is a central tenet underpinning this entire study that ownership (of private property) is a precondition for violence. The corollary is that a lack of proprietary ownership is necessary for a non-violent form of relation or interaction. However, in the world outside of the dizzying, hallucinatory spell spun by Outa Blinkoog, how do they deal with the practical burden of the lamp? It does not belong to either entirely, so in whose house should it stay? Brenda, for her part, feels she cannot keep it as her mother

would see it as cheap, garish (which, in a sense, it is). The value of the lamp seems impossible to convey away from the "storybook man" who created it. And though a lack of ownership seems like a good, ethical, noble thing, it cannot account for a world in which everything must be housed, or accommodated, somewhere.

I would argue that the novel is attempting to inhabit the uninhabitable, to write the un-writable, and to imagine the unimaginable. For, on the one hand, Marion finds that her experience with Outa Blinkoog resists being described (and thereby totalised) within language. She senses that the attempt itself is "a betrayal" of the experience of this stranger, and that language deprives the stranger of the strangeness that made him so astonishing. On the other hand, the novel has written that very experience, translated it into language and narrative. The novel is indeed playing – it is playing with us, its readers – by declaring that that which it has just described in language is indescribable. It is an impossible story, since it is the story of the impossible.

When one reads the Outa Blinkoog section of the novel and feels that it does not really fit with the rest of the narrative, one is sensing, at some level, that what is being read should not be readable: it is not a story that can be housed in story. It is always uncomfortable with itself and it is meant to illicit discomfort in its reader. What the Outa Blinkoog section describes is a man without home or notion of home, who engenders a limitless hospitality within a language freed of history. In this world, the "miracle of light" (89) can be experienced devoid of the history that aligns it with a violent, limited, monologic notion of 'truth'. It is only in such a place that "there's no place for sadness". By this I mean that it is only in the unimaginable, indescribable *there* of a 'no place' (a space devoid of all the violence inherent in the notion of place as home) that sadness, violence, and inhospitality can be undone.

The reader is forced to acknowledge that what s/he is reading is not real – not simply in the sense that it did not happen, but in the more profound sense that it cannot be. The novel's language reveals its limits precisely by exceeding them, and telling the story of that which can never have a story or a language. And, in this way, it whispers, again and again, 'impossible, impossible, and impossible'. Accordingly, the limits of language gesture toward what may lie beyond such limits, namely limitless, hyperbolic, unconditional hospitality.

The reader is invoked through his/her incredulity in the face of what s/he is reading to consider what may lie beyond all that is known, all that can be said (all that binds one to history, really). Any perceptive reader *knows* (as knowledge forms a limit too) that Outa Blinkoog is strange, and that there is something strange about the section of writing in which

he features. It does not belong with much else s/he has read before (or indeed after). But this incredulity cannot be placated by accusing the author of 'bad writing', that is contradictory and that betrays itself, *because the novel declares that it betrays itself*. It is only if it does so (even at the risk of being called "silly" [106]) that it can allow for an experience of the limits of narrative. In this way, the reader is given the non-experience of the impossible, which is the experience of the impossible as possible. S/he is called, in the most complex way, to be respectful and open to this experience (as non-experience). Even though judgement seems inevitable, s/he is asked not to judge. Accordingly, the text orients its reader to the possibility of that which is, we *know*, by definition, impossible: the unconditional welcome of the stranger as strange without any imposition or limit.

An Unresolved Conclusion: Why Marion Rejects Brenda's Story

This discussion of the complex responses of the reader to the Outa Blinkoog section of the novel leads quite nicely to what I would like to say about the novel's ending, in which the issue of who is telling the story arises. Before I get there, though, I must reiterate one of my central arguments about *Playing in the Light*, which is that Marion is a far more hospitable, ethical, open person by the end of the novel than she was at the start. On a conceptual level, I have argued that this relates in no small measure to the fact that in her investigations into her family history, she has been able to ascribe to her mother's all-encompassing notions of home and whiteness certain historical limits, and in the process she has been allowed to acknowledge that there are others who fall outside these limits. At a more obvious level, this increased capacity for (what will always amount to conditional) hospitality is reflected in two changes in Marion: her willingness to travel, as the novel progresses, and to make friends.

In relation to the issue of travel, I have already intimated that I am critical of readings of the novel that postulate that travel is, in and of itself, a way of experiencing that which is strange or foreign to Marion. For, as long as one travels with a violent, reductive mindset that always limits all that is strange to familiar terms (as if one were housing the stranger by imposing one's home on him/her), the physical process of travel need not expose one to anything that is foreign in any but the most conventional senses of the word. This is surely what Marion (the travel agent) inadvertently comes to realise when she muses: "[t]hese holidays that she enthusiastically arranges for others seem like nothing more than hard work, negotiating a foreign language and rushing about" (40). This line of thought leads her to ask: "[c]ould such an experience, in the final analysis, be any more pleasurable than seeing the

world on film or television?" (40). She views the foreign as something one must "negotiate with", in other words, inscribe in a transaction with all that is already familiar. Furthermore, she would rather see the foreign from the *comfort of her own home*, on film or television, suggesting her desire to see that which is strange translated into forms of representation with which she is already acquainted.

Marion has a similar distrust of friends and friendship, which almost certainly stems from the one true friendship she had in childhood and the way in which it ended. When Helen finds out that Annie Boshoff's father is a play-white, she commands her little girl to have nothing more to do with Annie. Despite her mother's injunction, Marion does meet her friend one last time, late at night, and Annie passes over the scrapbook they jointly share (reminiscent of the lantern jointly owned by Marion and Brenda). This scrapbook is a charming symbol of the girls' love for one another, yet Marion quickly drops it into the dustbin once it is handed to her. The narrator then solemnly observes that "Marion was eight years old when she *betrayed* Annie Boshoff" (195, my emphasis). Wicomb's use of the word "betrayed" leads one inexorably back to issues of shame, complicity with history, and all the forms by which one limits one's hospitality – including, notably, the imposition of language and narrative.

In many ways, these two prejudices (against travel and friendship) begin to change (to an extent) when Marion and Brenda meet Outa Blinkoog on their journey to Wuppertal. The experience of a man so unusual that he will not and cannot coincide with any experience familiar to the women binds them and also, strangely, frees them: "Outa Blinkoog's creations of beauty out of discarded objects and his present of the lantern gradually release a new possibility in each woman. Brenda is released into writing and Marion into a decision to travel, a journey that is part escape and part quest", contends M. J. Daymond (165). Certainly, and within limits of course, Marion's journey to the United Kingdom (UK) is an attempt to think differently and other than she has before. She avoids the museums and other tourist traps, the beaten track. She takes solace in what she thinks of as "the traveller's reprieve, the wash of time that blurs the bars of the clock face". And, according to the narrator, Marion feels that when "the new begins to take on aspects of the old, flagging its affinities with the familiar, the weariness does not carry over to the new day" (Wicomb *Playing* 188). For a woman who has followed so many unspoken rules her whole life, and taken such comfort in familiar routines, this is certainly evidence of the influence of the unknown.

Also, she begins in this strange land (where she is quite literally un-homed) to discover what is foreign or strange about herself. She begins to read South African novels, *The Conservationist* by Nadine Gordimer and *In the Heart of the Country* by J. M. Coetzee in particular, and is surprised to discover "how many versions of her exist in the stories of her country" (190–91).[28] These stories, which reveal that Marion does not know herself as well as she thought, in effect, that her self has about it an unknowable dimension, coupled with the lack of sunlight in Scotland, make her cry constantly. She is uncomfortable with her tearful identification with others but chooses to suffer it: "there is something about being cocooned in a single room, about the bleakness of the days, that must be endured", she thinks (191). Hauntingly, she begins to conceive of her new abode as "a place in which to cry" (191).

In many ways, what she is crying for is what has sadly already been lost, which is to say, aspects of her own self (as other) which were over-determined and obliterated by race. Indeed, Wicomb's novel as a whole is about what is lost when one is racially inscribed, and therefore focuses on the ways in which shame erroneously became the narrative of colouredness, simultaneously obscuring the origin of whiteness (that origin being its own supplement, colouredness). This limitless, pervasive narrative which creates racial categories in hierarchical order has ravaged families, destroyed lives and severely limited the ability to be comfortable at home. As Marion reads of herself-as-other, she catches a glimpse of what her life and the world in general might be like if that powerful discourse is finally put in its place. I am reminded, in this regard, of Toni Morrison's description of the ethical, hospitable world-as-home in which race does not matter:

> [The world-as-home is] the new space [. . .] formed by the inwardness of the outside, the interiority of the 'othered', the personal that is always embedded in the public. In this new space one can imagine safety without walls, can iterate difference that is prized but unprivileged, and can conceive of a third [. . .] world 'already made for me, both snug and wide open, with a doorway never needing to be closed'.
>
> (12)

Wicomb, I think, would agree with much of this lovely statement, though where Morrison envisions comfort, she would add tears. The difference is a matter of perspective: Morrison's vision is a projection of a hospitable world once the race-house has been made a "race-specific yet non-racist home" (5), whereas Wicomb writes of the painful ongoing process of constructing such a world-as-home. Marion cries for the versions of herself she never knew, versions obscured by race and shame, which she is only able to discover or encounter as other, in texts. These discoveries are also, always, of loss and thus they necessitate mourning

for the versions of her that race has kept hidden in the light. According to the narrator, Marion chooses a dark room, "a place in which to cry", which is the appropriate place for this work.

Also, it is important to be aware that this mourning is like melancholia; it is without end. And it must be so, for there must be limits to how fully one can accommodate Morrison's ideal vision of the world, which is reflected in the fact that when Marion returns from her trip overseas, she falls easily back into old routines, and, as Dirk Klopper contends, "by implication, it would seem, in[to] her whiteness" (153). He elaborates by stating that she now has "some sense of where she comes from but [is] unable to act upon this knowledge, ignorant, perhaps resistant, to what it demands of her" (153). Marion is "ignorant, perhaps resistant" to the demands that accompany the guest who is strange, who comes unannounced and unknown, like a ghost in the night, ensuring that her home, her language, her very self is put into question.

On her return from the UK, Marion declares that she intends to move to a new place with her father (an idea she was decidedly unwelcoming of earlier). Brenda then informs her that she is moving in with a man whose story she does not fully know. If "this is the case", if she really does not know her father as well as she would like to believe, Klopper concludes, "[Marion] would be making home with a stranger" (155). But this new home, this infinitely hospitable form of home in which the stranger is welcome, he claims, is "one that dwells in anticipation rather than attainment" (155). It is not a home the novel can write, yet obsessively, it must attempt to represent what can only exist "in anticipation". This would involve finding this 'new home', in words, in narrative, in time and space – in short, in all those things that make it impossible.

I think this description of the novel as obsessive is important because it goes a long way toward explaining why Wicomb can do little else than speak of home, race, shame, whiteness, light, history, complicity, and so forth. *Playing in the Light* seems possessed, haunted by these concepts, what they signify, what they do not, the violence they designate and obscure. These terms all speak to each other, and in this writer's complex handling of them, they suggest (in their own ways) that which might be just beyond the grasp of words, language and narrative. This obsessive quality also goes some way toward explaining why the novel concludes with the end of a friendship.

Brenda and Marion's friendship has been hard-earned. They have had to overcome the racial politics of their country (to the extent that one is able to do so), the class distinction between an employer and her employee, cultural differences, personal preferences, a shared

affection for the same man, and much else. Yet, like hospitality, if a friendship is to mean anything, *it must* overcome such limitations and place itself beyond the duties, rules, and conventions of history. Any gesture of friendship which did not completely do away with duty and rule would not initiate a friendship worth keeping. The person we call 'our friend' would, in actuality, be little more than a business acquaintance. We would be involved in *the business of friendship*, which is a business that sells 'our friend' to history, and to duty.[29]

Sadly though, just as the reader is lulled in to thinking that this friendship has indeed moved beyond its roots as a business relationship, and that finally, it will sustain itself, it falters.[30] It transpires that while Marion was on vacation, her 'friend' Brenda had been visiting John and has begun to construct a novel based on these interviews. Her writing, notably, has been done by the light of the lantern given to both women by Outa Blinkoog. Brenda describes John's story as the one that "should be written" (217). The phrasing surely suggests that she sees this writing as an ethical imperative, a work of hospitality (hence it is done by the light of a gift given without desire or hope of reciprocity). As Van der Vlies states, "Wicomb's staging of the act of writing or narration" suggests "her novel's playing host to the representation of acts of reconstruction and storytelling that themselves play host to another's story, like John Campbell's, or to others' stories" (596).[31]

In any event, the hosting of others' stories does not apparently appeal to Marion, and the very idea of Brenda writing her father's tale enrages her. She tells her so-called friend that she knows her father's story, that it is a private matter, her and her family's, and then kicks her out of the car, locking the door afterwards.[32] Just before this, though, Brenda gets her parting shot, informing Marion that she suspects she does not really know her father, or his story.

The reader has proceeded under the supposition that Marion is both focaliser and narrator of the novel. However, Brenda's revelation that she too is writing a version of the story leads to the troubling realisation that possibly, just possibly, the novel in his/her hands is narrated by a character who has neither the approval of the woman she constructs as her main character, nor the familial connection with the Campbell family which one assumes makes the story feel so intimate. If this is the case, she has constructed herself as an important but decidedly peripheral character in a story generated using John's confessions to her, her own experiences with Marion, and much she has had to imagine or invent. Recall, for instance, the *unknown narrator* reveals that Helen never told anyone of what Carter did to her. Accordingly, if indeed Helen did manage to keep her rape a secret, then the entire section that describes the violation is the work of a sympathetic imagination at best, and voyeuristic

motivations at worst. The same, of course, is true if Marion is the narrator of *Playing in the Light*, though why she would choose to construct herself in the third person in her own story would be puzzling in the extreme. These questions about which character wrote the novel and why she did so are endless, ultimately irresolvable, really. Hence, Daymond, for example, quells the issue by declaring that the novel functions "to create a formal heteroglossia [. . .] through the stories told by intermediary figures and revisited in intertexts". For Daymond, this heteroglossia is necessary as a "way of offering and containing narrative passages such as the impersonal meditation on whiteness and its 'cool and haughty and blank stare'" (158). Klopper, by contrast, reads the indeterminacy of the identity of the narrator as a reflection of the uncanniness of the text, and also as a technique through which the reader's expectations "for a clear understanding on the subject position from which the narrative has been recounted" are "unmasked" (150).

While I do not in any way disagree with these readings, I feel there is a question raised by the indeterminate 'authorship' which they do not address. The question is one of ethics. By what right does one claim another's story? Is the claim on another's story an ethical attempt to empathise with him/her or, inversely, by sympathising, does one violently assert a personal conceptual understanding of his/her experiences where it would be better (more ethical) to respect his/her alterity by *not* imagining what one, by definition, does not know? It is also necessary to ask whether the other would welcome such intrusion. And if s/he does not welcome it (as Marion does not – she locks the door remember), what should one make of that?[33]

These questions are engendered by one's inability to unequivocally identify the narrator of the novel. This is to say, since one cannot be certain of who is writing the text, one cannot prescribe a ruling and a rule that would determine which act is ethical and which is not. Further to this, even assuming that it could be generated, such a rule would violate the very form of ethics and respect it was attempting to determine and consolidate. What is singular and other should never be exposed to the violence of a rule, which functions precisely by generalising (and therefore by eradicating singularity). There is no rule that is applicable to the singular nature of each encounter with each singular being. It is for this reason that ethical hospitality is due the other, since his/her alterity signals an almost unbearable fragility, and a specificity so vulnerable that *more often than not* it goes unnoticed. This 'more often than not' marks the space for a rule. The general, pre/proscriptive form of law is comfortable in the place determined by an innocuous phrase

like ‘more often than not’. It produces a deadening sense of homeliness in other words, which is why one cannot and should never house the other: as a rule, one destroys what one houses.

What follows, then, are merely possibilities, answers that belong to the order of the ‘perhaps’. They are my attempt to grapple with the impossible in a responsible fashion – as impossible as that may be. Helen’s encounter with Carter is a troubling since it is so decidedly private that she told no one, which leads one to wonder how the narrator knows of it at all, to say nothing of the intimate detail with which it is rendered in the text. Indeed, the disturbing possibility exists that this violence is nothing more than the work of an imagination (either Brenda or Marion’s). Yet even if one accepts that the description is more than mere fiction on the part of the narrator, that it is what ‘really’ happened to Helen, one is still left to consider the fact that the written account disregards her desire for privacy, and therefore enacts a similar form of violation and violence to that which it describes.

This violence can thus be attributed to Brenda or Marion (or both?), which does indeed imply that neither has overcome history and that they are both, for that reason, incapable of a hospitality worthy of the name. If the story is Marion’s, then it is a story of home, by which I mean, it is a story of all that is familiar, known and knowable. On the other hand, if Brenda is responsible for the narrative, she has, despite any conscious efforts to be respectful, shed light on that which belongs to the dark and which cannot easily be recuperated in language. When she intimates that her life is too typical, too dull, to be written, and that John’s story (of becoming a play-white) is unusual or unfamiliar enough that it “should be written” (217), is she not saying that she would like to make the unfamiliar familiar? Is she not also positioning herself as the harbinger of truth, the keeper of the light? There is much that can be said about what “should be written” but, perhaps, it is most important to say that not everything yields as it *should*. Not all stories are so welcoming of the light. Helen and John, for example, are described as “pale, vulnerable geckos whose very skeletal systems showed through transparent flesh” (123). These are not the people for whom the light is noble and true. They are vulnerable and delicate beyond measure, and the light has already harmed them enough. When Marion is interrogating her own father (as Patricia Williams was interrogated) he pleads with her: “Can’t you let it be now?” (118). In a sense far greater than even John can imagine, it is an ethical request.

Furthermore, this desire to protect his story (not to have it exposed to the light, given form and language) suggests that stories matter a great deal. Certainly this is what Marion too is asserting when she kicks Brenda out of her car. She is declaring that their friendship *is not worth* her family’s story. For her, these are the terms of a transaction which does not ‘square

the books'. In writing the story, she feels Brenda is taking more than she has given. Friendship, like hospitality, may indeed demand that one do away with rules and the economy of exchange. However, in this regard, Marion has found that there is always a price to pay. In this case, she ultimately decides that the price is too high: she cannot give away her very self in order to welcome another in hospitably. There is, after all, a limit to how much one person can give.

According to Emmanuel Levinas, the infinite responsibility due the stranger accords with the very loss of self that Marion will not abide. It is, not coincidentally, also a loss of home:

> To revert to oneself is not to establish oneself at home, even if stripped of all one's acquisitions. It is to be like a stranger, hunted down even in one's home, contested in one's own identity and one's very property, which, like a skin, still enclosing the self, would set it up in an inwardness, already settled on itself, already a substance. It is always to empty oneself anew of oneself.
>
> (*Otherwise* 92)

Somewhat unsurprisingly, Marion draws a line at such a loss of self. She does not want to be made into a story where she discovers she is other to herself, and that all she thought she knew is strange, unfamiliar. She desires, still, despite all she has endured and learnt, a home that is inviolably her own. This accords with the ultimate limit to all hospitality: one cannot long endure the loss of oneself that is demanded by unconditional hospitality.

One wants, in short, to be the author of one's own life (even, perhaps, one's own destiny). To allow the other to be the author is impossible. Yet, what if one were always, necessarily, authored by the other? What if making oneself 'at home' always involved the loss of home, and the sense that home is actually *one's own*? This would mean that the impossible was always happening, had to be happening, as if the impossible were inevitable, like a rule. It would be a rule which would, by definition, be impossible. So one last, simple question: who is the narrator (and fictional author) of *Playing in the Light*? One does not know; it is impossible to say.

Conclusion: Marion's Lost Home

In the course of this chapter, I have tried to argue that Marion is the product of a racial discourse that invades her home and her sense of self. Ironically, this racial discourse presents itself as invisible, or limitless, and, for this reason, does not allow her any sense of how and when it is influencing her behaviour. In particular, I have tried to show that, like her mother,

Marion treats the outside world with suspicion because her conception of whiteness is without context or place, and therefore all others must be read in its terms. Whiteness, for her, is distinct from history, and purer than it too.

The crucial event that signals a change in this character is her discovery that her parents are play-whites. It is the beginning of a journey which reveals that, in fact, whiteness does have boundaries; it has a history that has always been obscured. This history points to the idea that miscegenation is not the fault of concupiscent black or coloured women, and that the mixing of races did not produce only colouredness, but whiteness too. In effect, one could not imagine the 'purity' of whiteness were it not for the 'degeneracy' of colouredness.

Once Marion begins to see the limits of her whiteness, she does what her mother was incapable of, which is to begin to respond to alterity of those outside her frame of reference rather than inscribing them in terms of that which is familiar to her. While, obviously, this ability to treat others ethically is not unlimited (since unconditional hospitality is impossible), it is, nonetheless, an important change in her character. Not coincidentally, it is not a change that leads to a sense of safety, comfort or privacy. For, as I have tried to argue, un-homeliness is a necessary consequence of allowing the other to enter one's home. There is no comfort to be had once the home is invaded by a stranger whose strangeness must be affirmed rather than negated by familiar forms of understanding. As a result, Marion is more vulnerable when she begins to respect alterity, and the un-homeliness she felt because racial discourse had invaded her home is replaced by a different kind of un-homeliness – one characterised by the intrusion of the other.

In the following chapter, I continue my analysis the un-homeliness that is felt by those who are subjected to violent discursive formations that enter the private sphere and attempt to determine the nature of one's life. I will argue that *The Silent Minaret* presents a character quite unlike Marion in one crucial respect: Issa Shamshuddin is not blind to the effects of these oppressive discourses. In fact, he is a scholar who finds that history is alive and well, and very close to home. My feeling is that this character is much more vulnerable to suffering others than Marion ever is, and his disappearance can be read as a renunciation of the intrusive force of history (in conjunction with global capital). Accordingly, he is a non-present character in the text, and I think it necessary to consider the ethics of 'reading' such an absence. Ultimately, I would like to show that the responsibilities of the reader to this character are very much like those Wicomb implies one owes others: that is, infinite, unconditional hospitality.

Notes

[1] The term refers to people (almost always of mixed race descent, so-called 'coloureds') light enough in skin tone to use the apartheid racial classification system to have themselves re-classified as white so as to enjoy the social, economic, and legal advantages afforded those known to be white. I will use the term as well as with the American formulation, 'passing', which is of equivalent connotation. Notably, both terms seem to imply a subjectivity that exists beyond performance or performativity. As such, while they indicate the fluidity of race, they also reify the notion of supposedly 'pure' racial categories such as white and black. Wicomb uses the terms and their many connotations in order to critique the very idea of a 'pure' race.

[2] It is possible that Wicomb stages this event on Marion's verandah to remind the reader of Bill Ashrcoft's comments on this space. He contends that verandahs are "the very model of the 'contact zones' where inhabitants and strangers meet with ease", and continues by noting that they are where "the 'inside' and 'outside' interact" in ways that can change both (195). At the beginning of *Playing in the Light*, the idea of meeting "strangers [. . .] with ease" would be inconceivable to Marion.

[3] I am obliged to mention that there is indeterminacy about the validity of this passage since the narrator (probably either Marion or Brenda) seems to have an intimate knowledge of Helen's actions and feelings during and after her encounter with Carter, which cannot be factual, if one is to take seriously the claim that Helen never told anyone of her ordeal. This same indeterminacy haunts much of the text, in which characters (especially Helen) live such profoundly secretive lives. Toward the end of this chapter, I will address this issue head-on. For now, a simple disclaimer: I have chosen to treat the narrative voice as valid and co-present with the characters it describes, even when it seems to inhabit the likes of Helen. This is first a pragmatic decision since it is impossible to always reference the question of narrative point of view in every assertion I make. It is, secondly, a conceptual choice because, as I will argue, the novel constructs a web of complicity which ensures that privacy is always, necessarily, invaded.

[4] Young attempts to consider how historical narratives might be conceptualised in the face of its critique by poststructuralists. He suggests that, if anything, poststructuralism demands a "more active critique of the Eurocentric premises of Western knowledge" (19).

[5] According to Africa Check, the number of sexual offence cases which occurred in the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013 increased by 2.9 % from the same period in the previous year (para 12). This amounts to 66387 reported cases of sexual crime – and, of course, these statistics do not even attempt to consider the number of rapes which went unreported in that period (Africa Check para 12). In any context, the idea that a woman has 'brought' a sexual form of abuse on herself would be appalling, but given the staggering rape statistics in this country (as if rape were only a statistic, when in truth each one reveals the complete inadequacy of statistics), as well as the shameful culture in which women are often blamed for their rape, such a contention is inexcusable.

[6] There is, of course, a conceptual link between shame, which could be described (particularly as it is represented in *Playing in the Light*) as a placeless sense of guilt, and complicity, which is a kind of placeless responsibility. While I find this line of enquiry helpful for considering Helen and Marion's sense of shame and its relation to race, I also intend to argue that shame functions beyond registering a certain form of complicity. This is to say, in its very particular form of 'placeless-ness', shame functions to maintain an equally placeless notion of whiteness that draws Helen (in particular) endlessly toward an unachievable notion of home and propriety. For this reason, shame is not simply an emotion felt due to complicity. Rather, it enacts complicity with race by allowing the latter to seem like the mythic home one is always sought.

[7] In some ways, my argument here, about the difference between a happy and an ethical way of being, draws on Sam Vice's influential paper, titled "How Do I Live in this Strange Place?" Vice begins by arguing that even conscientious white people in South Africa are still in danger of behaving unethically because of their 'whitely habits' and white privilege (326). She therefore concludes that shame is an appropriate response to one's whiteness and that, as such, a degree of discomfort with one's existence in the country is not only valid, but ethical (329). While I am not convinced by some of Vice's other conclusions in this paper, and while I suspect that her conception of shame is not quite the same as Wicomb's, I am nonetheless aware of the correlations between *Playing in the Light* and this important article.

[8] Helen's stoic attitude to her abuse makes her a somewhat unexpected ally of Dulcie, another stoic female character, from Wicomb's novel *David's Story*, who is raped and tortured, most probably by other members of the ANC. That Helen, who will quite literally sell her self to be white, should be associated with the militant 'Mkhonto we Sizwe' fighter Dulcie, who has obviously dedicated her life to opposing the dominance of whiteness (as a concept and in the political sphere), would probably be somewhat distasteful to her. I think the connection is intentional on Wicomb's part, though. Dulcie too suffers at the hands of a system that places race above and before gender issues. And her silence, like Helen's, registers a world in which a language capable of properly, respectfully, dare one say ethically, describing her abuse is simply not available. Finally, both novels, disturbing though this may be, implicate the reader in said abuse.

[9] I will discuss the issue of uncanniness, ghosts and spectrality in another (related) context further on in this chapter. Other critics have also discussed this aspect of the novel in ways quite similar to my own (though none has focussed on the issue of hospitality which it raises). See, for example, Klopper ("Place of Nostalgia") and Van der Vlies ("The Archive, the Spectral" 592).

[10] This sense that what we call the 'new South Africa' is inevitably troubled by a similar experience of un-home as that evident during apartheid (and during colonialism) is a crucial point of departure for this entire study. For more on this see the introductory chapter of this thesis.

[11] In Antjie Krog's landmark novel on the TRC, *Country of my Skull*, for instance, the narrator declares: "[w]e of the white nation try to work out the conditions for our remaining here. We are here for better or worse. We want to be here, but we have to accept that we can no longer stay here on our terms" (437).

[12] The concern over the treatment of women during the Struggle is a recurring one in Wicomb's work. It is certainly raised by the unsettling figure of Dulcie in *David's Story*, and Wicomb herself discusses the issue in her influential article "To Hear the Variety of Discourses". For more on this aspect of Wicomb's work, see Samuelson ("The Disfigured Body") and Dorothy Driver's Afterword to *David's Story*. Also, for more on the complexities of female testimonies at the TRC, see Lucy Valerie Graham ("A Hidden Side") and Goldblatt and Meintjies ("Dealing with the Aftermath").

[13] The word 'endure' is used at several key moments in *Playing in the Light* and has become a kind of thematic touchstone for much I would like to say about the novel. Wicomb seems, to me, to be intent on considering what must be endured. In other words, she is obsessed by that which cannot be overcome or side-stepped and with which one must reckon if one is to live ethically (in one's 'home').

[14] It is not clear from his article how Gready differentiates the kind of critique he rebukes and the "unpacking" which he admires (156). This untheorised aspect of the work problematises much of his argument.

[15] It is also worth noting that Sanders writes very perceptively on the TRC. One of his more important insights is that the people (often women) who came to testify at the commission in place of another who had died or been killed signalled a kind of complicity in general because s/he took on the responsibility for one who is absent (200). In this way, according to Sanders, these testimonies asserted the form of justice which Derrida advocates in *Specters of Marx.* Likewise, I would say that Marion's connection to the image of Patricia Williams drives her towards a responsibility before and for the other. Accordingly, she forgoes a narrow identification or affiliation with whiteness in lieu of a more generalised and irreducible human folded-ness.

[16] That said, the narrator voices Marion's feeling that this alignment with the perpetrator is preposterous as she has "never had anything to do with politics" (75). The word "politics" has a limited semantic meaning in this case which, nevertheless, underscores its pervasiveness. Ironically, it has defined Marion's life, at home and away. It has done so in a disconcertingly limiting fashion, though. Indeed, it is what exceeds this definition (in political terms), what else may yet be welcomed in, which is the destination of her journey (and this chapter's). You will need to forgive the somewhat meandering path that I have traced so far in analysing this journey. The detours, the missteps are, to my mind, unavoidable. As I have mentioned before, this cannot be a project that 'knows where it is going' in the traditional sense. Instead, it must travel from un-home to un-home, which is to say, travel without travelling (and therefore without any fixed coordinates or direction).

[17] I am referring only to one ghost, namely the troubled, uncanny spirit Tokkie. I would argue, though, that there are many others Marion will need to encounter. Their number is, in fact, boundless. For, every other will present itself with the demanding plea of the spectre.

[18] Bhabha also argues the following: "The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In the displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other" (9). This statement reflects one of the central tenets of my study very accurately.

[19] I suspect Bhabha is aware of the danger with which he is flirting. His discussion of coloured identity is brief, perfunctory, almost off-hand. I cannot help but speculate that he sensed that colouredness was important to his argument, but was unsure of exactly how to integrate it. That he turns to Gordimer, rather than say Bessie Head or Arthur Nortje, to validate his claims is also telling. Head, who sought to assimilate her coloured identity into a Pan-African black consciousness, would not, I suspect, easily abide the lack of agency ascribed to coloured people by Will in Gordimer's novel.

[20] In fact, Stéphane Robolin notes that Marion's own apartment is merely a more luxurious version of the kind of home her mother made: "impenetrable to sight and the presence of others, a space of almost complete seclusion" (352).

[21] For a perceptive reading of how class and space function together to allow Marion to avoid the geographical and social realities of Cape Town, see Robolin ("Properties of Whiteness"). This article is also a very fine exploration of the historical factors which make the experience of place so racialised and class-based in South Africa. While my particular focus on home does not allow me to elucidate all of the varied histories of the places to which Marion travels and her place of residence, I have nevertheless found Robolin's article useful in conceptualising my own thoughts on space and place in Wicomb's writing.

[22] Marion cannot fathom what relevance this story might have held for her mother. Its relation to the larger concerns of the novel is fairly clear, however. The Ethiopian eunuch Philip converts is a man incapable of sex, and therefore incapable of miscegenation. Furthermore, the eunuch, like Helen, reads the holy text but does not understand it. This is why it is Philip's God-given purpose to educate him on "the good news about Jesus" (*Good New Bible* Acts. 8.35). This news is so powerful that he soon asks Philip to baptise him, that is to say, to wash away his sins, shame and impurity. The implication for Wicomb's work is surely that learning of the Christ is always, in some sense, complicit with learning of purity, and that which is always to be associated with purity, namely, whiteness. For a slightly different reading of this biblical allusion see Van der Vlies ("The Archive, the Spectral" 594).

[23] It is worth mentioning that the title of Wicomb's novel is most probably an allusion to Toni Morrison's influential study, *Playing in the Dark*. This text is also invested in critiquing a form of whiteness which has disavowed its origins in a past which is deemed shameful. Morrison argues that American literature, so often assumed to be the "preserve of white male views, genius, and power" should, in fact, be understood in relation to the close proximity of African-Americans at all stage of the country's history. She asserts that "the major ad championed characteristics of [American] literature – individualism, masculinity, social engagement versus historical isolation; acute and ambiguous moral problematics; the thematics of innocence coupled with an obsession with figurations of death and hell – are [. . .] in fact responses to a dark, abiding, signing Africanist presence" (5). In effect, like Wicomb, Morrison imagines a construction of whiteness which is indebted to those who are 'non-white' and yet denied agency or voice.

[24] E. M. Forster used this phrase to describe the meaning of the journey in *A Passage to India*. He claimed that the novel was not about politics but about the human race's search for a "more lasting home" (298). In many ways, though, the spiritual dimension of the novel to which Forster is alluding is always deferred, conditioned by politics, especially by the politics of friendship and race. In this respect, I think Wicomb's novel has a thematic connection to Forster's most famous work.

[25] The desire for propriety as a desire for the English language and Englishness is a persistent theme in Wicomb's work, going all the way back to the very first story in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*, in which Frieda's mother yearns above all to pronounce English words properly, as does the wealthy Englishman who owns the mine (19).

[26] I mean English, though Afrikaans is, of course, derived from colonial Dutch and German. Wicomb is surely aware that the 'home language' of many Cape coloured people is a bastard form of colonial languages.

Therefore, the 'home language' of these people is always one that has done an incalculable harm throughout their history.

[27] Andrew van der Vlies points out that "Blinkoog is almost certainly not a figment of Wicomb's imagination, but rather based on Jan Schoeman, an itinerant storyteller and artist based at Prince Albert Road in the Great Karoo, who styles himself as Outa Lappies, the cloth man" (586). As such, Van der Vlies argues that the inclusion of this character implicitly raises questions about the ethical appropriation of others' stories (587). This issue of appropriation is interrogated more directly by the conclusion of the novel, when the identity of the narrator is thrown into doubt.

[28] For more on these and other intertextual references in the novel, see Daymond ("Shadow Stories") and Klopper ("Place of Nostalgia"). I am indebted to both of these fine critics for much I will say about the novel's ending.

[29] See Derrida (*Politics of Friendship* 275–77). In brief, Derrida here discusses the difference between a friendship defined by politics and one which is based on singularity.

[30] It is worth noting that this choice of ending parallels that of *A Passage to India*, in which Aziz and Fielding, who have also had to overcome bitter political and racial divisions, find their desire for friendship frustrated at the very end of the novel, just when it seems most possible.

[31] Notably, Van der Vlies is quite adamant that Brenda must be the narrator of the story, and his evidence in support of this argument is quite strong (see "The Archive, the Spectral" 594–96). I am, nevertheless, unsure that it is wise to foreclose on the possibility that Marion may yet be the narrator, or that the narrator may be an amalgamation of the two women's versions of things. Principally, I disagree with Van der Vlies's certainty in this matter because it obscures the extent to which the entire text suggests that all narration is an act of complicity, and the product of a web of responsibility.

[32] The last sentence in the novel reads: "[h]er thumb flicks at the lock before she shuts the door with a quiet click" (218). The use of the personal pronoun means that the person who closes the door could be either Marion or Brenda. I would think the ambiguity is deliberate and relates, yet again, to the impossibility of deciding, once and for all, who narrates the story. The conclusions I draw from this last event in the novel are valid no matter to whom the pronoun refers.

[33] While Van der Vlies's article deals with the issue of narrative responsibility in (and for) the novel, he does not really address any of these questions, except indirectly.

Chapter Two: Following the Un-followable Issa Shamshuddin through Ishtiyaq Shukri's *The Silent Minaret*

Introduction

Unlike *Playing in the Light*, which is distrustful of the very notions of home, privacy, safety and comfort, Ishtiyaq Shukri's prize-winning novel, *The Silent Minaret*, seems to grieve the irrevocable loss of an inviolable space to which, he would argue, we are all entitled. The tone of Wicomb's novel is grave, detached, cool and critical – surely a reflection of its tragically detached focaliser, Marion. In contrast, the tone of Shukri's writing is elegiac, wistful, infused with great pain and quiet dignity. It is as if the very things with which Wicomb has no truck, belonging and home in particular, he can scarcely bear to live without.

Playing in the Light takes its readers on what is a necessarily incomplete journey that traces the (stunted) development of Marion Campbell. She learns of the limits of race, and finds that there are others outside her frame of reference that are negated by a limitless conception of whiteness. By contrast, I would like to argue that it is impossible to follow Issa Shamshuddin, the protagonist of *The Silent Minaret*, through the novel. His absence is a loss that cannot be registered and, as such, he represents an otherness that history inevitably attempts to subdue or negate. The reader is obliged not to follow that well-travelled path set out by history, not to deny Issa his right to remain other, and instead to follow him by not following. While the reader may be troubled by the violence that has led to his disappearance, s/he can only grieve for his absence, but cannot and should not attempt to recuperate what is irreversibly gone.

Mourning what should never be losable is certainly what gives this writer's work its extraordinary quality, as well as its plot. The novel describes an English summer in the lives of those few family members and friends left behind to mourn the abrupt disappearance of Issa Shamshuddin from his London flat in 2003. It is the story of two mothers, one biological, the other simply one by virtue of love, who must face what one knows no parent should, that is, losing a child. Kagiso, reared as Issa's brother, must endure the loss of a person who was both family member and friend (though the two are estranged by the time the latter moves to England). While it might seem that Frances is the least likely of Issa's mourners, a 'mere neighbour', the novel makes it clear how much this old woman relies on him. Her daily routine is dependent on him: he opens her eyes to ideas and concepts she never knew existed, and is her only real friend. And finally there is Katinka – the daughter of violent,

conservative, racist Afrikaans parents – who rejects her upbringing and aligns herself with the non-racial ideals which are so crucial to Issa. Since it crosses so many political and racial barriers, their friendship seems almost miraculous. Then he vanishes from her life as imperceptibly as he entered it. She must cope with this absence, even as she is coping with the loss of her Palestinian lover whom she met in London, and who has since moved back to his country of birth. Surely, the novel suggests, it should not be possible that one loses two such intimate friends virtually simultaneously. Yet she does. And, what is even worse, precious few know of her double heartache, nor would most care if they did. This is the great irony which infuses this novel with so much tragedy: that which should not happen, happens all the time. Mothers lose their sons, brothers lose each other, friends and lovers are separated. History is interested in neither these individual losses nor the sorrow that comes into the home at any hour, unannounced and without right of permission. For, as I shall demonstrate, when tragedy enters the home, this is to say, as the home is violated and rendered un-homely, history enters too. Invasive and utterly indifferent, it trespasses where we most hope it will show respect, and it leaves us bereft.

Though Issa is in London to complete a PhD on the effects of the very first Dutch settlement in the Cape on the indigenous population, he becomes deeply troubled by an uncanny sense that the events happening on the world stage at the time are an awful repetition of those his research so meticulously details under the curious banner of 'history'. On a more personal level, he was an active member of youth organisations and the United Democratic Front (UDF) during the tumultuous late 1980s and early 1990s – when so many died or were tortured as the apartheid regime tried ever harder to maintain control over an increasingly ungovernable mass movement. In London, years later, what he sees before his very eyes is history repeating itself: the allied forces' invasion of Afghanistan and then of Iraq is horrific to Issa who poignantly mutters that "*[t]here's nothing there to bomb. There's nothing left to bomb*" (Shukri 93). Similarly, for the ever conscientious and once politically radical Issa, the anti-Muslim sentiment which is rising in the supposedly cosmopolitan city of London and which seems all too often to be sanctioned and even politicised by the authorities,[1] is all too familiar. He is appalled by what he perceives to be yet another form of apartheid brutality, perpetrated in the name of freedom against a defenceless community. And, just as apartheid was little more than an extension of practices first initiated for commercial gain by colonial powers, so too, according to him, is this new 'War on Terror' merely a ruse for the global imperial demands of the American-led Allied West.[2] In sum, both the South African apartheid history he was forced to live through and which he actively opposed as well as the

history on which he writes are not over; he senses that they have morphed and adapted but are "universally and eternally pertinent", as he writes in the beginning of his thesis (65). Or, as Eric Auerbach would have it, "history therefore includes the present" (qtd. in Shukri 65). Not coincidentally, this is a quotation Issa has on his wall as an ever-present reminder of the fact that history is always told from the perspective of the victor and that, as such, its primary purpose is to legitimise the hegemony of those who rule in the present (Auerbach, "Concept of History" 391).

Sadly though, the quotation is more 'present' in his flat, or for that matter, the novel itself, than Issa ever is. He is a vanished hero, an absent protagonist. Just as his family search futilely for him, so too does the reader of *The Silent Minaret*. Even in the few chapters which are about him when he is still an active member of society (relatively speaking), Issa is disturbingly quiet, reserved, and at times absurdly obtuse in his interactions with others and the world at large. Furthermore, in the present of the novel, he is simply gone. His character is only revealed through reminiscence, which is why, I think, his speech is rendered in italics rather than being contained within quotation marks (as is the case with all the other characters). The use of italics gives one a sense that his words are ephemeral, since they are probably inaccurately recalled, and subject to the vagaries of memory. What is clear is that they are not the words of a person who will ever return to take his place at the centre of his narrative.

The attendant notion of a search which leads nowhere will inform much of my reading of the novel. I will argue that the text enacts a kind of following which is not following, or non-following perhaps. In effect, what I believe *The Silent Minaret* attempts is to destabilise the very notion of travel, of movement, particularly as the concept implies a home, a space which is familiar, and a 'foreign' world beyond which one might then visit. While the plot (which centres a great deal on the transnational movements of the characters) might seem to suggest that the text is informed by cosmopolitan notions of the ubiquitous routines of travel on both a limited and global scale in modern society, I would argue that it actually stages a disillusionment with what such travel has enabled. Rather than advertising the supposed advantages of transnational flight – in particular, the 'jet-set', cosmopolitan life that is thought to be possible for the modern subject because of international travel – Shukri seeks to make his reader aware of the cost of such border crossing. It allows invasion on what is arguably the grandest scale the world has ever known. Jane Poyner, following Paul Gilroy, argues that this world, created by George W. Bush and Tony Blair's political, economic, military and ideological 'War on Terror', is characterised by what she calls "a 'quasi'

armoured mode of cosmopolitanism" which is designed along racial lines, and uses the language of humanism and cosmopolitanism to justify military and political interventions such as the Afghanistan and Iraq wars (319).

I would add that the novel suggests that just as the allied forces send their armies into sovereign states, or send their bombs to obliterate what Issa assures one are the poorest infrastructures imaginable, so too does history invade every home, every private space. These two forms of invasion are intimately related, the former really nothing more than the highly visible effect of the latter. Furthermore, these intrusions are predicated on a process whereby all that is other is reduced to the unfamiliar, unusual and foreign. Shukri's text is wary of travel and its theoretical benefits because it is informed by an ethical wish to avoid such easy, often violent, reductions. The cosmopolitan society, as Derrida has informed us, should be infinitely hospitable (see *Of Hospitality* 4–5). Each limit placed on hospitality to the other therefore enacts a limitation of the cosmopolitan nature of society. In this chapter, I will attempt to show that while Shukri's work mourns the loss of the inviolable home, it does so precisely because the cosmopolitan dream has yet to be achieved. In other words, for as long as history curtails our ability to be radically hospitable, by defining the conditions under which the guest is received, this writer implies that people are in need of places which are safe from that very history. Ironically, what makes such spaces of safety impossible is a brutally invasive master narrative which cannot be put in its place, subdued, or limited. Even in living quarters as barren as Issa's, historical discourse crowds one out.

Hence, more and more, Issa rejects this unbearable, violent, indifferent 'guest'. Indeed, as I will hope to show, there is much evidence to suggest that his disappearance, which some interpret as evidence that he has been taken by nefarious forces (perhaps even sanctioned by the English government) or that he has become militant, is actually his final and most radical renunciation of history and its claims to his mind and body. The reader is therefore asked to follow a character that can no longer be encapsulated in language or any other means by which subjects are inscribed in society. This following becomes, as I have said, a non-following, which destabilises the sense that one 'belongs' to history, even as it asserts that one cannot but do so. In effect, Issa becomes the radically unknowable other for whom the reader must be unlimitedly hospitable. Like those who loved him and are left behind, the reader's affection for this character must stop short of 'knowing' him by 'knowing' what has happened to him. S/he must accept not only that Issa is gone, but that knowledge of what has become of him is not owed to him/her. At a literally unknowable price, he has shed the self

he is within society, and the responsible reader must not impose on him a narrative which his absence, by definition, repels.

In the final section of this chapter, I will focus directly on the form of love which Shukri seems to regard as the only valid response to the atrocities of history. Love is impossible, the novel seems to admit. Subjects are too limited by nationalist and racial discourses, by the demands of Western capitalist society, and by the violent fear of what is unlike themselves to care in the extraordinary way that Shukri implies one must. Yet, because this is impossible, it is also necessary. In a sense, then, as it is depicted in the novel, love is a gift given beyond measure, beyond self. It is a message sent to one (like Issa) who may never receive it, which is nevertheless sent for his/her benefit and not the sender's. I will argue that such a message cannot be codified and commodified, and must instead be singular and unreadable in general terms. Conventional notions of love are therefore incommensurate with the kind of care and concern that Shukri advocates. It follows that the representations of selfless love in the novel are a form of resistance to late capitalism (and its military might). These achingly fragile forms of love, least likely to enact change, are all the characters seem able to muster in the face of the horrific violence which enters their lives daily. They matter little and yet they are all the characters have left. Like the young man who no reader will find, however much s/he may look, these "pockets of connection" and love are sure to vanish (Steiner 53). Still, the reader must search for what can never be found. S/he is obliged to look for love, though we all know that love is impossible in times like these.

Method: An Exception to the Rule

Shukri's text presents the reader with inherent methodological difficulties. Indeed, it seems singularly resistant to analysis. It is not that it does not yield to the typical narratological practice that focusses on theme, style, plot, imagery, characterisation, and so on. Such an analysis is readily accessible to any reader who might attempt it. However, in my opinion, it leads nowhere. A reading of the novel that emphasises its narrative elements belongs to the world from which Issa has vanished. By definition, then, it cannot lead to him. Whether by choice or by others' will, he is no longer in the text, which he nevertheless haunts, and all meaning one might derive from it has no bearing on him. It is as if he walked off the pages of history, and away from the reader too, when he walked out of his 'normal' life. Even the most conscientious reader is left to feel that his/her compassion for this character can do little to

help him. On the contrary, s/he is faced with the awful sense that s/he belongs to the world that has victimised Issa. Reading, in particular literary analysis, in which one sheds light on what is hidden or obscure, begins to feel like the exertion of force. Revelation begins to resemble cruelty. Clarity looks more and more clearly like violence.

The problem for Shukri's readers is the totality of Issa's absence. Where he is, we cannot go; where he is not, we are left. For this reason, his 'story' (assuming we can still call it that) also cannot be used as an example. For instance, while I too shudder when I read of the riot police battering down the doors of the Ghasia Jamia Mosque, terrorising a community in the process, I cannot take Issa's lead and leave the world behind. If, as the novel implies, he is exceptional, unusual, exemplary, and his loss the greater because of that, his path is nevertheless not one the text allows the reader to follow.[3] If I may put it this way (and indeed I shall insist on the phrasing, for reasons I shall soon explain), Issa has *gone home*. For his 'readers', there is the more daunting, terrible prospect of continuing in a world deprived of the solace of home, precisely because they belong to the history which causes that deprivation.

As I have said, the problem for the critic is one of method. Following the text wherever it may lead is simply not an option. Even assuming that such a form of reading were possible in general (and I am in no way convinced that it is), it should already be clear that it is distinctly impossible when the work 'leads' beyond its limits, which are the limits of history. Conversely, one must ask what type of reading it is which does not follow the text, faithfully, with fidelity. Is not the worst kind of reading one which ignores the text, what *it is* or *would like to be*, not even necessarily so as to say what it *is not*, but perhaps to assert whatever one wishes (one's own ideas, prejudices, knowledge)? Bad faith circles such a 'method' in every direction.

What is therefore at stake is what might be possible were one to follow, to walk the path and adhere to the rules, precisely *by not following*. Can one be led to the extent that one exceeds the leader, and even exceeds oneself? Can excess mark the rule, even when it demonstrates the limitations of all rules? Could Issa – who the text suggests is an exceptionally bright young doctoral student, quiet, loyal, politically conscientious – be the exception to the rule? When Issa rules himself beyond the control of modern laws and systems of surveillance, could it be that he marks the space where the rules and laws falter before what Derrida has called *The Law* (see *Specters of Marx* 74), which enables all other laws by signalling their limitations? If the rhetorical nature of my questions gestures at affirmative answers, they should, I hope, yet hold a degree of indeterminacy that I am

hesitant of violating. Exceptionality and rule both risk that violation as they tend toward purity. I am nevertheless inclined to argue that there is perhaps a form and a method which would resist that tendency, and would be exceptional for being a rule that could never be followed. *The Silent Minaret* is an extraordinary novel, unique in its way. It demands such a method.

Notably, the novel begins by asserting its own methodological problems. In the poem which prefaces the narrative, the speaker wonders if the violence that cracks cities might lead to cracked "stories too / their scaffolding / collapsing" (Shukri n.pag). S/he then describes "trawl[ing] the fragments lying disarranged, / searching this side and that" (n.pag). At various points in the poem, s/he confesses to the futility of this search in which one only ever finds "skeletons of silence" (n.pag). Daunted by the absences, the speaker salvages what s/he can, which amounts to "collage – / pieces, / mosaic pictures hobbled together from fragments" (n.pag). And, finally, the last lines read as an apology (for what has or will be produced, but also, in its way, for what has been lost): "I'm sorry it's so disarranged, like ravaged cities / cracking" (n.pag).

Shukri's poem asks the reader (for whom he writes), how it is possible to write when, daily, the humiliation and degradation caused by history ensures that the places in which the majority of modern subjects live are left in disarray, cracked and "disintegrating". It implies that there might be no story left to write when the most common geographic and social location of the modern story is irrevocably ruined, "like china heirlooms / smashing", and when the crack or the fissure robs people of comfort, of solace, identity, even the right to their memories. The poem's final apologetic comments seem ruinously ironic, a call for forgiveness for a crime it could not help but commit. Implicitly, the poem suggests that there is something or someone else who should apologise. The reader is then led to wonder where the one is who caused the cracks, and why s/he is not being held accountable. In the absence of that apology, which would acknowledge wrongdoing and that others have been hurt, Shukri's "sorry" seems late to the party, as if it is limping on behind what it can neither subdue nor defy.

The poem, which acts as the novel's preface, announces that it cannot but follow in the wake of its master: history. Already, before the narrative proper of *The Silent Minaret* has even begun, one is aware that history is the *master narrative*. Shukri must therefore write as one of its servants, an apologetic one perhaps, though his servitude is undeniable. That is thus not where his uncertainty lies. Rather, he is unsure of exactly how to perform his duty. If he must write after history, which ravages stories, forcing them to collapse, then how can he do

his work? Like any good servant, he will do what he can, that is, salvage the broken bits, collecting them in the "disarranged" order in which they present themselves. What is not clear, however, is the value of this labour. One gets the sense from the poem that stories should be more than bits and pieces, "skeletons of silence". Those better, more coherent and full stories belong to another world. It is one in which the city has not cracked, and in which the place where the story occurs can still be thought of as home.

There is no doubt something nostalgic and therefore perhaps even naive about this desire for a better world in which better stories can be told, particularly since Shukri associates it with the city, a location that, arguably, has always been heterogeneous, scattered, riven with conflict – in a word, cracked. Too much is made by this writer of the damaged city, and indirectly he suggests to the reader that the world was an inherently more cohesive, communal space before the violence of not only the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001, but also the harm done in the retribution sought for those acts. Perhaps, it is true, some aspects of civic life were easier before those tragic incidents but, given that the novel goes to such pains to reveal the connections between that violence and much older forms of oppression (the rise of colonialism and modernity in general), the suggestion that the city's destruction has created a 'new' or palpably 'different' kind of suffering seems a logical inconsistency.[4]

Nevertheless, "When Cities Crack" (the poem's title), at the very least, alerts the reader to the fact that this 'better world' is no longer retrievable, and certainly not through the limited means of storytelling. Like the shattered china, what is broken is priceless and can never be put back together. Similarly, Issa is un-locatable, his story now un-tellable, and in his absence those around him are left broken, fragmented, unsure – as, of course, is the narrative which describes their plight. It is for this reason that I would argue that he has gone to the 'better world', the more homely world in which the value of home is left intact. Shukri's novel will not follow Issa there – not because it does not wish to do so, but because it cannot. Even if it would like to be in the service of that other world, it has another master.

Routines and Rituals

One of the most dominant tropes in *The Silent Minaret* is that of rituals and routines. This focus on habitual behaviour is related to Issa's disappearance through the notion of following. What the text does, I will argue, is represent some rituals which, like Issa, cannot be followed. Frances, his aged upstairs neighbour, for instance, observes religious practices

which have a strangeness about them that cannot be generalised and therefore repeated. Significantly, it is she who first recognises that he is missing. She knows his daily routines well, has come to rely on them after nearly three years "creaking around each other's lives between cheap paper-thin walls" (13). It is she who informs Issa's biological mother, Vasinthe, and the reader too, that he woke early, listened to the news report on the radio first thing in the morning, and that he played the same unidentified piece of music repeatedly while he worked on his PhD (which was for most of the rest of each day). She knows that he rarely had guests, and that he bathed many times a day, in particular whenever he had come in from the outside. So reassuring does she find his daily routines that she begins to coordinate her own day-to-day life to the rhythm of his. For example, her morning prayers are always recited as he is listening to his news broadcasts. Little wonder, then, that "his movements downstairs [. . .] became a comforting, harmonious accompaniment to her own lonely life" (13).

To many, the lives of these two people might seem small, limited, banal – even dull. Certainly, it speaks to Issa's nature that at the age of twenty-nine (the age, that is, at which he moves to England), the best friend he will make in London is a widow who scarcely leaves her apartment (except to go to church, which is yet another routine). Yet, I think one should be hesitant in assuming that either of these lives lacks meaning or purpose. To illustrate this point, I would like to consider another curious routine that the two share: Frances recalls that, whenever Issa went out to the shops, "[h]e always knocked on the ceiling to see if [she] wanted anything. [She] would knock back, once for no or twice for yes. If [she] knocked twice, he'd come scaling up the stairs, three or four at a time as he used to, to see what he could get [her]" (19). Rather than describing such behaviour as boring or unremarkable, I am tempted to call it hospitable, neighbourly and domestic. In fact, leaving aside for now the quite remarkable feat of a twenty-something former activist and academic from South Africa sharing, so intimately, a life with a lower-middle-class Christian English woman, it is still extraordinary to see the comfort with which Issa and Frances interact. They have ways of communicating (one knock for no, two for yes), they *care for each other* (by which I mean that they feel affection for one another but also that they take care of each other), and their shared routines make them feel *at home*.

Routine, however, is often conceived of as the very 'thing' which makes the idea of home so dangerous.[5] What is habitually experienced, what is comfortable at home, may nullify the possibility of experiencing something else, something unexpected, by which I mean the other. Accordingly, one is obliged to abandon the deadening drudgery of what is

routine and comfortable in favour of what is completely unfamiliar, that is, that which cannot be known or determined in advance.

In general terms, this argument has much to recommend it. I have already stated in my previous chapter that it is exactly this danger of not being open to the other that leads Wicomb to reject the trappings of comfort in favour of a more vulnerable, violable, quite radical conception of personal space and one's behaviour within it. *Playing in the Light* seems to imply that one's homes, one's life too, must be susceptible to the other, who might disrupt every routine and habit, demanding an infinite and interminable respect. In exposing oneself to the other, one is also unable to barricade one's door to history, which may then enter carrying with it a violence all its own.

Yet, what if the threat of history were not absolutely and utterly inseparable from the possible coming of the other? Shukri seems to ask why the two must ineluctably be intertwined. His work suggests that what makes the experience of alterity impossible is history itself. Too general, too iterative, too committed to ensuring the will of whichever empire is in vogue at the time, it cannot account for that which is singular, vulnerable and/or un-representable in conventional terms (or un-representable in any terms for that matter). In the face of that which cannot and does not coincide with its terms of reference, what choice is there but to misrepresent, misunderstand, even destroy? By being absolutely ulterior and anterior to historical discourse, the other reveals the limits of that so-called master narrative. Alterity is the most absolute challenge to the will of history and it is so exactly because it does not present itself in contrast to the discursive practices of history, or in any relation to it at all. The other is not the antithesis of the historical. Instead, it can be thought of as that which is never encapsulated fully by any thesis, be it negative or affirmative. As I will show in due course, the ritual which Shukri valorises draws on this postulation of what might be possible beyond history. For that reason, he implies that ritual need not negate alterity; it can work in the service of the latter (provided, of course, that somehow history can be overcome). Shukri's rituals can themselves be considered other.

If the absolute alterity of the other is singularly resistant to the force of historical discourse, it is, for that very reason, also particularly vulnerable to being misrepresented by it. As I have already suggested, history is a hegemonic discourse and, as such, incoherence, discrepancies, anything which undermines or resists its influence, is, more often than not, treated with suspicion and as a threat. As such, there is a political drive which ensures that historical discourse presents itself as limitless by re-inscribing that which falls outside its limits in its own terms.

For instance, Kagiso's grandmother tells the boys of Robert Baden-Powell and the siege of Mafikeng in 1899. The 'facts' are well known: he and a small number of British soldiers defended the town from six thousand Afrikaner soldiers who were under the leadership of Generals Snyman and Cronje. The official version of events states that the British protected the town for "217 brave days" (Shukri 23). Kagiso's grandmother, however, gives the children an alternative version of the story to the one printed in the history books. She recalls the Black Watch, a force of black soldiers who assisted Powell's men in keeping the town. According to her, these men "were forced to survive on less rations during the siege than their British counterparts" (24), and worse still, "at the end of the siege, which had turned Baden-Powell into a national hero in England, not one of [Kagiso's] people so much as saw the glint of a medal" (24). Baden-Powell had also promised the people of Taung land and money, neither of which materialised. She therefore concludes that "your Boy Scouts' Baden-Powell may be a national hero in Jo'burg and London, but here, among our people, he's a lying thief" (25). I do not wish to glibly equate the suppressed story of the valour and then subsequent betrayal by the British of the Black Watch with Derrida's notion of alterity as espoused in his writing on hospitality. However, when the narrator of the novel notes that "[h]istory [is] not intended to capture [that] part of the story" (24), it is instructive to think on what it *does* intend. In the service of a powerful elite, in this case the British Empire, it has little place for stories which reveal that elite as narrow-minded, unjust, ungenerous, and calculating (as Baden-Powell surely was in this affair).

The archive that was generated by colonial authorities is quite simply incomplete. And this lack of completion is neither incidental nor accidental since, as Carolyn Hamilton tells us, the archive is inherently modulated by "complex historical processes (rather than mere accidents of preservation) that have established some things are part of the archive while others are not" (120–21). For this reason, she draws our attention to the fact that "acts of remembering and of forgetting within the archive are the effects of developments in changing public and political discourses" (Hamilton 121). Hamilton's point is put more forcefully by Thomas Docherty (who elaborates on Benjamin's writing on the matter) when he notes that: "historicism benefits and is complicit with the ruling class at the moment of the historian's own writing" (11). Accordingly, Docherty, who I have previously cited on the matter, points out that "[t]he victors in history thus proceed in triumphal procession, bearing with them the spoils of their victory, including those documents which record, legitimise and corroborate the necessity of their victory" (11). He concludes that "[s]uch documents the victors call 'culture'" (11).

To understand culture and in particular the archive as political or, at the very least, as influenced by politics, is scarcely new. That said, it could be argued that the importance of such an understanding is unprecedented in modern society since it may well assist in preventing the kinds of acts of aggression which are becoming so ubiquitous – acts which *The Silent Minaret* describes, if somewhat obliquely. One must remember that the archive is modulated by historical forces because, should one fail to do so, one may be blind to its use as "political rhetoric [. . .] to justify immoral activity, repression and genocide" (Hamilton 120). In other words, an inability to ascertain the political pressures, biases and wills which inform the archive is dangerous because it leads to a failure to apprehend the dissonance between the archival and phenomenological past. Instead, one treats history as fact and ignores its use as ideological justification for the worst kinds of "immoral activity" (be it by a nation, an ethnic group or any other powerful community).[6]

While this understanding of the workings of the archive is valid, it is also problematic to the extent that it negates or denies the role of the individual. In the same collection in which Hamilton's chapter appears, Kwame Anthony Appiah notes the following: "[n]ations do not remember, individuals do. The metaphor of a national memory has to be cashed out in the stories they teach their children, stories produced from oral and written archives" (106). Appiah's point is not irreconcilable with Hamilton's. He would surely agree that there are national (and international) political forces which determine the content, focus and scope of the "circumscribed body of knowledge of the past that is historically determined as that which is available to us to draw on when thinking about the past" (Hamilton 120). However, he would have one realise that the site for such large-scale political machinations is not simply a "national memory" but the individual citizen burdened with holding that memory.

This is almost certainly the point that Shukri makes in his novel when the narrator relays to the reader what Issa does, as a young scholar, with the 'forgotten history' that Kagiso's grandmother has passed on to him. In class, he repeats her words, Baden-Powell is a "lying thief", to Mr Thompson, a history teacher and the "leader of the northern suburbs branch of the Scouts and a long-time admirer of the Colonel" (26). Despite jeers from his classmates – they call him "Dreamer, schemer, history's cleaner" (26), a line that becomes more apposite than they would ever have imagined – Issa is determined. He finds an expert on the South African War, and he compiles a thorough report which proves the role of the Black Watch.[7] Mr Thompson, though, will have none of it; "History cannot be rewritten" for "History *is*", he tells the boy. Undeterred, Issa refuses the oppressive notion of an unequivocal history and instead writes Kagiso's grandmother's version of things as his

examination answer. His essay leads to his being awarded his one and only B (rather than an A) in Matric. Kagiso recalls that, while Issa was "never given to excessive displays of emotion", when he saw this mark "he lost the struggle to fight back the tears as a huge drop fell, plop, on the official advice of results" (26–27).

In the grander scheme of things, this is a quite small example of the way in which those able to authorise 'History' refuse variant or forgotten histories for decidedly political reasons. Mr Thompson's rejection of the other version of things, and the mark he awards Issa as a result, as well as the pain and humiliation that the young man suffers thereafter, are not significant when compared to, say, the end of apartheid or the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. However, it is exactly this line of thinking which this sequence in the novel reveals as wanting. What is it to say that some or other event is 'not that important' in the 'grand scheme of things'? It is surely to reify history at the expense of the individual. When Appiah obliges his reader to contend with the fact that "[n]ations do not remember, individuals do", there is an ethical dimension to that statement which must not be ignored. Historical discourse is inherently violent and reductive because it denies agency, value and respect to the individual. If, however, national memory is only ever recalled by such singular persons, then they do indeed have an inestimable value. In effect, there can be no history, no nation and no national archive, without the individual. This is true even if, at some level, history is also, paradoxically, the very thing which most violates and disempowers individuals.

Issa's pain is therefore not insignificant for it is the outcome of having been made to feel insignificant, and of being told that his story does not matter. His encounter with Mr Thompson is just another example (but an exemplary one) of the way in which the individual is burdened with remembering and recalling that for which the grand narrative has no place. And yet, at the same time, said individual is also forced (more or less) to be the site for a nationally acceptable memory, which s/he may personally reject only on the basis of a profound and terrible loss of power and voice.

These two forms of memory – the public or national and the private, intimate – are in constant conflict within each person. The more one's memory falls in line with the national archive, the more easily one is able to cope with the manifold insidious and overt ways in which the public invades one's personal sense of privacy. In a sense, one allows one's private and individualised ontological and experiential response to history to be overcome and overwhelmed by the public discourse. Conversely, the more one clings to unique, forgotten recollections, the more one finds oneself at odds with the discourse of tribe, nation and global-capitalist society in general.

Issa, more than most would ever dare, rejects the standard narrative that is imposed on him. An instance of such rejection, which is emblematic of his attitude to most normative discourses, occurs when he and Kagiso are travelling from the Cape to their family home in Johannesburg. The brothers have an exchange about a place on the map called Asmara. According to the map, it is in Ethiopia, and since Kagiso has clearly never heard of it before, he accepts the accuracy of this. But Issa does not, and will not condone what he perceives as misinformation: "[*f*]*orget about maps. They don't show things as they are. Asmara is in Eritrea*", he informs his brother. Kagiso is doubtful: "'Eritrea?' He scrutinises the map. 'Don't see it.'" The discussion ends with the following dialogue:

> *That's because it's still a dream. Maps don't show dreams either. Only nightmares*.
> 'But in reality, Asmara is still in Ethiopia.'
> *Not to the people of Asmara. Not to those men and women dying on the battlefield for their convictions. To them, Asmara is in Eritrea and will one day be its capital.*
>
> (61)

It is unsurprising, really, that Issa should know of the fight for Eritrean Independence. He clearly believes in being informed about such matters – hence his ritual of listening to the news each day while he lives in London. What is slightly unusual, though, is his choice of language. Why is it that he says that maps cannot show dreams, "[o]nly nightmares"? The statement causes one to reflect on how Issa conceives of the relationship between the 'real', on the one hand, and dreams and nightmares, on the other. It seems to me that the geographical map which his brother has is doubly inaccurate. At one level, it is problematic because it fails to show what is, and instead only gives a nightmare version of reality. Yet Issa's words seem to imply more than just that; they suggest that what is considered 'real' is not itself real (enough?), precisely because it does not or cannot account for the hopes and dreams of marginalised people. These two levels of inaccuracy are readily understood in light of the complicity of cartography and imperialism, which has been considered with a great deal of sensitivity by various postcolonial writers. For instance, Nicola Renger observes that

> [m]apmaking is 'one among the imperial arts, whereby territory, empire are imagined, inscribed, maintained.' Imperial cartography compresses the three-dimensional world into two dimensions, with the conviction that reality is being truthfully represented. The projection serves as physical orientation in the world and as a means of taking possession of culturally and historically 'empty' and 'uninhabited' territory.
>
> (111)

Renger goes even further, adding that "mapmaking tends to *draw a territory into existence*, while simultaneously making the native population invisible" (112, my emphasis). Accordingly, while "the mimetic claim of a map seems to validate the reality of the boundaries drawn and the territorial claims of the colonizer", the 'reality' of such borders could not exist without the map (112). The boundaries, borders and internal integrity of a territory are not just represented by a map but are drawn "into existence" by it (112). It follows that the discursive dimension of cartography, while presenting itself as "mimetic", is, in fact, generative. What is 'real' is not simply misrepresented by the various discourses (among them, notably, narrativised history, cartography, and the many strains of nationalism) which become ever more prevalent as the imperial project takes shape. Rather, reality is itself *constituted* on the basis of those representations which are, supposedly, supplementary.[8] Maps create 'versions of reality' while appearing to be merely records of an absolute, undeniable reality which preceded their construction. Accordingly, what we ineffectually call 'reality' should instead be understood as the effect of the normative power of discursive representation. (It should be obvious that Barthes' notion of the "reality-effect" which produces realism is relevant here [148].)[9] What *is*, one should acknowledge, amounts to little more than what has been authorised as representable. "Is" is a dangerous word, really: hidden within it are the ghosts of innumerable untold stories.

This violence which mimesis obscures and even performs is why Issa describes the 'reality' of the map as a "*nightmare*", incapable of including dreams. Neither dreams nor nightmares belong to the order of the phenomenally real. Nonetheless, both have the ability to modify and to create what we think of as real. Reality, then, is the effect of the representational forces which have acted on it to create a generally acceptable, generally normative image of things. For this reason, the consensual process by which discourse defines the world is a nightmare from which one cannot easily awaken. Supposedly, narrativised history is an accurate (mimetic) representation of society and its territories because it is the story all subjects of society have implicitly agreed upon. As Shukri shows, though, some people have little or no say over most aspects of the story the world tells about them. Their dreams can be ignored, their pain easily disregarded. They may fight and die for the right to establish a home or homeland (as did those who fought for Eritrean independence, for example), but that does not mean that history will grant them a safe space. "History *is*", chides Mr Thompson. If, however, what 'is' ignores what so many live and dream each day, then history's very ontic status is premised on suffering.

The maps of the world (in spite of their overtly stated purpose) are unofficial records of loss, dispossession, the vulnerability and terror of individuals, as well as the will and might of Empire. Those who drew the maps (that is, those who are authorised to 'map' history) are cartographers of domination, subjugation and alienation. In fact, they do more than merely record, since their records enact those very processes. What the maps do is recast people's dreams, and reformulate them as a never-ending horror which they see even when their eyes are open. To look on the map is to face one cold, terrifying truth, which is not the truth of space represented in two-dimensional form, but the fact that there is no space, no space at all, for the individual. His/her life is lived wandering lost and abandoned because his/her home and homeland has been re-thought by history. Though an individual must live in the places on the map, those spaces are not his/her home and never can be.[10]

These matters of dispossession and disempowerment have a very personal dimension for Issa. What he thinks of as his family and his family's home are the exact kinds of narratives (and spaces) that the apartheid government sought to obliterate. He is the child of a Muslim father and a Hindu mother, and while the apartheid state never explicitly segregated these two faiths and cultures, one cannot help but feel that Issa's very conception must have seemed an insult to the spirit of 'separate existence' (even if it did not break any of its laws). Moreover, what constitutes his family goes well beyond biology. The black woman and her son, who come to live with his mother on the very day Issa is born, are his other mother and his brother. In fact, since it is intimated that his father was probably beating Vasinthe on the day of his birth, and was most likely chased away for good by Gloria, I would say that the novel is deeply critical of basing family on mere genetics. It is possible that a person who is biologically related to you can do little to justify the designation, while those who have not blood but love and respect in common can come to feel like home. Certainly, given the vast, ultimately quite futile legislation which the colonial and then apartheid regimes put in place in order to establish a 'biological basis' for race and community, this family's choice to be together in the name of something that is difficult to legislate, quantify and define, namely love, reflects (again) that they have never fitted well into the national narratives of the day. While Ma Gloria lives in the house under the pretence of being a domestic worker, it has been years since she was last asked to clean anything. And there is another factor to consider: while it is not overtly stated, there is nevertheless the possibility that Vasinthe and Gloria are lovers (for more on this see Steiner 65). I think it is an elegant decision on Shukri's part to leave this relationship undefined. Why is it that one needs such definition, his text implicitly asks. The two women love each other. Would it really explicate or elucidate anything to

define and know the exact nature of that love? To put it slightly differently, can one call something love only once it has been defined by the standards of history and society? As I show in the final section of this chapter, Shukri's text represents several instances of love which exceed convention, and are, in a sense, as illegible as the vanished Issa.

In any event, this families' love for each other is, for obvious reasons, under constant threat. The two mothers are all too aware that at any minute their fragile family might be ripped apart. So as to prepare Kagiso and Issa for this eventuality, they teach the boys the game of "hide and seek". It is sometimes played indoors, thereby ensuring that both learn to find "more and more elaborate" hiding places (Shukri 84). Considering that it is child's play, it is unusually serious, which the reader is able to ascertain when Kagiso remembers one round of play during which "Ma Gloria even took them to hide in the neighbour's kitchen" by throwing them "over the back wall, before jumping over the wall herself and spraining her ankle" (84). The pleasure of the game resides, quite importantly, not just in being hidden, but also in being found. The boys squeal with laughter and cling to Ma Gloria's skirt whenever found and the two women nod "reassuringly at each other" (84). "Hide and seek" clearly teaches the children important lessons, not least of which is an intimate knowledge of the house and the best places to remain hidden in it. But also, like Ernst's game of "*fort/da*", which Freud famously described in "Beyond the Pleasure Principle", the game played by these boys reassures them that the mother will return. Freud's analysis of his grandson's game is barely three-pages long, and it constitutes one among many examples or incidents in which he attempts to consider what instincts or impulses of mental activity might not be regulated, in the final analysis, by the "Pleasure Principle". His musings on the game (and it would be difficult to call them more than musings, as he is by no means rigorous in his treatment of the child's activity) is ended by a series of postulations. One of these is the possibility that Ernst played the game because he related the spool to the mother's occasional disappearances. Accordingly, Freud's hypothesises that "[i]t may perhaps be said [. . .] that her departure had to be enacted as a necessary preliminary to her joyful return, and that it was in the latter that lay the true purpose of the game" (Freud 15–16).[11] The same pleasure can certainly be argued to derive from the game of "hide and seek" which Issa and Kagiso play with their mothers. Being found reassures them that even if one of them should disappear or leave, the loss can be experienced as pleasure (or as regulated by the "Pleasure Principle", to use Freud's terminology), since it is temporary and always accompanied by the *coming back to presence* of the mother. Presence marks the rule of the game: they hide so that she (the mother, both of them) will find them and return them to safety.

In fact, I would argue that this game is even more complex in its Oedipal undertones than Freud's grandson's little ritual with the spool and string. First, while Kagiso and Issa must temporarily suffer the absence of the mother, they do so while being hidden (and kept safe) by the mother (their other one). Secondly, this game involves acquainting themselves with the house. Apart from the occasion on which they used the neighbour's kitchen, all other occurrences involve learning of the intimate nooks and crannies of their own property. If, as Freud has elsewhere asserted, the home is associated in psychic activity with the womb and/or female genitalia (see "The Uncanny" 245), then the brothers are hiding in the comfort of the 'home-as-mother'. At no point during the game is presence ever denied or deferred. Even whilst hiding away from their mother, they are with their mother and are, in the symbolic sense, *in their mother*. When Vasinthe finally finds them, she only confirms what they have always known, which is that they are safe in the profound presence of maternal love.

Sadly, though, the absolute safety and pleasure of the game does not (and cannot) last. Kagiso recalls that each instance of it was always begun by the elaborate pretence of a knock at the door. The boys and Gloria then hid, while Vasinthe answered the door. But on one occasion, he remembers that "they didn't have enough time to find a good hiding place, [so] they scrambled under Vasinthe's bed and waited" (84–85). According to him,

> [t]hat was an eerie round and they didn't enjoy it very much. It frightened them and, even though Ma Vasinthe said that they were imagining things, they knew that from under the bed they had seen the boots of the dreaded Black Jacks come to drag Kagiso and Ma Gloria away.
>
> (85)

Kagiso observes – with a bitter, regretful tone – that "after that, they enjoyed the game less and less" (85). What they find "eerie" or frightening and sinister is obviously the uncanny sense that their beloved and familiar game has come under threat from that which is unfamiliar.[12] Not coincidentally, the *Unheimlich* nature of the memory owes much to the fear (a valid one) that Gloria and Kagiso may lose their home. Even if Issa and Vasinthe are in less danger of that form of literal dispossession, one should consider what their home and homelife would amount to without the other half of their family. As I have argued throughout this study, the home is always more than the physical structure which the word denotes.

Un-homed by the uncanny knowledge that the violent, reductive world outside has disrupted the pleasure of their favourite pastime, they can no longer enjoy it as they once did. From the moment the "Black Jacks" (a nickname given to the apartheid South African police

force) arrive, they realise implicitly that they are not assured of the return of the mother. She can be taken away; she can disappear and never return. Similarly, the 'house-as-mother' can be lost. At any moment, the "Black Jacks" can ensure that where once there was a home, there is now only the haunting memory of it. Where once there was love, safety and joy, there is now only absence, uncertainty and damage.

In my previous chapter, I discussed the serious, terrible form of 'play' in which Helen and John Campbell engage. Their 'game' involves performing whiteness even in the privacy of their own home. By doing so, I argued, they violate their own privacy – that is, they ensure that society, history and violence enter the home at the expense of their private lives. In the game of "hide and seek", a similar violation occurs. While it might have seemed like an innocent form of play, it was designed to minimise the inevitable threat of a hostile world. There is therefore a seriousness to playing it, precisely because playing is the solemn work of negotiating the always violable space between the safety of home (and family) and the violence of history itself. The boots which the children are sure they see are an apt image for the world outside and the grand narrative of hostility which we call history. Like those boots, history stomps on small lives, barges into sacred spaces, and walks past that which it deems insignificant.

When all is said and done, the game has always been geared toward that fateful day when the world would find and destroy the sanctuary that the two mothers had tried so hard to create. And so, though it is supposed to protect the boys, it is premised on the notion that they cannot be protected. No matter how much Vasinthe and Gloria may love each other and their children, and no matter where they may hide, devastation looms large. The very best that they can do is teach the boys to be prepared. A game might seem like a strange tool with which to pass on that lesson, but it is also strangely effective. In playing it, what Kagiso and Issa experience first hand is the precarious, terrifying and fragile limit that exists between safety and danger, love and loss, presence and absence, home and un-home.

The boys' innocence and especially their initial pleasure in playing "hide and seek" are therefore ironic. Their joy is premised on a lack of experience of the violence of the state, an inexperience which the game may have been developed to protect. In reality, however, it is only necessary in the first place because protecting such innocence is impossible. Some time, somehow, the boot of history will come. There will be a knock at the door, and childhood will be over forever.

It is also worth considering the ritualistic nature of the game, since it ties in to the novel's abiding interest in routine. Engaging in the pastime over and over again is not, in this

case, the deadening experience which negates the possibility of absolute hospitality. Children play games in the metaphoric vacuum of innocence, which is, in the strictest sense, an openness and responsiveness to that which is new, undefined and unexpected. Yet, just as innocence is ruined by experience, so too is ritual ruined by history. When a ritual is truly open and hospitable to the strangeness of love, for example, it is also dangerously susceptible to the violations and abuses of state and history. When such violation occurs, a ritual created in love and innocence can indeed become insular, closed off, cold. Like the once pleasurable game that the boys begin to enjoy "less and less", ritual can achieve the opposite of the purpose for which it was intended. If once it was a way of protecting purity and love, it might become a thing from which the innocent recoil in terror.

To explain my point in slightly more general terms, ritual involves repetition. But, as Derrida has argued in so many ways, each repetition is also a *différance* from its origin (and, as such, it always involves difference and deferral). What is repeated is *never* repeated absolutely accurately. For this reason, within the very structure of repetition and ritual there is the possibility of that which was not an element of the original, that which is new, unexpected, other. Ritual need not deny this possibility. It is not inherently designed to do so. The negation of the other by ritualistic behaviour is therefore a product of history. It is a consequence of the moment at which history invades the ritual, and denies or destroys the other by asserting its authority.

The question, then, is what would a ritual be in the absence of history? How could it be enacted and maintained? It would have to be a ritual without rule or definition. More accurately, I would say that it would be *beyond definition*. Engaging in such an activity would involve nothing less than following the un-followable. One would need to do so as a profound act of faith and love. And, not coincidentally, for Shukri, these two concepts, as we shall see, are also beyond definition. They are ungovernable (though governments are constructed in their name, and regimes police them with a fierce, dogmatic desire for control), and they are lawless (though many laws would claim to be based on them or attempt to define them). Love and faith do not correspond with the laws and definitions of history. While they are fragile and always under threat, their excess marks them out as the most important 'entities' (no word is proper to such concepts) in the characters' lives. In the process of practising their respective faiths, and loving each other, they partake of a ritual like no other, that is, a ritual that can never be followed or duplicated – a ritual of profound excess.

Travel, Religion and the Failure of Cosmopolitanism

In the book *Counterpath: Travelling with Jacques Derrida*, the reader finds two strands of writing travelling side by side, as it were. The first strand is comprised of the postcards and letters sent by Derrida to Catherine Malabou during his travels as a world-renowned intellectual. These correspondences by Derrida often respond directly to the other thread of writing, which is a quite extraordinary, long essay by Malabou herself, in which she considers the trope or theme of travel in Derrida's *oeuvre*. What she shows is that this concern with travel has been central to deconstruction (and to Derrida's thought in particular) from the very beginning. According to her,

> [t]he impossibility of leaving, or starting, in his work, from a precise *topos* of travel, of isolating or situating a locality, definitively prevents us from considering travel as an accident of thinking, something that befalls conceptual rigor as a type of distraction [. . .].
>
> (Malabou 12)

What Malabou then goes on to suggest is that as Derrida has deconstructed well-known themes (language, architecture, literature and so on), his work has, in various ways, implicitly argued for a form of travel that must encounter the other. The metaphysic which underpins travel seems to deny the possibility of such encounter with alterity, and therefore the journey fails to be a voyage in the most profound sense of the word. As she puts it,

> [a] voyage ordinarily implies that one leaves a familiar shore to confront the unknown. The traveler derives or even drifts from a fixed and assignable origin in order to arrive somewhere, always maintaining the possibility of returning home, of again reaching the shore of departure. Travelers drift as far as their arrival, thus completing the circle of *destination*. Within that circle there can and must be produced what confers on the voyage its sense and allows it to be distinguished from a simple movement or displacement, namely *the event of the foreigner*. In fact, the very thing one expects of a voyage is that it will deliver 'the other' – the unexpected, a type of defamiliarization if not adventure or exoticism. One can always travel afar, but if there is not this sudden emergence of otherness, whatever form it may take, the voyage isn't accomplished, it doesn't really take place, it doesn't happen or *arrive*.
>
> (2, original emphasis)

The recourse to terms such as "foreigner" and "exoticism" in Malabou's writing is problematic because these words imply quantifiable difference. Someone is foreign to the extent that s/he is unlike oneself. The convention of travel derives from the idea of the

foreign or exotic which one anticipates, and which affirms one's own sense of self in the process. Ironically, it is precisely such limited forms of travel which Malabou would like to deconstruct. It is difficult to know why she chooses to use such loaded terms when, clearly, what she means by them is the other (in the sense of a radical alterity which is not foreign but inexplicable). Nevertheless, I have chosen to reference her remarks, despite their flaws, because they reveal what is so crucial to any voyage one might take: if it derives solely from an *a priori* knowledge of what will be encountered and the point to which one will return, then it is not a voyage worth taking (it is a "simple movement", a mere "displacement" [2]). As such, arrival from a journey which actually "take[s] place" will always involve an "emergence of otherness", and the corollary is that 'returning home' can never be to the home one left. The otherness one experiences renders return a complex issue. As Malabou informs us, the word 'arrival' has two contradictory meanings. On the one hand, it refers to "reach[ing] a destination and attain[ing] one's goal". On the other hand, the word also designates "what happens, what comes to, surprises, or falls from the event in general, what is anticipated as well as what is not expected" (2). Arrival is thus paradoxical as it can "sometimes contradict, upset, or prevent arrival in the sense of the accomplishment or completion of a process" (2). What this semantic ambiguity suggests is that the possibility of a return to one's point of origin, which 'completes the process' of arrival in a closed circle, is always disrupted by an arrival that comes as a surprise (and therefore allows for the "emergence of otherness" [2]). The point of origin, the home one left and to which one expected to return, is rendered other because of the other that one experienced on one's voyage.

In this section of my chapter, I would like to relate what Malabou (and Derrida, indirectly) says about travel to the implicit and overt failures of cosmopolitanism depicted in *The Silent Minaret*. I will also attempt to connect these concerns to the representations of religion and faith in the novel (since religion troubles the cosmopolitan ideal).

A crucial episode in the novel has all of these tropes or motifs come together. Issa is stopped at customs at Heathrow after a whirlwind trip back to South Africa to hear his mother's inaugural lecture for her Emeritus Professorship. He is detained by customs officials who search his luggage. Issa, narrating his own story at this stage of the text in the form of written notes found by Kagiso, despairs that "*[e]ven sealed packages were opened*", which reinforces the intrusive nature of the ordeal (180). After being searched and harassed, he is locked in a "*windowless room*" with other detainees. In an exchange with one such man, he is asked where it is he comes from. After Issa informs him, the other detainee wonders: "*[t]hen*

why have they stopped you?" (Shukri 181). M Neelika Jayawardene, in her excellent article on the novel, explains that the detainee's question is informed by his awareness of the latent prejudice of the English immigration authorities, who have been socialised and perhaps even directly trained to believe that "origins betray one's criminality, or potential as threat" (58). As a consequence, the detainee's puzzlement at Issa's being held reveals that he feels the South African should not be there at all because "his nationality and origins are not stereotyped as a breeding ground for terrorism" (Jayawardene 58).

While his homeland may not be considered suspect, his name certainly is. In response to Issa telling him his name, the unnamed detainee declares: "*[t]hat's why. In here we all have such names*" (Shukri 181). Jayawardene's elegant explanation of the logic which underpins the man's claim is that Issa's "name ties him to a suspect ancestry" and it also (somewhat ironically, given that names are conventionally thought to identify us as individuals) "stamps him as potentially criminal, and effectively nullifies his individual achievements" (58). That said, he will reassert these "individual achievements" when he is questioned by the authorities later. In particular, he will demand that his interrogator write down that he is a doctoral student: "*PhD Yes, Big P, small h, stop. Then big D*", he tells the man bitterly (Shukri 182).

Despite his desire to have his words recorded, part of the problem for him is that he is already over-documented. His passport, student visa, identity document and numerous other kinds of legal records all "map, regulate, and control [his] mobility" (Jayawardene 50). According to Jayawardene, they are therefore an "effective means of isolating [him] behind the complications of regulatory barriers in order to excise [him] and remove [his] ability to engage in the debate surrounding [his] bod[y]" (50).

Not coincidentally, Issa chose to document this traumatic incarceration himself, adding it as an annotation to his copy of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1988). Leaving aside for a moment the thematic and conceptual concerns that the reference to Rushdie's novel might generate, one is surely reminded of the strange and terrible controversy that has grown around that book. In mid-February of 1989, the Ayatollah of Iran issued a *Fatwa* declaring Rushdie an apostate, the punishment for which should be death. As a consequence, the latter went into hiding, needed round-the-clock police protection, and was unable to travel or move freely (Slaughter 154). In some senses, what has come to be known as the 'Salman Rushdie Affair' is interesting in its difference from what Issa endures at the hands of the English officials. While both are restricted in their movements, it is notable that Rushdie had to endure this limitation of his freedom because he was accused of betraying and

misrepresenting the Muslim faith. Issa, by contrast, is perceived as 'too Muslim' and therefore (appallingly) as a possible terrorist. In a similar vein, one should note that while the *Fatwa* decreed by Ayatollah Khomeini was a call to the faithful to kill *in the name of religion*, Issa's maltreatment is done in the *name of the state*, that is, the English state, which is, supposedly, secular.

Ironically, then, the modern, cosmopolitan state – Issa lands at Heathrow remember, and there are surely few cities more seemingly cosmopolitan than London – and the fundamentalist religious doctrines of those who decreed and advocated the murder of Rushdie find a common practice. Both are committed to restricting the movement of the individual. The role they assign to origin is also similar: many of the detained written of in *The Silent Minaret* come from those places which the state assumes must be "breeding ground[s] for terrorism" (Jayawardene 58), while Rushdie is often accused of being a traitor to his home and his people. And, finally, despite superficial differences, the secular British state and the fundamentalist zealot attempt to enforce their belief in the importance of origin, and the various restrictions they impose on travel, by means of similar practices. First, naming is important. Rushdie had to be publically named and thus singled out for death, while it is Issa's name that lands him in trouble with those in charge of British immigration. Secondly, documentation is crucial to the violence of both enterprises. In the case of Shukri's novel, the protagonist finds that the modern state is premised on "documentation of personal movement" with many of the regulations on an individual's right to travel "implemented using the now-ubiquitous travel document that also serves as an identifier of origins: passports" (Jayawardene 55). These passports, supplemented by other documents like visas and work permits, "serve as permanent markers of individual origins, indelibly inking and advertising the body's trajectories for public view" (Jayawardene 55). The Ayatollah too began with a document of sorts, the *Fatwa* being a 'legal decree', which is to say, a decree on a law of Islam. It was also, not coincidentally, a decree directed at the body, since it called for irrevocable harm to be done to Rushdie's body. One last similarity is that both regimes are obsessed with religion. The fundamentalist Muslims who called for or adhered to the *Fatwa* are the exact kind of "Bad Muslims" (see Mamdani 15–16) who the immigration officials at Heathrow are trying to prevent from entering 'their' country, in the sense that they merge violence with a dogmatic form of Islamic faith.[13] Still, what cannot be disputed is that the British government and the Iranian Ayatollah-run state both have a fixation with what it *is* to 'be Muslim'. For the English, the Muslim faith must be understood because then they will more easily identify the terrorist (as if the two were synonymous). For the Iranian regime,

there is only one kind of Islam, and they decreed Rushdie an apostate because his novel challenged this notion. Accordingly, they both would like to know the fundamental nature of 'the Muslim' absolutely, to understand its nature and borders, and to document those things for the 'safety of the people'. There is a belief common to both the London officials and the Ayatollah, that there is only one kind of Muslim, defined by one kind of religious practice.

Know the villain's name, his/her origins, where s/he will go, and what it is s/he believes. These 'tactics' are fundamental to the two states in question, though the one the West calls modern and cosmopolitan and the other is often constructed as 'backward', 'tribal', dogmatic and closed off to difference. As one considers the gulf in time, space and forms of governance of these two societies, one realises that (ironically) the differences are superficial. At their core, each is pathologically fascinated with knowing, determining and curtailing the other. Neither one is able or willing to allow the other to be other. For this reason, neither can help but restrict movement and the most profound right of travel (which, according to Malabou, is the experience of otherness, you will recall). They are therefore guilty of a systemic, state-sanctioned violence, as they wilfully circumscribe the freedom of the individual.

In *Of Hospitality*, Derrida argues that the very first violence that is done to the guest by the master of the house is the imposition by the latter of his/her language (15). And, in my previous chapter I discussed the role of naming in this regard, positing (after Mike Marais) that the name assumes knowledge of the one it names and is for this reason a limitation placed on the alterity of the other (or guest, if you prefer). As I have already noted, when Issa is detained, it is because his name is read in terms of its place within a (ideologically determined) web of associations and historical allegiances (some real, many not). In that sense, his name fails to designate that he is a unique person because of the public role it performs. Names, by their very nature, negotiate the passage from the private to the public. Yet, there is nevertheless a trenchant belief that one's name is private. From this perspective, the name one is given is a profound signifier of one's difference from others (and this sense of ownership is not utterly undone by the fact that others can, and probably do, have the same name). The very concept of the name, despite any and all evidence to the contrary, is always associated with what makes a person unique, or special. When we assert our names to others, we call to be recognised as our selves. In the process, we declare that we are subjects deserving of the respect and hospitality which the subject should be accorded in any post-Enlightenment society.[14] How, then, are we to reconcile these two roles performed by the

name? How is it that they can simultaneously assert and negate subjectivity? Quite literally, they seem to name what they allow to be de-valued, even destroyed.

There are, no doubt, several aspects of the intricate issue of naming which might be analysed at this point. I will restrict myself only to one small aspect of this immensely complex issue. It seems to me that the violence that is done to Issa, which is done in his name and also to his name, is an inherent risk of naming itself. When the subject is identified, when on some level subjectivity itself is enacted by the process of naming, this process determines that one is a subject of and for the world. In other words, subjectivity is never for itself; it is for the historic-socio-political structures which must identify, determine, limit and control those who make up its constituency. These structures, or strictures more accurately, are inherently hostile to alterity because the latter signifies (without ever signifying) a formless form of individuality which is radically heterogeneous to subjectivity. It is, from this perspective, an incomplete assertion to say that the individual is not important to history (as I did earlier). I must now qualify that contention: the 'individual-as-subject' is absolutely key to the discursive and technical functioning of history, culture and their socio-political manifestations. Once one is recognised as a subject, one is subject to that authority. Not coincidentally, naming the subject, or hailing him/her, is crucial to the process. According to Louis Althusser, ideology functions through the practice of interpellation. An individual is hailed and s/he is then obliged to recognise that that hail is indeed directed at him/her (Althusser 178). In so doing, s/he is transformed into a subject and is thus obliged, also, to act in accordance with the ideology of the one who sent out the hail (the state, or culture etc.). The irony of subjectivity, for Althusser, resides in the so-called freedom with which we accept it: "the individual *is interpellated as a (free) subject [. . .] in order that he shall (freely) accept his subjection*" (182, original emphasis). Issa rejects the violence of his detainment by asserting his individuality, his accomplishments and unique self, but the irony of his rejection is that its condition of possibility is an acceptance of the ideology of statehood, nationalism, as well as the immigration policies that necessarily go hand in hand with them.[15] It is also worth mentioning that the same cannot be said of him once he has disappeared. No matter how often he is hailed then, he does not respond. Whether that disappearance is by choice or not, at the very least one can say that he no longer "*(freely) accept[s] his subjection*".

Clearly, Issa feels it is atrocious that he is treated with suspicion simply because of his name. The reader is probably meant to feel a similar sense of outrage. But, like Issa, s/he is similarly vulnerable to such abuse. The possibility of it lingers in the very names by which

one is identified. This also means that (troublingly) the reader is complicit in the violence that is done to Issa and to him/herself (principally because s/he is a subject of the world). One is therefore victimised by that which one helps to validate and maintain. One authorises one's own subjugation. And, really, it is done in one's names.[16]

For this reason, there can be no absolute hospitality which desires the name of the guest. The airport as site of hospitality becomes, on a very basic level, simply another means of control and exclusion precisely because its practices are based on naming, knowing and thereby limiting those who pass through it. Hence, one can also say that airports are premised on an absolute belief in the subject and (therefore) a belief in history itself. In a broader context, Derrida raises much the same issue. He asks if hospitality should not begin with an "unquestioning welcome" which effaces both "question *and* the name" (*Of Hospitality* 29). He then goes on to speculate that perhaps it would be more just, more hospitable, to offer space to the other "before they are identified, even before they are (posited as or supposed to be) a subject, legal subject and subject nameable by their family name etc." (29).

A similar concern is raised by Jayawardene, who points out that passports render visible, public and exoteric one's movements. The public-ness of the document determines that, rather than allowing for the transnational mobility which it promises, it can be used to restrict travel. Even though my passport (like my name) is mine, it is only this in so far as my ipseity functions within the framework of the nation-state model which is now ubiquitous. I cannot travel without my passport – obviously. This is not to say, however, that it ensures that I will receive hospitality. It is part of an ever-expanding, overwhelming machinery which violates my individuality by constructing my selfhood in terms of subjectivity as defined (no word is more apt) historically.

Furthermore, it is not coincidental that so much of this 'machinery', these documents of subjectivity, is, as I have noted, obsessed with origin (passports and names being the examples most relevant to Shukri's text). More than just explaining where one comes from, what is documented or edified is a certain (limited) form of home. Passports and names declare that one is 'from there'. The corollary is that this place to which one has come is not one's home; it is not where one belongs. As such, one's welcome and one's stay here are not dependent on one, the guest, for this is the home, the place of belonging, of another. One's privacy as a subject (the very subjectivity which one's name announces) is therefore violable exactly because one is not where one belongs. This is not to say that when one is home, in one's country of origin, for instance, that one is any less vulnerable to such violation. As I have already suggested, the possibility of that violence is inscribed in one's name, which one

is (usually) given ‘at home’, in one’s country of birth. One might also think of the ways in which the British government violates not only Issa’s rights, but also those of its own citizens. In this regard, what comes to mind is the incident in which the police defile the mosque, the event most directly responsible for Issa’s disappearance.

Both ‘at home’ and ‘abroad’, then, the state attempts to protect its status as home, which also means that, paradoxically, it protects its right to offer hospitality. “No hospitality, in the classic sense, without sovereignty of oneself over one’s home, but since there is no hospitality without finitude, sovereignty can only be exercised by filtering, choosing, and thus by excluding and doing violence”, writes Derrida (*Of Hospitality* 55). And, for exactly these reasons, it is the case that “one can become virtually xenophobic in order to protect one’s own hospitality, the own home that makes possible one’s own hospitality” (53).

It is weird, counter-intuitive even, to think of xenophobia as a result of maintaining hospitality in the classical sense. But, in the lived experiences of Issa (and, by association, the countless Muslim, Middle Eastern and Asian-descent men and women who have been subjected to similar experiences before and especially after September 11, 2001), we see the counter-intuitive logic at work. In this small but haunting episode in the novel, readers find passports used to limit passing, airports used as detainment centres, and a secular state attempting to define the innate nature and identity of the Muslim. The state does so with a zealous intensity which mirrors, ironically and shamefully, the fundamentalism of the Ayatollah-run state of Iran, which called for the death of a man simply because he wrote a piece of fiction. In that book, he tried to re-imagine Islam. Rushdie has recently said that he does not believe that in the modern climate of fear and repression that *The Satanic Verses* would have been published (BBC News para. 1). I do not think that he is speaking of the ‘Arab world’ (given that the novel was almost immediately banned in almost all so-called Muslim states, and was really published and bought by a Western readership). Most probably, he is referring to the West and its own unfeasible attempts to define, in dogmatic fashion, the god of Mohammed and his followers.

Again and again, *The Silent Minaret* asks its readers to consider travel in relation to religion. There are the awful restrictions of movement within what would be his own country (if that origin were not effaced in the name of another, namely Israel) which Karim’s people, and Katinka’s, too, once she moves there to be with him, must endure by virtue of the Israel-Palestine unrest which, historically, cannot be disentangled from religious belief on both sides. And there is the debate which Frances has with her priest, Father Jerome. It is sparked because of her “usual irritation” with the supremacist ideology espoused so unreflexively by

the majority of people who patriotically sing "Rule Brittania" (Shukri 248). In particular, she dislikes the line "[a]nd every shore it circles thine", which reflects a central hope of Empire, namely that wherever one travels one will still be in the British Empire. From that point of view, travel would be a circular, quite futile exercise. Each departure would be its own arrival, as one would leave home only to arrive home.

In his conversation with Frances, Father Jerome valorises Britain's immigration policy. He tells her that "there have to be limits", that "countries have to set limits on the number of immigrants they can accept, otherwise they'd lose their national character" (248). The metaphysical logic which determines the young cleric's ideas is inescapable: there could be no nation (and no national character) were there not limits that differentiate nations, and these borders must therefore be policed so that the nation knows who is entering and leaving its territory. As Derrida's work on hospitality clearly demonstrates, though, this logic must be overcome or undone precisely because it is unavoidable. That is to say, it is not hospitable to limit, to exclude, to prescribe and to attempt to know the other. If nations construct their immigration and emigration policies on that basis (as they surely must), then their most 'open' welcome harbours a certain degree of xenophobia, a degree of violence properly speaking.

Yet it is also the case that borders are always more open than any policing of them can ensure. They are enabled, made possible, only on the basis of their being cross-able. Immigration infrastructure exists because this internal threat is ineluctable. Frances says as much when she reminds her priest that his precious English "national character" was not "lost" but ultimately enhanced by the arrival of his French ancestors and hers from Ireland (248). If exclusion is a condition for the establishment and preservation of a nation, it is also what a nation must inherently reject. There is no nation whose history is not one of border-crossing and cultural exchange.

Tellingly, even as Frances argues this point to Father Jerome, she fears that his orthodoxy will prevent him from accepting the validity of her line of reasoning (248).[17] It is perhaps for this reason that she next attempts to persuade him by couching her ideas in religious terms. Her troubling question to him is the following: "have you ever thought, Father, about what would happen if the anti-immigration bigots had their way? For instance, would the Holy Family be given asylum in Britain now on the evidence of Joseph's bad dream?" (249). In the dream she mentions, the biblical Joseph is visited by an angel who warns him to flee to Egypt because the baby Jesus is in danger from Herod's men. Frances wonders, sceptically, if the family would find refuge in modern Britain. Or, would they, like

so many Muslims, be questioned and harassed, even turned away? Given that, famously, Joseph and Mary were turned away at every inn in Bethlehem, before being offered sanctuary in the stables, the idea of shutting them out once more has added ironic import. Due to his orthodoxy (and here I mean to imply that his religious ideology is inseparable from his political views), Father Jerome supports an immigration policy which would, more than likely, refuse asylum to the "Holy Family". He would advocate denying access to the family who are the basis of Christianity. Clearly, there is a dissonance between the faith the priest declares and the practices he condones. And, in effect, the latter negates the former. Because, *in practice*, he would refuse access to the living god in whose name his religion is constructed; he would, for orthodox reasons, exclude Christ from Christianity.

This is not to say that Shukri depicts all religion as inherently, fatally inhospitable. Rather, what he seems to do is contrast the dogmatism of Father Jerome with the radical openness of his parishioner, Frances. In her, the reader finds a faith which does not correspond with any orthodoxy. Indeed, so as to be truly religious (to assert her faith in the most profound sense), she will welcome in practices which are, seemingly, antithetical to the Christian faith. She will glorify the Christian god by being hospitable to other gods, and reveal her faith precisely by opening it to the faiths of others. It is through this character in the novel that Shukri seems to portray a cosmopolitanism that actually functions for the good.

It is Issa's influence, coupled with her aforementioned reservations about orthodoxy, which leads Frances to begin to think of religion quite differently from most others. She is fascinated by the similarities and areas of overlap that she discovers between Christianity and Islam. Angels, the immaculate conception and the virgin birth are common to both faiths. Tellingly, the Koran even documents aspects of the story of Christ that the Bible does not. For instance, it notes that Jesus's grandfather (Mary's father, that is) was named Imran. One can only speculate as to why this name, indicative of an Arabian ancestry, is not included in the Bible. Whatever the historical reason for the omission, from a modern perspective, one cannot help but read it in terms of an increasing intolerance that the Christian faith, and in particular those practising it in the Western world, have shown for Arabian culture. And while Father Jerome, with whom she shares her discovery, has little interest in a common heritage, for Frances it is invigorating. She wants to reassert the Arabian heritage of Jesus's mother, even if others would prefer it were forgotten. I think that, for her, it suggests the common ancestry of the two religions, and thereby undermines the basis for the vitriolic antagonism that has arisen between the nationalist proponents of each.

Moreover, it is not only in the abstractions of ancient religious history that she uncovers similar aspects of the two monotheistic faiths. In her daily rosary, she, quite literally, practises what she preaches. Issa has given her a gift of a tasbeh (also spelt tasbih), which one can think of as the Islamic equivalent of rosary beads. Indeed, she keeps it along with her rosary beads in a satin pouch, and often the two become entangled. Frances comes to think of the intertwined beads as her "trosebery", and part of her religious ritual each day now includes carefully "peel[ing] the beads apart, like seeds from a pomegranate, when she sits down to pray" (Shukri 14).[18] The two religious objects are almost inexorably knotted into one, her "trosebery", which is a physical manifestation of the linkages between Islam and Christianity. Her "ritual" of disentangling the tasbeh from the rosary beads (ironically) reveals the failure of differentiation, that is, that what is constructed as different (about the two religions) is premised on what is the same. Hence, by touch alone Frances is often unable to tell the one prayer bead from the other. In fact, she is only able to differentiate between the two if she is able to feel the crucifix, which is appropriate since she will later determine that "the cross is the main difference between the two faiths" (15).

In any event, Frances's choice to keep the prayer beads in the same pouch, and her process of separating them before she prays, though it does not correlate with other religious practice (indeed, because of that), once again presents the reader with a ritual which is hospitable and open to the other by virtue of being distinct from customary practice. Furthermore, her form of faith implies that religion is not, in and of itself, closed and prescriptive (even if, as is the case here, it is monotheistic). Father Jerome's dogmatic approach acts as a warning of what becomes of faith when it is stultified and enveloped by the historical forces of orthodoxy, politics and empire. In rejecting these things, Frances, somewhat unexpectedly perhaps, practises the 'true religion', which it to say, she is able to worship god without placing upon the deity the restrictions and limited forms of understanding which assume a special knowledge of him/her. Both Christianity and Islam declare that god is unknowable, beyond the forms and understanding of mortal humans. They also both state that their 'version' of god is the one true, valid, absolutely 'real' one.[19] It is as if Christians and Muslims alike seek to say: 'I do not know god, I know that, but what I do not know about god, I know to be true'. The contradictions are demonstrably absurd and can only be reconciled by recognising that an unknowable god would demand an equally unknowable, singular religious practice in his/her name. (In fact, the practice would be one that would eschew naming.) Such ritual could not align itself with the historically determined doctrines of the monotheistic faiths represented in *The Silent Minaret*. Rather, it would be

more like Frances's practice: fumbling in fading light, uncertain of what was being touched, and infinitely open.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that Frances's ritual (which is like no other) reminds her of something Issa told her, namely that there is a place where one sees a "mosque in the shadow of a cathedral". When he informs her of this place, she "looks up to imagine the sight" which she thinks of as "a cathemosdraquel". The phrase she coins is a combination of words, much like the term, "trosbery" (14–15). The unique blending of faiths which this image conjures literally demands, for her, a new name. The old name, the old language, appears to be inadequate.[20] The "cathemosdraquel" is the appellation that Frances would choose. It is a jumbled merging of two old words so as to create something new. The neologism is like a promise that, some day, yet to come, it will designate an actual space rather than a mere trick of light (shadow falling in a particular way when seen from a particular vantage point). Like Frances, the reader must "look up to imagine" what does not currently exist. S/he is obliged to find a new language to describe a new world. It is an act of faith.

Both mosques and cathedrals are often described as the 'house of god'. For this reason, it seems fair enough to postulate that this new world would require that the home and hearth be rendered infinitely open, welcoming and hospitable. The physical structures within which we worship god would have to be fashioned anew so that they no longer restrict and determine the kind of worshipper and the kind of practice admissible within. Each such restriction would have to be recognised as a restriction placed on god or, more accurately, one's *access to god*.

The point I am making may appear fairly obvious. That there exists a difference between religious ideals, philosophy or theory, on the one hand, and religious practice or ritual, on the other, is unavoidable. Religion must grapple with the limits and conditions of the phenomenal real world in which it is practised. That much is clear and even the most devout follower would not argue otherwise. Yet, religious practices, in particular the rituals of the two major monotheistic faiths which I have been discussing, are carried out precisely so as to move beyond this world. Prayer, for instance, is an attempt to gain access to god and thereby transcend the constraints of the phenomenological real world. The ritual which attempts to allow an experience of god is and must always therefore be a ritual *like no other*. It must orient itself to that of which it can have no knowledge, no understanding or grasp. As such, it is the duty of every true believer *not to follow*. To phrase my point slightly differently, in order for one's faith to be meaningful in any way, one is obliged to be a

follower who nevertheless follows by not following. Frances exemplifies this aspect of the novel, though, again (and in my opinion this problem cannot be overcome), she is an example that cannot guide the reader as s/he cannot follow Frances's lead, as she is an example that is not exemplary. She is a Christian who abandons or subverts much Christian practice and belief – including, most importantly, the monotheism that is at the very heart of her religion. For instance, disillusioned by the Afghanistan war and the part she feels Christianity has played in legitimising it, she listens to the Eucharist and thinks of it as "pantomime [. . .]. Repetitive, meaningless pantomime" (Shukri 164). Accordingly, when the congregation rises to line up for communion, she walks out of the church. She does this to be a Christian, that is, so as to live up to the ideals of Christianity.

More so than other concepts in which there is a dissonance between practice and philosophy, religion depends on such difference being utterly invalid or inconsequential. The contradiction, between the patently obvious fact that ritual necessarily falls short and the pressing demand that it nevertheless overcomes its limitations (by exceeding itself and the world of which it is a part), is irreconcilable. No faith can sustain the paradox. And yet, no faith is possible without it. Ironically, religion is corrupted and corruptible by its own ideals.

There is clearly an irreconcilable tension at the heart of religion. This tension between convictions and the manifestation of these convictions is also at the root of much religious conflict. Shukri's novel shows that the so-called 'clash of civilisations' between the Islamic and Western world is in no small measure a failure on the part of both societies to meet the philosophical standards of their own religious creeds. For instance, Father Jerome fails to act in a Christian way because he refuses to be open and welcoming in precisely the way that the story of Christ suggests one is obliged to be. In effect, what the text allows its readers to think about is the idea that, in the current day, religion itself has become a failure of hospitality, and therefore, also, a limit placed on the promise of cosmopolitan society.

In my opinion, this failure of cosmopolitanism, as well as the connection the text establishes between it and the inherent limitations of religion, is perfectly appropriate. For, what I think *The Silent Minaret* implies is that cosmopolitanism is undone by the exact same tension between the concept and its execution that plagues religion. While the theory of cosmopolitanism is much in vogue lately with a diverse range of scholars, as I will show, its implementation has been inadequately described. Proponents of the theory claim that it is a better concept than multiculturalism with which to understand the pluralisation and globalisation of modern society. According to those who advocate cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism "has received broad criticism for resting upon and reproducing rather rigid

notions of culture and group belonging" from which it cannot easily be rescued (Vertovec and Cohen 3). In their fine introduction to *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice*, Vertovec and Cohen suggest that, in contrast to multiculturalism, "cosmopolitanism is now increasingly invoked to avoid the pitfalls of essentialism" (3). The two are cautious scholars, and readily admit that the concept which they are theorising is a complex one with many perspectives or (to use their term) "windows". Nevertheless, they end their introduction with the following hopeful remarks:

> Cosmopolitanism registers and reflects the multiplicity of issues, questions, processes and problems that affect and bind people, irrespective of where they were born or reside. The theory and practice of cosmopolitanism have at least the potential to abolish the razor-wired camps, national flags and walls of silence that separate us from our fellow human beings.
>
> (Vertovec and Cohen 22)

A page earlier they concede that "practically all the recent writings on the topic remain in the realm of rhetoric. There is little description or analysis of how contemporary cosmopolitan philosophies, political projects, outlooks or practices can be formed, instilled or bolstered" (21). Undoubtedly, the potentially transformative power of cosmopolitanism would be best harnessed if practice aligned more closely with theory. It might then be instructive to consider the extent to which such an alignment is possible. Ulf Hannerz, for instance, has suggested that cosmopolitanism can best be thought of as "a perspective, a state of mind, or – to take a more processual view – a mode of managing meaning" (238). This process involves "relationships to a plurality of cultures" and "an orientation, a willingness to engage with the Other" (Hannerz 239). Put slightly differently, one must be open to other cultures, other ways of thinking, in such a way that one does not reify or assume prior knowledge of those other cultures (as multiculturalism might be argued to do). In attempting to be more practical in their description of how this might be achieved, Vertovec and Cohen suggest that "[s]uch an outlook or disposition is largely acquired through experience, especially travel" (13). As we know, however, travel, particularly transnational travel, is not for everyone. It is principally an advantage afforded only to an increasingly small middle and upper class. From that perspective, cosmopolitanism runs the risk of further reinforcing already-existent global class inequalities. It will create a limited number of cosmopolites, well-travelled, open, seemingly ethical, though their very existence would come at the expense of a disadvantaged majority. Not only would this majority have to grapple with the systemic conditions which limit their access to wealth, education, political power, health care and so forth, but they would also

have to endure being relegated to a sort of 'theoretical ghetto' marked by an ever-increasing lack of cosmopolitan knowledge and experience. Effectively, this inexperience of other worlds, due to systemic and theoretical constraints, would mean that they would be perceived as lacking in the ethical potential which Hannerz (for example) associates with cosmopolitanism. The scenario I have outlined is cosmopolitanism against itself, since it would be created on a micro level only to be destroyed on the macro level. Exactly at the point that Vertovec and Cohen suggest a practical route to implementing the theory, so as to marry the two, by suggesting the necessity of travel, we find prodigious disharmony and incompatibility. I would argue that the reason for such lack of union between theory and practice is that cosmopolitanism, like religion, cannot sustain the formal differences between its ideals and the rituals which supposedly enact it. Integral to the very notion of the cosmopolitan society is the respect and openness to and for the other that cannot be ritualised or 'practised'.

Two moments in the novel seem to illustrate this point. While the first is recalled by Katinka, it is a memory that both invigorates and haunts post-transitional South Africa in general. The memory in question is the liminal moment between the old South African flag coming down and the new one being raised. In that moment, she celebrates the end of "[t]hree hundred and forty-two years [. . .] – wrong years, dark years, evil years" (250). But also, she is briefly able to "run towards the stateless moment" where, she senses, there is "no flag to wave, no anthem to echo, no eternal enemy against which to perpetually defend, no God-chosen nation for which to die in gory glory" (250). Unburdened by history, and without any nation, Katinka feels free and that anything is possible. "If she had to spend an eternity anywhere, it would be right [. . .] in [that] moment", she thinks to herself (250).

This stateless form of existence, which Shukri even describes as "sublime", cannot last. In the time it takes to raise the new flag, "the endless, limitless, possibilities of the stateless moment [have] already been diminished" (251). The new flag, the new anthem, the "eternal enemy" that the country will next pit itself against all contribute to a national identity. That sense of self is, however, accomplished at the expense of something far more ephemeral, more intangible and less limited. Cosmopolitan ideals are deferred or denied so that the country may know who and what it is. The 'new' South Africa, whose emblem is a new flag, is welcomed into a global community from which the country had previously been excluded. That welcome has its limits, though. The modern subject is free to experience the potentials inherent in international travel and exchange, but only within these limits. No "stateless" person can enjoy the freedom of the transnational and the cosmopolitan. Without national

identity (and the attendant documentation, such as passports and visas), one is necessarily denied access. The "sublime" and "stateless" moment in which Katinka would choose to live forever cannot, ultimately, be her home (even if it is undoubtedly the 'place' that most resembles the best notions of home, that is, a place of limitless possibilities). Instead, she must live trapped outside of home. The rituals of nation, identity-formation and history ensure that she is exiled from it. Ironically, exile turns out to be the 'state of the nation'; national identity renders us all exiles from our sublime home.

The other example of the failure of cosmopolitan practice that I would like to consider is the chapter titled "Somewhere and Nowhere", which describes the aeroplane journey that Kagiso takes back to South Africa after he has packed up Issa's meagre belongings. While travelling, Kagiso either remembers or occasionally reconstructs key moments from his family's past. These include a further mention of the game of "hide and seek" (which I have already discussed), his idea of how his mother met Vasinthe on the day Issa was born, and his most enduring memory of his brother, which is, ironically, another memory of absence, since what he recalls most is *not seeing* Issa. He is haunted by the fact that, after he and Issa had struggled to communicate because of the gulf created by the latter's UDF political activism, Kagiso drove away without looking back at his brother. All these recollections are bittersweet not only because the latter has now vanished, but because they describe the precarious position of a family caught in the grand sweep of history. Vasinthe, Gloria, Issa and Kagiso, collectively and independently, face the very real danger of political and hegemonic forces destroying the fragile interpersonal relationships which make them such an extraordinary family. What the narrator describes as a "trifling tragedy" is the possibility that at any moment their own personal lives and affections might be crushed in the swell of more "iconic events" (237), a 'grander' history of empire and dominion.

Much of what makes this chapter of the novel so effective can be linked to its form, particularly the way in which Shukri weaves Kagiso's present with the strands of his past. The reader feels the irrepressible force that the past exerts on him as he flies home. These are not the memories he chooses to recall; they are the ones to which he cannot help but return. One senses that he has tried to repress or ignore them, and that this is no longer possible. Partly, of course, the memories washing over him are the consequence of an inevitable release of emotion. At some point, the pain and anguish brought on by his brother's disappearance would have to find expression, and the end of a difficult journey is not an unusual time for this. There are, however, also thematic concerns to which Shukri is gesturing. To reiterate an earlier point, transnational flight is the most conventional signifier

of a cosmopolitan society: it designates exactly the negotiation between rootedness and the unfamiliar which so many theorists identify as crucial to the concept of cosmopolitanism and its practice (see Poyner 315–316). While flying, one is "somewhere and nowhere" (as Kagiso thinks of it). Yet, reading the chapter of which that phrase is the title, one does not get a sense of a transformative cosmopolitan ideal at work. At best, a reader might describe the tone and feel of the chapter as tragically cathartic.

When read from this perspective, the chapter is about the very profound desire for an inviolable home. Accordingly, all of the memories that Kagiso recalls while flying (home) are about a search for home. For instance, I have already indicated how the game of "hide and seek" can be read in this light. Similarly, his reconstruction of how it is that he and Ma Gloria first encountered Ma Vasinthe is, at a very obvious level, his attempt to understand how Vasinthe's house became his. And finally, when he considers his university days and the difficulties he had then in communicating with Issa, the memory of driving away haunts him. Tellingly, though, the chapter does not end with that event but with a gentler, warmer, more loving memory: Issa and he sitting in the former's dormitory room, smoking marijuana and listening to Pink Floyd.

Collectively, these are the intimate memories of a family and also of that with which the family is ineluctably associated, a home. Yet that space is under threat. While Kagiso recalls instances of affection, there is nevertheless the overwhelming danger of history that lurks on the edges of all he remembers. This dominant narrative threatens to subsume their more personal stories, and relegate them to the category of "trifling traged[ies]" (237). History and politics are therefore what make the possibility of a safe home impossible.

So, when Kagiso thinks that he is both "somewhere and nowhere" while flying, this should not, in my opinion, be understood as Shukri's way of valorising a cosmopolitan ideal. Although this writer uses the phrase to invoke that ideal, he does so in order to critique it.[21] Kagiso is not set free by being betwixt and between; rather, he is trapped there. Read in this way, "somewhere" designates the home to which he is trying desperately to get back, while the word "nowhere" signifies the 'no-man's land', or place of exile, where he is actually forced to reside.

Not coincidentally, the last description of Kagiso in the text is also as he is on this flight. Through a mix of personal recollection and written transcript from the TRC report, he pieces together that Issa may well have planned to plant a bomb in 1989. However, a strange set of coincidences (involving Kagiso and an accident during which his brother broke his leg) meant that he could not take part in the bombing. The documentation reveals that all the other

cadres involved died when the bomb went off unexpectedly. Actually, that too is disputable since the TRC report indicates that the bomb might have been set to detonate early (Shukri 266). Like Kagiso, the reader can only wonder at the possible reasons for such sabotage: was it the fault of government agents who infiltrated the Movement, or might the cell of which Issa was a part have been suspected of betraying the UDF, in which case their deaths may well have been the execution of suspected traitors? Whatever the case, the incident reinforces for the reader how similar the state and its enemies always are in so many regards. An oppositional organisation must always resemble that which it opposes; it is obliged to take on the enemy's tactics, level of violence, even their paranoia. Little wonder, then, that I, as a reader, am so uneasy with the notion that Issa's disappearance might be linked to a militant stance he adopted. Though the possibility exists, it does not gel with what we know he learnt about armed resistance, which is that its condition of possibility is authorised by a historical discourse which posits that, really, there are only enemies and friends, righteous causes and terrible tyrants. This history immerses its subjects in a narrative which implies that the world is divided into those who rule and those who would like to rule.

Is such a 'will to power' really unavoidable, insurmountable? Are one's options for resistance so limited? Such questions are implicit in the mystery of the bombing. The reader is led to wonder about what difference there is, in the last analysis, between the cadres who set the bomb to kill and the person who sabotaged it so that it would kill the freedom fighters.[22] I certainly do not wish to make light of the armed resistance and the freedom that so many fought and died to attain. Neither does Shukri, as he surely reveals by making his protagonist one of those young men. As an aside, we might also recall that one of Issa's more lasting heroes is Nelson Mandela, a man credited with initiating the armed resistance of the ANC. That said, Issa has seen the effects of his violent opposition and, with the death of his fellow comrades in 1989, he has seen its limits. A radical form of opposition would not accept the terms of the contract; it would not sign on to future violence in order that present hostility be lessened or stopped. Instead, it would oppose violence itself, and since aggression is always premised on a lack of hospitality for otherness, the radical form of resistance would be open, infinitely open, therefore unknowable, undefined and unclassifiable. Do these words not perfectly describe Issa, once he disappears?

The bombing is not necessarily the only event which might be listed as evidence in support of my argument that Issa's disappearance is a form of resistance, though I think it is telling that he neither discusses it, nor mentions it to anyone. This memory has surely haunted him since the day it happened. Yet he does not share it, or write about it, or take any action of

any kind in its immediate aftermath. One senses that not only are there feelings of extreme guilt and shame at play, but also that the incident has forever shaken his belief in the simplicity and righteousness of 'taking action'. And the violence of this episode in his brother's life has an equally profound effect on Kagiso when he learns of it on his flight back to South Africa. The shocking realisation that his brother came so close to death years before he vanished shakes Kagiso deeply, which is viscerally implied because he vomits as the aeroplane is landing. Thereafter, he hears the impersonal on-flight announcement which welcomes the passengers (like him) back home (266). But for him, one senses, home will never be home again. Whatever comfort and safety he may have had has disappeared along with his brother. Both in the past they shared and in the present in which they are separated, history has conspired to take Issa away (by which, I must repeat, I do not mean that he has been taken by unknown agents of state, or that he has joined any resistance movement, but rather that he has chosen to fight the 'will to power' of history by radically renouncing it altogether). Though the flight attendant's announcement blithely declares that he has arrived, it is crucial that Shukri never has Kagiso step off that flight or reunite with his mothers. In a metaphoric sense, this seems apposite, for he is still on that flight, stuck "nowhere", trying to get back home.

"Yes. Loved – and at Home"

When Katinka moves to the West Bank to be with Karim, she admits that "nothing [t]here is simple" (Shukri 270). She writes to Kagiso (who she befriended the same day she met Issa) of the perpetual struggle of life in that region. Living in the "shadow of the wall" means that "even sunrise is denied, and the beauty of daybreak is filled with the promise of further oppression" (270).[23] The children she teaches can, she regrets, "draw helicopter gunships with their eyes closed" (271). There are terrible stories, like her neighbour's experience of being stopped at a checkpoint while in labour. The soldiers denied her the right to pass the checkpoint and she died leaving an orphaned newborn behind (271). "Death is everywhere; every day an anniversary, every day a future one assured. Despair is a sitting tenant", she writes of her new home (271).

The notion of despair as a "sitting tenant" is, of course, apt given Shukri's concern for what becomes of our places of residence once they are invaded by history (and the despair it brings in its wake). It is also congruent with the text's motif of ritual that Katinka should

describe the observance of anniversaries for the dead. So much of *The Silent Minaret* is an act of remembrance and commemoration of an absent loved one. Yet, if only obliquely, I think that the reader is meant to find something alarming about the notion that those on the West Bank are obliged to recall, ritualistically, the deaths of so many. It seems absurd that they must commemorate, year after year, what should never have happened in the first place.[24]

Moreover, each anniversary demands that the residents of the West Bank remember what can, in any case, never be forgotten. Those left behind do not need anniversaries to recall their respective and collective loss. Similarly, their pain is not less intense or immediate simply because their friend or lover or child did not die on that particular date. This is not to say that anniversaries are insignificant. Let us instead say that their significance is formal and conventional. In fact, one conventional aspect of memorials of whatever form – monuments or anniversaries – is that they are there (partly at least) to enable forgetting. After the ritual, one is (supposedly) able to 'move on', feel better. Memorialisation is therefore closely bound up with the notions of catharsis and normalcy, the latter of which is, first and foremost, a political category. There is the rub: the loss of an intimate and the mourning process that it necessitates is not something which can or should be formal, conventional, or designed to re-establish a normative state. Let us leave aside for a moment the work of certain psychologists – most famously Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and David Kessler's work on the five stages of grief (7) – not because such theories are without merit, but rather because they seem to posit, at least implicitly, that there is a 'normal' grieving process. By contrast, I would argue that grieving is inherently abnormal.[25] That is, while there might well be certain characteristics or 'stages' in the mourning process that are common to many, one should nonetheless avoid associating grieving with normality or normative experience. To lose someone you love is strange, and it renders you a stranger to your life. No one can formalise the process (or ritual) of dealing with such loss, primarily because no one can know exactly what it is that has been lost. The relationship one establishes with a loved one is incalculably intimate – what one experiences with the other person, or admires about him/her, even what one dislikes, all of this and more, belongs to the privacy and intimacy of that specific relationship. This is not to say that our interactions are not mediated by society and therefore by normative processes, but there remains a specificity, a particularity to each relationship which cannot and should not be wholly subsumed and explained by any social model.

It is this understanding of love, as something varied and excessive of definition, which I would like to explore further in this final section of the chapter. I shall argue that *The Silent Minaret* offers the excess of love in response to the macabre abuses of history, politics and

power. As I shall show, the novel connects love both with a more lasting home and with an infinite hospitality. Moreover, what this reveals is that, while in many ways it is subject to historical forces, love (by which I mean the intimate care of one for the other) also exceeds them. To put it simply, love gives more than history can take.

By Katinka's own admission, the West Bank is an extremely difficult place to make a home. It is characterised by loss, dispossession, systemic violence, prejudice. In sum, life there is over-determined by all the workings of power which are encapsulated in the novel's conception of history. Yet, for all of this, there is something wonderfully hopeful, even joyous about her description of her new life. For example, in her letter to Kagiso, she writes: "I've never felt as many emotions in one day, as I have here. Every night I try to count them, but I always fall asleep before I'm through" (270). It is worth pausing briefly here to note that Katinka feels overwhelmed by the emotions that her new abode inspires in her. They are, in a quite literal sense, beyond calculation, definition and complete understanding.

Katinka also celebrates the "infectious joy of the children", and observes that, where she lives, the people are characterised by "a willingness to laugh" (270). Those children are the same ones who are able to draw gunships without a moment's thought. Despite this familiarity with violence, it is these children who have re-inspired her love of the classroom (nothing there is simple, remember). The irony of a people so filled with exuberance and passion regardless of being so pathetically susceptible to hostility is deeply significant. Implied is the idea that while, in so many ways, subjugated, they are also, paradoxically, freer than others who have more economic and legal opportunities and advantages. Katinka describes these people, her people really, as poor in the pocket and rich in their hearts. "How often the converse is true in England", she observes (270).

By this point in the novel, this conclusion that she has come to about England is quite apparent to the reader too. Issa's disappearance is the culmination of invasive and abusive acts perpetrated in that so-called 'free society'. One cannot but be reminded of Issa's own description of London: a place where, on the margins of the wealth and splendour, one finds "*the invisible ones*", who, he writes, "*roam the city* [. . .] *with vacant, distant stares*" (134). According to him, these people are the "*[a]bsent and preoccupied*", who are "*here* [in England] *only in unwanted, despised, brutalised, foreign body*". At one point, he even refers to them as "*Europe's untouchables*" (134). For these refugees and exiles, London is no cosmopolitan metropolis, and it is certainly no home. They live in "*lairs, where the corridors echo with anguished sobs and moans*" (135).[26] You clearly do not have to live on the West Bank or the Gaza strip (or a slum in India, or any other place which the West is so quick to

construct as inhospitable, violent, inhumane, "other" to its sense of itself as the normative standard) to experience victimisation and oppression.

Interestingly, Ronit Frenkel ascribes a great deal of hope to Issa's ability to understand and recognise the suffering of others. For her, it is the product of his "transnational South African-produced consciousness, born out of a successful revolt" and it connects him to others "through a type of cosmopolitan humanism" (135). His experiences of oppression and resistance in apartheid South Africa, in effect, allow him to value "the commonalities of oppressions across sites and subjectivities" (129). This line of argument is interesting, though problematic. For instance, while it may be true that one's own suffering might be a 'window' into the anguish of others, that is certainly not a given. One can just as easily be so overwhelmed by one's own troubles that one ignores others' altogether. Issa does not display such a selfish attitude but, as I have suggested, he is more an ideal than a character. His example is not one the reader can easily follow. Furthermore, Frenkel neglects to consider that what she terms his "cosmopolitan humanism" leads Issa to despair. While she is aware that he begins to "unravel" while living in London, she fails to account for the extent to which his personal problems might be due to his empathy for the marginalised across the globe. As such, Frenkel is able to advocate the cosmopolitanism she sees in Issa while ignoring its haunting consequences. Ultimately, my sense is that her argument does not register the idea, implied by the novel, that Issa's humanism is all but destroyed by the forces of empire. Shukri's novel is wise enough to know that, while care for others is necessary in the face of modern forms of oppression, it does not lead to a cessation of hostility. The hegemony of the neo-colonial West is always maintained at the expense of others.

Indeed, Katinka even implies that what is happening in Israel and Palestine is partly the responsibility of the West, particularly its media which disseminate "the propaganda, the misinformation, the lies, the crude racism, the blatant stereotypes" (273). What she is referring to is the narrative that has been authorised and passed on about this conflict, which simplistically pits Islamist terrorists against Zionists without ever critiquing either term. With the passage of time, this narrative has moved from being called news to being called history. In many ways, though, the difference is negligible.

London and the West Bank are both subject to the coercive and normative effects of this narrative. So why should it be that Katinka experiences so much more happiness and laughter in the Middle East? In England – the England represented in the novel, that is – there is quite simply not enough love. Consider Issa's "*unwanted ones*", what he calls "*Europe's untouchables*" (134). They are invisible to the majority of English society, mostly working in

menial jobs which involve cleaning up after others. There is little care given to these exiles by those whom they serve, by which I mean the 'native' English society who supposedly truly 'belongs' in that country. Instead, the "*untouchables*" suffer the brutality of being made to feel inferior and decidedly unwelcome. Even more painful, thinks Issa, is the fact that they must endure the absence of loved ones who have been left behind or who have died in places like the West Bank to which Katinka moves. Issa imagines that in their cramped places of dwelling, alone at night, they must be tortured by memories "*of a carefree childhood with siblings, now dead; of grandparents, shell-shocked that their many years of toil and sacrifice had not made it all better; of lonely, fretful wives, unable to escape from under the captive gaze of vigilant government gangs; of anxious parents filled with self-loathing and reproach*" (135). He describes England as the place they thought would be their "*sanctuary*" when they chose to uproot their lives. But, like him, the reader senses how pathetically ironic that choice of word is. It shares the same root as the Latin word 'sanctum', meaning "'a holy place,' as in Late Latin *sanctum sanctorum* 'holy of holies'" ("sanctum"). The irony of the term's use in this case is that England is described as a place where a building set apart for holy worship, like a mosque, can be defiled for reasons of 'national safety'. Moreover, those who go there hoping for protection from brutality instead find that the form and severity of the violence and disempowerment has changed, but not its fundamental nature. For the meagre rewards of cleaning toilets and scrubbing semen-stained sheets, they have lost what is most precious and sacred: their families and those for whom they care.

Contrast that sham of a 'free life' with some of Katinka's experiences living with Karim. She speaks of the "joy of a new life", by which she means her sister-in-law's new child. The infant is named Kulsoum after the neighbour who died in labour at the Israeli checkpoint. Moved by her sister-in-law's gesture, she muses that the name is evidence of "the dead in the living, the old in the new, the past in the present" (272). This line might seem problematic given that Issa (and, by association, Shukri) has been so critical of the way in which history repeats itself. They share this view of history with T. E. Lawrence (better known as 'Lawrence of Arabia'), of whom Issa is a great admirer. Like Lawrence, he loves deserts because they are "*clean*" (57). And, as I have already suggested, being 'clean', or untouched by history and empire, is Issa's greatest wish. More pertinent at this stage of my analysis is another of Lawrence's reflections that has influenced the young man:

> Yet when we achieved and the new world dawned, the old men came out again and took our victory to re-make in the likeness of the former world they knew. Youth

> could win, but had not learned to keep: and was pitiably weak against age. We stammered that we have worked for a new heaven and a new earth, and they thanked us kindly and made their peace.
>
> (qtd. in Shukri 61)

Perhaps in the continued inequality and abuses of power in post-transitional South Africa, Issa has seen first-hand that the victory for which he fought and was willing to die (even kill?) can be undone by the continued influence of those Lawrence terms "the old men". He has thus borne witness to a "peace" that perpetually resembles the prior war. There is little doubt that a similar sense of history repeating itself is experienced by him in London in 2003. The USA's 'War on Terror' seems, to him, a mere repetition of the forms of abuse of power which the apartheid state made law and which the colonial authorities first perpetrated against a perceived 'other'. In fact, his thesis is a scholarly contemplation of the ways in which early practices in the Cape colony would be adopted by later regimes. Furthermore, his years in the Movement, followed by his disillusionment with the heroes of the Struggle, so many of whom, he feels, have become corrupt government officials, attests to the ease with which the victory of 'youth' can be perverted by the 'age-old ways'.

Issa therefore needs a 'new way' because it is futile for him to repeat a course of action which he has seen fail time and time again. Since any opposition he might undertake would need to be done within the terms of history, it would necessarily be imbricated in that structure. Metaphorically speaking, such resistance would not be 'clean' in the way that Issa hopes. Rather, it would be 'stained' by the violence and greed of what Lawrence calls the "former world".

In a not dissimilar way, I think one can read Katinka's choice to move to the Middle East as a form of opposition which does not oppose, and therefore does not function within the laws that govern the society and which have led to the vast inequalities so painfully visible on the streets of her new community. For, one should not forget that she has not chosen to come to the West Bank to stand and fight. Rather, she has come for love. The latter fact also reveals why the naming of the child Kulsoum is qualitatively and demonstrably different from the awful historical recursions of which Lawrence speaks, and which Issa experienced first-hand. As I have already explained, the historical discourse which does so much damage to innocent lives is not simply a record of past events, and recording may not even be its primary purpose (even if it gives rise to its primary form, namely narrative). It is power – the endless, uncaring maintenance of the hegemony's 'will to power' – which gives historical narratives their legitimacy and value. Ideally, though, this would not be the case. In

a better world, perhaps the "new earth" Lawrence and his men tried to establish, the first and foremost role of history would be to remember people, particularly ordinary people. Their suffering, their joy, how and why they live and die would be the story we passed on. Surely, historical narratives *should* be the basis for how humanity remembers its humanity, precisely by recalling the lives of people? This is, in my opinion, exactly what is achieved in naming the child after a fallen neighbour. Those who are lost live on in those who remain. Love, the very thing that drove Katinka to her new life, might be the narrative we tell, the history we choose to record – in a better world, obviously.

More generally, I would say this is what the whole of *The Silent Minaret* is, that is to say, a way of preserving Issa, the disappeared, in those who are left behind to tell his story. It is a living memorial that counters the forgetting of history. Read in this context, the novel, while all the while acknowledging the power and hegemony of history, might also be considered as a challenge to the grand narrative. It is the counter-narrative which does what historical discourse should but fails to do. When the novel begins, the writer admits that he is all too aware of the dominant force of historical narratives, and that his story cannot but be implicated in the discourse of history, as if it were following in its wake, to its detriment. Yet, through its complex form and story, this text appears to challenge the discourse which is its master by telling the story which the latter could not and did not want to pass on. Shukri's work therefore does the impossible: by following, it is able not to follow!

Given that the text takes on such an impossible task, it should also come as no surprise that the two things that have all the while seemed unattainable for the characters in the novel are accomplished by Katinka in the West Bank. She is offered an extraordinary hospitality which places the guest before the host, and she feels at home. In this regard, let us reflect on what she calls "phenomenal hospitality", which is described in one of the many vignettes in her email to Kagiso. She recalls being invited over by members of the community, and her own feelings of "humility" when "made the guest of honour at a meal where the family can barely afford to feed themselves" (Shukri 272). The unidentified family (and why, we may wonder, need they be named? What might be lost in naming them?) place Katinka before themselves and willingly give more than they have. This is a welcome almost without limit because it is not made with thought for themselves and their needs. It places the guest in a place "of honour" ahead of the host who would ordinarily occupy it. Unsurprisingly, such generosity inspires "humility" in the guest. A selfless gift teaches her the limits of her self, subjecthood or ipseity.

One would not ordinarily think of a place like the West Bank – where despair is a "sitting tenant" (271) – as a place of belonging. Nevertheless, the hospitality which she is offered leads her to conclude that "amidst it all, after all the years of searching in unlikely places", she has finally found "the contentment of being at home, in the most unlikely place". She therefore joyously declares in her letter that: "[y]es. [I am] Loved – and at home" (273). Love and home are intimately related in many people's psyches. What her declaration reveals is why that connection should continue to be pertinent, even when one lives in the shadow of a barrier that is literally meant to prevent transgression. For her, love is not simply, not even primarily, a feeling of affection for the other person. Rather, the word designates the care for the other which is offered in spite of history and, also, in spite of one's self.[27] When a family gives a place of honour to a guest at a meal, even though they can barely feed themselves, that is love. When a South African Afrikaans woman of conservative upbringing teaches young Arab children on the West Bank, although there are uncountable differences between them and insurmountable hardships they all must endure, that too is love. And, one should not forget, it is also Katinka's choice to move where hostility and danger are a part of daily life, so that she can be with Karim. For him, she decides to expose herself to that danger, to make herself vulnerable, both physically and psychically. Anything less than that and her love would prove self-motivated; in other words, it would not be love at all.

Undeniably, the logic of such claims is open to critique. For instance, how can one contend that Katinka loves selflessly, for surely if she were without self, she would also be beyond love, and beyond any form of interpersonal relationship whatsoever? Even assuming that the overcoming of self, what the Greeks called *ekstasis*, were possible (and it is an incredible assumption, to be sure), on what basis does the self give itself to the other, if not because the other is a self, that is, a subject whose unique characteristics inspire the giving of oneself (love, effectively)? There are even more absurd contradictions, some of which I feel it necessary to consider since they bear directly on the complex form of love that Katinka offers.

One such paradox is pointed out by Derrida, who asks the following in a postcard sent to an anonymous lover: "when I call you my love, is it you I am calling or my love? You, my love, is it you I thereby name, is it to you that I address myself? (*Post Card* 8). The question hypothesises that perhaps there is a difference between one's love (the feeling, attachment or connection) and the object of that love. It is asked in *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, which must surely rank, alongside works such as *Glas*, as one of his more bizarre texts. Before a series of essays on Freud, legacy and much else, there is a very long

'first' section comprised of "post cards" which the travelling intellectual sends to his lover from his various 'points of arrival' across the globe. Many recurrent themes or topics connect the numerous postcards and, in turn, connect them to the essays which follow. Actually, the exact nature of the linkages between the postcards and the essays is difficult to ascertain – deliberately so, I would say. The text is critical of the metaphysical logic which assumes that legacy or influence is a unidirectional process, and therefore one senses as one reads it that it does not 'flow'. By this I mean that the order in which it is set out is not indicative of a teleology in which the earlier sections inform or influence later sections without the converse also being true. The problem for the reader is how then to read the work. Should one read the essays first, or the postcards? The influence of the sections is contemporaneous and simultaneous which means that, inevitably, wherever one begins, one cannot totally account for the influence of the other section. 'Following' the logic of Derrida's work is therefore deliberately problematic. Indeed, 'following' in a more general sense is revealed as a process which assumes too much, and is in fact only possible when one is not following the text.

Nevertheless, one could argue that love and its connection to the 'post' is arguably that which ties all the various other themes addressed by the text together. As Derrida writes to his lover, about his love, about Plato and Socrates, about travel, he observes that the tragedy (but also the possibility) of the postcard is that it "can always not arrive at its destination, and that therefore it never arrives" (33). While the logic is troubling, in philosophical terms, it is quite fair. If arrival cannot be assured, then arrival is never possible. Wherever a postcard might arrive, since nothing can guarantee that it would arrive there, that point is not its destination. The ramifications of this paradox are, for Derrida, overwhelming. Destination, either the shore one hopes to arrive at through travel or the addressee who should receive one's communication, becomes a deeply problematic issue. The Postal Principle (as he terms it) implies that arrival will always involve and depend upon a kind of non-arrival. Each destination to which one orients oneself is already irrevocably lost, and the condition of possibility for arrival is deviation or drifting (see Malabou 1–8).

Post Card is a hugely ambitious work and cannot be summarised in any systematic manner in these pages (not least because it calls into question the systems which depend on an unproblematic notion of departure and arrival). That said, what is perhaps most fascinating about the book is that, as he writes on Freud, Heidegger, Nietzsche, Socrates and Plato, love seems foremost on the great scholar's mind. Implicit in the form of the work is the haunting question, 'what if I can never arrive at you, my love?' According to Catherine Malabou, derivation is a conventional notion which assumes that what one allows to leave from a point

of origin can and will arrive at a predetermined destination, thereby ensuring that both the origin and the other shore are fixed and knowable. Yet, as Derrida explains, derivation is always corrupted by the Postal Principle. The question that the text obliges its reader to ask is to what extent love might radically destabilise derivation, and be characterised by the Postal Principle for this reason.

For example, Derrida's aforementioned question to his love – in which he wonders on the difference between the object of his love and the love itself – implies that what he gives or sends to his love (be it himself, or his words on a postcard) may not coincide (or arrive) at/with his love (the object of his love). If nothing can be given or sent with the promise of arrival, then love is not only impossible, but patently absurd. One would like to give oneself (or as much of oneself as is possible in any case), but that gesture is rendered futile in advance. For, one is never able to send the gift to its intended addressee. The possibility that it will not arrive marks a rule which calls arrival itself into question. Let us say, for instance, that I would like to send a gift (a postcard, a message of love, any message of any kind really). If I assume I know where or to whom I am sending it, I deny the catastrophic effect of the Postal Principle (which has allowed me to send the gift in the first place). Accordingly, I have sent my gift assuming that I know its point of arrival, while the sending itself is only possible because the point of arrival is never absolutely knowable (a postcard can always not arrive, let us recall).

Such a duplicitous 'giving' (one which denies the Postal Principle) has at least one notable advantage: knowledge of destination allows for a certainty about origin. As Catherine Malabou explains:

> [a] voyage ordinarily implies that one leaves a familiar shore [. . .]. The traveler derives or drifts from a fixed and assignable origin in order to arrive somewhere, always maintaining the possibility of returning home, of again reaching the shore of departure. Travelers drift as far as their arrival, thus completing the circle of *destination.*
>
> (2, original emphasis)

One's home, one's sense of self and ipseity, is maintained or reaffirmed by a known point of arrival. Conversely, the "event that abducts the traveler's identity and allows an opening to alterity to become experience of the world in general must occur by surprise and remain incalculable" (Malabou 2). So yes, one can give knowing to whom and to where the gift must go. Ironically, then, the gift will arrive back at its giver. This is how we give to ourselves in a closed loop. In this way, we give to ourselves solipsism and an end to communication in

general. Where one might be tempted to read Derrida's Postal Principle as a rule which negates communication (since it appears to imply that no message can ever arrive), the opposite is true. There can be no communication without the Postal Principle, without an irreducible threat of deviation which allows for an "opening to alterity", by which we must understand Malabou means the other for whom our message is meant.

I would argue that this might also explain why the *Post Card* is so obsessed with love. After all, one hopes that love is the form of communication or gift which orients itself most profoundly to the other. As I have already suggested, it should ideally be a selfless act, and a gift of the self. It is a form of giving (or sending) which must not assume any knowledge of its addressee. As such, it must not even assume it will arrive, and must not reaffirm or reify the ipseity of the sender. As Derrida writes to his lover: "Understand me, when I write, right here, on these innumerable post cards, I annihilate not only what I am saying but also the unique addressee that I constitute, and therefore every possible addressee, and every destination" (*Post Card* 33).

Consider the 'destination' of Katinka's love, Karim. He is (yet another) absent character, known only to the reader as an enigma, an unknown, a photograph that Katinka keeps that is never even described by the narrator. The reader knows what Katinka gives, but does not know why she gives it. No reader can therefore claim that s/he knows Karim, or knows that he is worthy of her gift. But, really, that is not the point, because it does not matter what he has done, or who he is. Rather, what matters is what she gives. The focus of the text is on the gift of love, not the receiver thereof. If every aspect of such a notion of love strikes one as impossible, consider the impossible thing that it makes possible: Katinka is loved, yes, "*and at home*" (Shukri 273, my emphasis).

The hope that she feels by the end of the novel is also perceptible in the very last words in the text, though it may not seem so at first. She sends a message, an sms, to Issa's mobile phone which reads; "Im by dawal@qalqila. Wen janlandd @cape he plantd a hedj 2 sepr8 setlazfrmlocls. Da histry of erlyurpeansetlmnt @da cape is unversly&eternlypertnt x" (274). Leaving aside the abbreviations and colloquialisms of her 'sms language', the latter half of her message is taken virtually word for word from Issa's thesis. In effect, what Katinka is describing is the hegemonic place of history, and its ability to repeat its forms of power *ad nauseum* for the benefit of a few and at cost to many.

As with the beginning of the novel, its ending appears to imply that history is insurmountable, unending, and pervasive. Yet Katinka sends the bleak content of her message without any assurance that Issa, the supposed recipient, will ever read it. Her sms is

without the prior knowledge of who will set eyes on it, or that it will ever be read at all. As such, it makes room for the unexpected, the catastrophic even. In short, it allows for an experience of the other. On this basis does her message exceed its sender, its recipient and even its content. Again, and while it might seem trite, love is the gift which overwhelms history by being entirely obscure to its terms of reference.

Katinka cannot know that her words will ever reach her friend and, in fact, that possibility seems ever less likely with the passing months. Her words might never find him, yet still she sends them. She gives them to Issa in love, precisely by giving them without destination. If they should reach him, they would have followed in the footsteps of one who could not be followed. As such, they would have taken an unknown and unknowable route that could never be repeated or predicted in advance.

And what of the other destination at which her words have unexpectedly arrived: us, the readers of *The Silent Minaret*? How should we place ourselves, we who have read the message that was never assured of being read at all? Is it possible that we have done that which seemed most impossible? Are we also in that un-findable and undefined 'place' beyond history, beyond the text too? Have we arrived, by a never-before traversed path, at the place to which Issa disappeared? Are we home?

It seems to me that what makes *The Silent Minaret* such a difficult text is exactly what redeems it. That is, the reader of this work is troubled by the lack of certainty surrounding the protagonist. His absence marks a hole which the reader cannot fill in by piecing together information from others. It is true that one may know more about Issa by the end of the novel than one did at its beginning, but one can never know what has become of him. There are several possibilities – extraordinary rendition, death, madness etc. – but none is definitive. Perhaps, though, there is a necessity to respect this uncertainty around which Shukri has constructed his novel. In not knowing, the reader rejects the violent machinery of state which has tried to document and thus claim Issa's body and mind (see Jayawardene 50). Accordingly, s/he does the unthinkable, which is to respect the alterity of this character – to welcome it, even. There is no hospitality that does not care for the alterity of the guest. All other forms of hospitality are subject to history, by which I mean that they are at the service of history. In being welcomed, the guest is made a subject of history. Issa refuses this conventional welcome, and he is illegible as a result. The reader who chooses to read his illegibility is given an extraordinary mandate, which is s/he must *not read*, *not know*, and *not find* a legible form for this character. Instead, the reader is obliged to give him a most extraordinary gift, which is a radical kind of freedom, which amounts to an absolute freedom

from description and inscription. Such a 'gift' cannot be given in the knowledge that it will arrive at its recipient, precisely because what one is giving is the recipient's right to be unarrivable-at, heterogeneous to placement and definition. The novel characterises the giving of such gifts as a love worthy of the name. It is love deprived of vanity, aggression, convention and codification. There is no way to 'plan' to love in this way. There are no directions, either. Yet, to love in any other way is not to love at all. It is, in fact, to do the exact opposite, which is to enter into the power matrix of history and to collude in the damage it causes.

Of course, such notions are fanciful, far-flung. Readers are subject to history. They are complicit with it. Despite this, when one views Katinka's message (it is Shukri's too), it is worth asking how one can be sure of the place from which one does so? It is quite a claim to say that the reader knows him/herself in the act of receiving it. In reading it, one may, in fact, find that the opposite is true: that the ground below has vanished, and that one is overwhelmed by the uncanny, *Unheimlich* sense that one is already other to oneself. That is not a destination the reader could have expected in advance. A text about history, about violence, about loss, which nevertheless concludes in love – that is indeed an unexpected journey.

In the following chapter, I intend to analyse a text quite unlike Shukri's novel in many ways. Vladislavić's *Double Negative* is not really about love, or the 'War on Terror, and its protagonist is not only not absent, but his point of view becomes quite oppressive for the reader. As I intend to show, this character, Neville Lister, is prone to choosing comfort (or the illusion thereof) over ethics, whiteness and its privileges over responsibility, and apathy over engagement. The difficulty is that his point of view resembles the reader's in ways that cannot be utterly denied. That is, while one may not wish to see the world as Neville does, I will demonstrate that what informs his perspective informs all perspective. As such, the protagonist of Vladislavić's novel is quite dissimilar to Shukri's absent hero, because he is unwilling to sacrifice anything for anyone else, whereas Issa, as I have shown, forfeits himself in order not to be party to the harm caused by master narratives like history.

I would also argue that, in some respects, Neville's journey is the opposite of Marion's in *Playing in the Light*. Her development is to become far more uncomfortable and wary of the whiteness in which she was reared. By contrast, he begins the text rebelling (at least verbally) against the privileges of his class and race, but, as the narrative proceeds, becomes far more settled in his station in life. This is not to say that he ends the novel absolutely comfortable with his whiteness. Certainly, he senses, if somewhat dimly, that there

are others who are excluded by this limited way of being. Yet, he seems less and less willing to risk the meagre rewards of his well-established life in order to encounter these others. As his photographs of walls imply, he wants to rest in a world that is familiar and safe, even if it is also solipsistic.

Notes

[1] For instance, the police (infamously) desecrate a mosque near where he lives, and he is searched at Heathrow, presumably because of his name and skin colour.

[2] Jane Poyner is fairly unequivocal on this point. According to her, "[a]nxiety amongst Western and colonial powers has always masked the economic and strategic interests those powers held in the colonies, and, then as now, 'terrorism' was a useful term to deflect the world's attention from such incidents" (314). Furthermore, she asserts that while she does not wish to "deny the crime of attacks like those on the World Trade Center", it is nevertheless necessary to "acknowledge [that] the rhetoric of 'terror' outweigh[s] the reality of the threat of terrorist attack, [and] has been cynically employed by hegemonic states to maintain strategic interests in the (post)colonies in the guise of moral right" (Poyner 314).

[3] Apart from his excellent academic record, willingness to put his life in danger to oppose the apartheid regime, and extraordinary compassion for the victimised, there is one other thing which indicates Issa's exceptionality: his name is an Arabic word meaning Jesus (see Jayawardene 49). The latter, of course, is, for Christians, the most exceptional person mentioned in the Bible. He is thought to be both god and mortal man. Furthermore, his love for all humankind and especially the poor is the basis of Christian charity and faith, and his sacrificial death serves as atonement for all people's sins. In effect, Jesus's life is the example that all Christians must follow, though, in actuality, none cannot follow in his footsteps as his love and compassion are infinite while humans are limited and born to (and of) sin. Like the followers of Jesus, the reader of *The Silent Minaret* is asked to follow an impossible path taken.

[4] I would argue that the subtle ways in which Shukri connects the violence of the so-called 'War on Terror' with older historical events, the rise of modernity chief among them, owes much to Mahmood Mamdani's writing. While I do not analyse this alignment with Mamdani's work in great detail in this chapter, I do not wish to suggest that it is an insignificant one. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (2004) is a touchstone for all who wish to think about terror, its causes and the representation of the Muslim in Western society.

[5] Is routine a 'thing', a singular object? Or, alternatively, is it a process which a thing undergoes? The former implies that that which is routine might also be unique. This line of enquiry will be increasingly important to me as this chapter proceeds.

[6] Notably, Andrew van der Vlies also points to the importance of considering the political dimension of the archive in his fine article on Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*. He draws on Derrida's writings on the archive and concludes that Helen's inability to find a public space to be herself is very close to the problem Derrida identifies as "cosingantion", which is, ultimately, the repression and denial of the other for the purposes of establishing one corpus that can easily be identified as the official archive (Van der Vlies, "The Archive, the Spectral" 591). Though the connections between Shukri's work and Wicomb's might not be obviously apparent, they are nevertheless there. Also, one can look at Poyner's article ("Cosmopolitanism and Terror") which also identifies similarities between these two writers.

[7] It is likely that Issa's love and simultaneous distrust of academic research are born from this episode.

[8] Supplementarity functions according to a metaphysical logic which Derrida has famously deconstructed. The supplementary representation is not added to the origin. For, there is no experience of the origin which is not an

experience of its supplement. It is beyond the scope of this project to discuss this argument in depth. That said, it informs much of my thought. For those who are interested, see Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1997).

[9] In effect, what Barthes postulates is that realism is a genre of writing and that one of its defining features is verisimilitude, that is, a superfluity of detail which has no other purpose than to indicate the real, or, more accurately, that the text has recorded the real. Barthes also mentions that this technique owes much to historical narratives (148). That connection is undoubtedly relevant to Shukri's critique of history within the novel, and also goes some way to explaining the disjointed form of the text. Clearly, this writer would like to avoid the coherence one associates with realism, and the claims to referentiality which it makes. His work is experimental in terms of form, at least in part, since it allows him to dramatically announce that he does not wish for it to become normative in the way that history and realism might.

[10] According to a report by the United Nations' High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), by the end of 2012 the number of forcibly displaced people had reached 42.5 million (qtd. in Sedghi). The vast majority of refugees come from countries such as Afghanistan, Somalia, Syria and Iraq (Sedghi). The socio-political circumstances of these diverse regions are all unique and complex, yet it is difficult to ignore the fact that they are all territories targeted by the 'War on Terror'. The effects of the West's political, financial and military policies in these countries on the refugee population would be impossible to quantify. Nevertheless, Shukri's novel suggests that the difficulty of finding a home and homeland in the modern world cannot be thought separately from the violence done in the name of Western history. Furthermore, it is not coincidental that Issa feels a profound connection and compassion for the displaced people from developing nations who end up in London doing menial labour (Shukri 135). I think that, for him, and by extension for Shukri, the (lack of) status of refugees is something like the logical outcome of the inhospitality and violence of late capitalism and the discourses which perpetuate it. In other words, refugees are the most obvious, terrible effect of a process of un-homing which is ubiquitous and subtle.

[11] Immediately after making this conjecture about the game, Freud admits that such a claim has an obvious flaw, since the child more often played at throwing objects away without retrieving them than he played the game with the spool and string. At this point, he posits other possible interpretations of what the game might signify, all the while confirming (if only hypothetically) that the "Pleasure Principle" does still reign supreme. Then, as suddenly as the child's activities was raised, is it dismissed so that he my turn to his main focus: those activities driven by "tendencies *beyond* the pleasure principle" (Freud, "Pleasure Principle" 17, original emphasis). In *Post Card*, Derrida does an excellent close reading of this essay, and argues (quite persuasively) that it is marked by endless digressions and postulations which lead nowhere, or that at the least do not lead beyond the "Pleasure Principle". I would suggest that Derrida's argument be read by those who wish to understand Freud's work. I raise some of the problems of endless digression and unproven postulation here to indicate why it is that I have chosen to focus on one conclusion that Freud made about the game rather than the others. Since he never does or is able to prove definitively anything except that the "Pleasure Principle" has mastery, it seems fair, to me, to consider each conclusion as equally valid (or invalid as the case may be). In any event, Freud's work is really just a backdrop to what I would like to say about Shukri's novel. I think that the common motif of play and its relation to the mother validates the connection I establish.

[12] Among Freud's many assertions about the *Unheimlich* is that it is what was once *Heimlich*, or familiar, which has undergone repression and then recurred ("The Uncanny" 241). It is therefore unsurprising that the familiar game of "hide and seek" becomes so uncanny (and un-homing) as time passes. There is much evidence in the description of that time to suggest that Kagiso, in particular, has repressed a great deal. Why, for instance, does he only recall seeing the boots of the policemen? Is it because of his vantage point, as he seems to claim, or might it be possible that his 'limited view' reveals the limits of his own memory's willingness fully to integrate the repressed into his psyche?

[13] Mahmood Mamdani (along with many in the Muslim world) is actually very critical of the use of the word 'fundamentalism'. He argues that it falls into the trap of constructing a 'bad Muslim' who should and can be contrasted to a 'good Muslim', though, notably, he admits that the militancy of the Ayatollah is, in some respects, an exception to the political militancy which created "Political Islam", what the West in error terms religious fundamentalism (36–38). I take his point, but have chosen to continue to use the term because I think Shukri tries to show that religious conservatism is not a uniquely Islamic trait, and that its political and ideological underpinnings can be revealed by considering the similarities of its practice to that of other faiths. Also, while I do not doubt that Shukri would agree with Mamdani that it is more constructive and historically accurate to say that there is really only a "Political Islam" rather than a fundamentalist Islam, in the case of *The*

Silent Minaret, I think the novel is concerned by the ways in which religions (all of them) might contribute to violence. For strategic reasons, Mamdani does not address this concern in his work.

[14] I mention the Enlightenment because it gives rise to the particular conceptions of individuality, subjectivity and nation which define what we call modern societies. As with Wicomb's novel, the rise of modernity is a fundamental aspect of the story that Shukri wishes to tell. In both novels, the writers seem intent on showing that the recursion of history is always possible, and that so many of the violent, reductive forms that that history might take were first initiated during the colonial project, or as the notion of nation (as we know it) began to take shape. For more on the connection between terrorism and the advent of modernity, see Mamdani's erudite introduction to *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim*.

[15] I explored this issue of the name and its role in the subjection of those deemed subjects of society in the previous chapter as well. This interest in the violence that can be done by the name is probably quite common in much South African writing. It would stem from many factors, including (but not limited to) colonial policies of naming landscapes and peoples using the language of the centre (the absurdity of which Marion comments on [Wicomb *Playing* 84]), as well as apartheid's obsession with racial nomenclature. That said, Shukri shows that naming is also becoming a major form of control in the post-9/11 world.

[16] While coming at the text from a different perspective, Poyner makes a similar point. She argues that postcolonial writers must "be mindful when engaging with 'terror' that in aestheticizing the erasure of bodies and in turn reproducing the obscuring of space-time coordinates, they risk reaffirming the rhetoric they wish to expose" (322). The example she uses is the dictionary definitions of 'disappear' which Kagiso reads, which "categorizes and sets in order, and, in this instance, even closes off the possibility that Issa is still alive" when, really, the text wants Issa to remain beyond such forms of identification" (Poyner 323). Since Poyner's article seeks to discuss the representation of terror in two South African novels, the other is Zoë Wicomb's *David's Story*, she does not have the space to address this aspect of Shukri's work in as much detail as I have. Nevertheless, her point is an important one which no other critic of the novel has yet sought to analyse.

[17] It is worth considering why the word orthodoxy is most often used to describe a dogmatic form of Christianity, while fundamentalism is conventionally associated with Islam and terrorism. The term orthodoxy does not carry the connotations of violence and irrationality which are so readily identifiable with the phrase Islamic fundamentalist. Since both stances demand a rigid adherence to religious sacred texts, and since extremists have come out of both camps, the negative connotations which Islamic fundamentalism accrues seems to be, at some level, politically motivated.

[18] In the book of Exodus, God commands that Aaron, Moses's brother, be made a priestly garment adorned with "pomegranates of blue, purple, and red wool, alternating with gold bells" (28.33–34). In the Koran, too, the pomegranate is mentioned often, most notably as a fruit which grows in the gardens of paradise (55.68). Frances separates the two prayer beads as if she were peeling "seeds from a pomegranate" (Shukri 14), but the irony of the symbol of the pomegranate is that it is yet another thing which connects, not divides, these two faiths.

[19] In what sense is god 'real'? And on what basis can such a word even be used in this context, one wonders?

[20] One might also think, in this regard, of Katinka's decision to learn to read and write Karim's language. Her love of him also demands that she move beyond the confines of her culture to experience his. Since culture is ineluctably bound up with language, it is apt that this is achieved by learning Arabic. Moreover, her immersion in his culture is further made possible by her choice, at the end of the novel, to move to the West Bank. In order to experience another's social milieu, one must endure the loss of comfort and home by making the foreign culture one's home.

[21] Issa, Jane Poyner suggests, strives for this cosmopolitan ideal but fails to consolidate it (316).

[22] We might well ask who the initial intended targets of the bomb were? While it was placed in the public toilets of the Athlone magistrate's court, it is unclear if that mean that officials of the court or innocent civilians were the primary marks (Shukri 265). Even if the civilians were not targeted, Issa surely had to realise that some might die. Would the mature man, who a few years later rails against the terrible use of phrases like "collateral damage", accept the loss of innocent life which he seemed to in his youth? Alternatively, it might be that his wisdom in later years constitutes more than merely his determination to critique the state-sanctioned violence of

the Allied West. His greater understanding of the complexities of political resistance might be the product of his more personal realisation that he too was once complicit in that kind of violence and now needs a new way.

[23] The construction of the wall to which Katinka is referring was begun in June of 2002 and is the largest, most expensive construction in either Israel or Palestine. Israeli authorities claim that the erection of this separation barrier was necessary for security reasons. There is some evidence to support this claim. For instance, the death toll of Israeli civilians killed by 'terrorist' bombings decreased in the years following the wall's construction (Tristam para.1–4). Critics argue that the wall has led to increased hostility though, and that it allows Israel to occupy Palestinian territory. Much of the acrimony has arisen because of the fact that the wall does not follow the Green line which is the official line of demarcation between the two territories. The Israeli government contends that the route of the wall has been determined by topography and security concerns. Those opposed to the barrier note that by the time it is completed it will allow Israel to control almost 12% of Palestinian territory and further develop settlements on that land (Tristam para. 7–8). To do so is a breach of international law, with one non-binding judgement by an international court stating that it "constitutes breaches by Israel of its obligations under the applicable humanitarian law" and that, furthermore, such encroachment and settlement "cannot be justified by military exigencies or by the requirements of national security or public order" (qtd. in Tristam para. 11). Notably, the Palestinian authorities refer to the edifice as the "apartheid wall", and this appellation is surely relevant to Shukri's novel, which reflects on how the forms of oppression which were practised in South Africa might be considered "[u]niversally and eternally pertinent".

[24] Judith Butler writes a book called *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (2009) in which she attempts to consider the value of being in the aftermath of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. She begins by contesting that "the frames through which we apprehend or, indeed, fail to apprehend the lives of others as lost or injured (lose-able or injurable) are politically saturated" and are, accordingly, "themselves operations of power" (1). It is in light of this contention that she begins to critique the ways in which some deaths are constructed as grievable while others are not (15). In many ways, Butler's work resonates with my own. Like her, I am critical of the normative process by which we frame the other. Moreover, her concern for those who are constructed as ungrievable, and therefore as less than human, is certainly relevant to Shukri's novel.

[25] To be fair, Kübler-Ross and Kessler begin their book on grief by stating that the five stages of grief have been "very misunderstood over the past three decades", which is surely true (7). They then admit that "there is not a typical response to loss, as there is no typical loss", and that the stages should therefore be viewed as "part of the framework that makes up our learning to live with the one we lost" (Kübler-Ross and Kessler 7). If we ignore the ambiguity of the phrasing (which implies, unfortunately, that we must learn to live with the one who is no longer living, no longer alive to be lived with), these introductory remarks are a good sign that the notion of normal grief has always been suspect. I do not wish to misrepresent the nuances and complexities of Kübler-Ross and Kessler's work in this regard. I mention their theory of stages of grief, in part, because it has been "misunderstood", that is, because it has led to a popular notion of grieving as processual and telelological (the goal being "acceptance", the fifth stage).

[26] This description of the plight of refugees and asylum-seekers who end up in London seeking sanctuary resonates with Wicomb's critique of the violence done by Englishness. As I showed in the previous chapter, she is critical of the idea that Englishness and English society offers a haven for others. Also, both writers suggest that, in point of fact, English culture is responsible for a great deal of the violence that leaves others (like Helen and Issa) dispossessed.

[27] Though I write that love "designates", the word seems singularly inappropriate in this case. I would argue that for Shukri, the word love is a catechresis, since it designates that which is beyond designation.

Chapter Three: The Art of Getting Lost in Ivan Vladislavić's *Double Negative*

Introduction

Neville Lister, the protagonist and narrator of Ivan Vladislavić's award-winning novel *Double Negative* – though he is no Romantic – would agree with William Wordsworth in his assessment that the world is "too much with us" (1). But where some Romantics might argue for an imaginative and aesthetic engagement with nature, which might transcend quotidian modernity, Neville is struck time and time again by the limits of aesthetics, imagination and representation in general. While he is overwhelmed and exasperated by the sheer vastness and contingency of everyday life, he also feels, somewhat paradoxically, that the real world is always beyond him – precisely because it is beyond his means of capturing it. What he realises, and this becomes clearer to him once he becomes a photographer, is that while forms of representation are the only means by which one experiences the world, they are by definition at a remove from it. He is bombarded by more signs than he can ever hope to process, but the signifiers have no innate correlation to that which they signify. As a result, the real, which seems always to be swirling around and inundating him, is also lost to him.

It is this interest in the real and art that most differentiates Vladislavić's novel from either *Playing in the Light* or *The Silent Minaret*. That said, where all three novels are very similar, in my opinion, is in their concern with home and hospitality. They centre on characters who are uncomfortable in their home and homelife. In Marion's case, this discomfort stems from an uncanny sense that the vigilance and inhospitality that her mother had taught her hides a dark secret. The realisation that her parents are play-whites leads to an even more profound lesson, which is that race need not altogether define her life if she is able to recognise its limits and respect the alterity of those who exist beyond it. Issa too is uneasy about the extent to which master narratives like race and history determine and subjugate one's private life. As a consequence, I have argued that he resists this invasion in the most radical way by refusing to collude with the modern world in any way. Ironically, the reader is made aware of the fact that reading itself is a complicit act, and that following Issa's example might be impossible. Nonetheless, as with Wicomb's text, Shukri's seems to demand the impossible, and to imply that anything less is unethical, inhospitable. As I have said, however, neither of these novels explores in detail the function of art in relation to hospitality. Vladislavić's work is therefore an important inclusion in my study since it will allow me to consider the possibilities for ethical engagement with others in literature.

Moreover, the connection between art and politics in this novel is also of particular interest, to me. In short, Neville's failure to find an appropriate political response to the violence endemic to apartheid South Africa is reflected in his art's limited interest in the plight of others.

As a white, middle class student in the late 1980s, he struggles both with his own complicity with the racist regime, and his inability to know what action he might take to redress the balance of power. He senses that access to what is real, in the form of what *really matters*, the *realpolitik*, is out of his reach. Ever the outsider, the loner who does not belong and can find no door that will let him in, he becomes disillusioned. For a time, he leaves South Africa to live abroad. Ostensibly, he is dodging conscription, though I would argue that his search for home is a latent aspect of all his major life choices. After the end of apartheid, he returns convinced that his life will lack purpose or meaning unless he is in the newly democratic South Africa. His return, however, marks merely another point along a path that ultimately leads to his becoming the conservative, apathetic middle-aged man that the reader encounters in the final section of the novel. Whereas in his youth, he wanted to engage and could not figure out how to do so, in his maturity he only wants to be comfortable in his home, and for the world outside to function in an orderly way. (Unsurprisingly, he does not feel that the 'new South Africa' can offer such order and flirts with the idea of returning to Britain.) As a young man, he debates the ability of liberal and radical politics to initiate change, and even gets into a physical altercation with a neighbour with whose political views he disagrees. In middle age, discussion of personal accountability for change seems to have been all but replaced by a world-weary sense that he has no connection to a larger social reality. "History has played a flame over me" he thinks privately to himself, "I've come unstuck, but I'm joined to the world by a few gluey strands of saliva" (Vladislavić, *Double Negative* 201). As a teenager on the verge of adulthood, he did not know what he wanted from his life except that it should be determined by his "social conscience" (9). The passing years do not open up that possibility; quite the contrary, in fact.

The crucial event in his life is his day spent with legendary photographer Saul Auerbach, whose character is loosely based on David Goldblatt. What Auerbach attempts with photography, that is, to capture something of the complexity of others' lives, resonates on a subconscious level with Neville. And while his introduction to the profession is more by chance than design, it is surely telling that his niche within the market is in capturing "the moment when things teeter, when they hover and vibrate, just before the fall" (146). On the one hand, this desire to capture frozen moments correlates directly with Auerbach's

fascination with ordinary lives and the moments they comprise. On the other hand, Neville's niche reveals a desire for stasis, for preservation of things in danger of a "fall".

In the third section of the novel, entitled "Small Talk", he is interviewed as his work is being shown for the first time. The collection does not comprise the "frozen moments" pictures, which he does purely for financial gain. Instead, it is made up of stills of walls, and of Johannesburg walls in particular. Assuming that the collection is a more personal reflection of his self and world views than his commercial work is, this change in focus has obvious resonances. Whereas he once concerned himself with conserving things, with preventing their imminent and unavoidable destruction, he now only cares for those things that keep the world out. It is as if "the fall" has finally happened and all he can do is wall himself in.[1]

Aubrey Tearle, the prudish, conservative, Eurocentric protagonist of Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket* (2001) would have little to say to the young Neville the reader encounters at the beginning of the later novel. Indeed, were conversation to turn to politics, they might well quarrel even though they come from the same period in South African history. But if Tearle were to wait a few years, he would find the middle-aged Neville far more agreeable. I can imagine them sharing a pleasant afternoon discussing the various institutions and civic services that have failed or are in disarray. As Vladislavić makes clear in *The Restless Supermarket*, Tearle's conservative views, racial and social, are the product of a problematic appreciation of this country's apartheid years. But conservatism, even racism, can have another, quite unexpected wellspring: a disillusioned liberalism. The aging Neville is the product of the beliefs of his younger self. Neither version of the man can find a home in South Africa. Neither feels that he belongs, or that he matters.

I would argue that much of Neville's difficulty in dealing with the world appropriately (by which I mean both his struggle with the limits of photography, art and representation more generally, and his troubled political engagement with this country) may constructively be understood within the context of the impossibility of infinite hospitality. That is to say, the protagonist of Vladislavić's latest novel is rendered increasingly passive and disengaged by his sense that his interaction with others will always be mediated by various ideologies, paradigms, prejudices and misunderstandings. In effect, this character always walls the other within representations of him or her which do not and cannot denote absolutely accurately. Once he accepts the idea that he must give form to the other as an ineluctable fact, he begins to take less responsibility for others. Older (though perhaps not wiser), Neville slinks into the certain knowledge that while what he knows of people might

well be wrong (or limited at the very least), he cannot know them in any other way. The impasse exhausts him and he all but gives up on the world. Yet, as I hope to show, there is an ethical demand (suggested by Vladislavić in numerous ways) to do more than turns one's back on the world in despair. One is obliged to exceed the limits of one's knowledge, and is therefore also obliged to be infinitely hospitable to the other who exists beyond those limits. If the liberal left of this country is to avoid the political and ethical regression to which Neville falls prey, it must do so by engaging with the impossible demands of unlimited respect for alterity. For this writer, the choice is clear, even if it is by no means simple: one can live behind high and varied walls, as if there is nothing that exists beyond them, or one can engage in the terrifying, interminable work of trying to live outside them. One can find comfort in the solipsism of one's own homes, or choose to live as a stranger in the home of the other.

The Precipice of Perception: Memory, Photography and the Unknown

When Neville is being interviewed by Janie, the talkative, confident young reporter and blogger, about his first showing, he has the recurring feeling that he is not expressing himself well. He finds it difficult to explain, for example, why he has chosen to photograph walls, and cannot adequately describe his reasons for returning to South Africa after the end of apartheid. Furthermore, he has an appalling sense that, despite his best efforts, he is putting on a bit of a performance, one designed (presumably) to show himself in a good light. As he is not a very extroverted man, one senses that he finds the entire interview process unnerving, even invasive. What is more difficult for him, though, is his sense that he is not coming across clearly or as a sincere person, and that, as a result, his interviewer is interpreting him, or reading him. On some level, he is aware that it cannot be otherwise. As she scribbles notes based on his responses, he muses on what it is she could be writing. He concludes that it must be no more than "the gist" because, he realises, "[w]e're left with so little to go on" that:

> only the present is full enough to seem complete, and even that is an optical illusion. The moment is bleeding off the page. We live on the precipice of our perceptions. At the very edge of every living instant, the world shears away like a cliff of ice into the sea of what is forgotten.
>
> (Vladislavić, *Double Negative* 153)

This beautiful passage captures the 'gist' of one of the major themes of *Double Negative*, which is the impossibility of ever experiencing the real in an unmediated way. What strikes me about the extract is the preponderance of images of liminality: we "live on the *precipice* of our perceptions" and "*at the edge* of every living instant, the world shears away" (153, my emphasis). Beyond these liminal and limited spaces, which are our abode (where we "live"), there is an endless, indescribable abyss – "the sea of what is forgotten" (153). By Neville's logic, even the page is liminal and the moment, the present moment, is always vaster, more ephemeral and expansive, than its recording. Hence, it is "bleeding away" into an un-recordable darkness.

Here, as elsewhere in the novel, there is a conflation of, or resemblance between, different ways of 'knowing' the world. Memory is dwarfed by the "sea of what is forgotten", while the written word is overwhelmed by the excessive reality that no page can capture. And, more subtly, Vladislavić implies that photography – which supposedly captures the "moment" – is little more than an "optical illusion". The fullness of the moment, by which I think he means its immediacy, its presence-unto-itself, is not available for experience. If you write about it, photograph it or even remember it, you are not living *in the moment*. These forms of 'preservation' allow one to experience the moment again as citation and they therefore endow it with a futural dimension. But, such 'preservation' also means that its immediacy is only ever experienced in impure form and that its 'fullness' is not experienced at all. What is re-presented is not purely present and never will be. Such forms of 'knowing' are therefore contingent, inadequate and inaccurate. More than that, their condition of possibility is the abysmal unknown, which they seek to master but by which they are actually mastered.

We live on (and I would add in) the "precipice of our perceptions", but there is a beyond which is imperceptible. That is not to say that it does not exist, that we are discussing some hypothetical, metaphysical realm populated by gods and monsters. Rather, the fullness of the moment is the here and now. It is what exists, existence itself – yet, ironically, no ontology can adequately explain it. The explanations would necessarily draw on memory, on narrative – and perhaps take the form of narrative – and they would seek out forms of representation and present themselves in those forms. In the process, something would inevitably be lost. Incalculable, unnameable, inexplicable, it is precisely that ineffable thing which gives the moment its fullness. Perception does not and cannot grasp this fullness, this plenitude of time. In the face of such excess, it is rendered weak, cauterised, tame. Perception, ironically, leads to the realisation that we do not perceive enough, and do not

know enough. The limitations of perception make us feel as though we are teetering on the edge of a great cliff, with a mighty sea before us. We both desire and dread the fall, so, like the objects that Neville photographs, we hover in-between. We are perpetually falling, since the allure of fullness is irresistible. But we never land, never touch what Neville refers to as the waters of what has been forgotten. We seek to know and to remember all that has been forgotten and, ironically, it is knowledge and memory which make that impossible.

Neville refers to what can be known as the "gist", which implies that it is the essence of things, the most important and salient aspects. But his musings on the liminality of experience suggest that the word might be inappropriate (whether he knows it or not). He describes perception as limited, liminal and seemingly ephemeral. One is obliged to use it to grasp the world, and as a result one is like an insignificant being standing on a steep cliff before an endless expanse of dark and forbidding water. Such an image makes humanity seem very small indeed, and its observations smaller still. The "gist", or essence, one realises, lies deep beneath the water.

It is worth noting that this quite bleak view of perception and representation has some of its roots in Neville's experience with Auerbach. Neville's father organises for his son to spend the day with the then already quite famous photographer in the hope that it will spur him on to a career, or at the very least give him some direction. The two are joined by a British journalist, Brookes, who is in the country to report on the 'state of the nation'. At some point during the day, they drive out to Langermann Kop and Auerbach directs them to a clearing from which they are able to look out across the city.

Neville says that he is struck by the sense that "the land lay open like a book" before them (44). Like so much of the first two sections of the novel, the difficulty of placing the narrative voice haunts this line. By the end of the text, the reader has become familiar with the tone and attitudes of the middle-aged Neville and assumes that the first two sections of the work are recalled from his perspective. What is often unclear is whether or not the thoughts expressed by the narrator are those of the younger man or his mature self. For instance, does his description of the world as a book to be read represent the view of the young man on the *koppie* or the older man interpreting his younger self? Certainly, it seems like the conclusion one might draw in the moment when faced with such a vista. Yet, it is also entirely in line with the older Neville's outlook on things, as he distrusts memory and interpretation, and fears the world might be a text beyond his ability to read. I do not wish to glibly pass over this technical aspect of the novel, though I must also concede that I do not think that determining once and for all the differences between the narrating self and the

experiencing self is possible. They are conflated, inexorably so. Furthermore, it seems to me that it is only right that they should be thus bound. For, while the process of experience and that of recollection are not the same, there is nevertheless the same limitation that defines them and, indeed, makes them possible at all. That is, they are dependent on perception which, according to Neville, does not grasp the fullness of existence. Be it a moment experienced or one recalled, that moment surpasses a person's perceptual ability to grasp it. It is greater, more expansive, more quotidian and banal but also stranger than one can ever imagine.

The Space of Home in Vladislavić's Writing

Auerbach shares with Neville an understanding of what limits human experience. When they are on the hill, he looks out at the city, considers his vantage point, and says: "You think it would simplify things, looking down from up here [. . .] but it has the opposite effect on me. If I try to imagine the lives going on in all these houses, the domestic dramas, the family sagas, it seems impossibly complicated" (45). He goes on to ask, "[h]ow could you ever do justice to something so rich in detail?", and concludes, "[y]ou couldn't do it in a novel, let alone a photograph" (45). In many ways, *Double Negative* is an exploration of this thought, since the text attempts to reassert the importance and complexity of domestic life. Paradoxically, it does so by revealing its own restrictions: its inability to capture the plethora of details and intricacies which make up the 'average' home.

It is worth pausing to observe that, in fact, the domestic sphere has become an increasingly dominant trope in Vladislavić's *oeuvre* since his publication of *The Exploded View* in 2004. And, therefore, the over-emphasis of critics on the city-space and its meaning in this writer's work can usefully be balanced with a more critical focus on home-as-space in his fiction. Since the evidence for this interest in home is abundant and often quite self-evident, I will only provide a few telling instances from this writer's other recent narratives (which are not the primary focus of this study). For instance, in "Villa Toscana", Budlender, the story's protagonist and narrator, a statistician by trade whose current work involves assisting in re-drafting the questionnaires for the census, is obliged to travel to others' homes to discuss the draft questions and record responses. Since he is a guest in others' abodes, particularly in the complex after which the story is named, the narrative implicitly raises issues of hospitality. What is especially intriguing about "Villa Toscana" is the connection it establishes between the political work Budlender does, which gains him access to places from

which he would otherwise be excluded, and his violently reductive treatment of women. In effect, the story implies that politics and patriarchy are often inextricably intertwined and function simultaneously to invade the privacy of ordinary people's lives.

The second story in *The Exploded View*, "Afritude Sauce", begins with Egan visiting A Reconstruction and Development Programme housing project called Hani View. While there, a resident, Mrs Ntlaka, hurls a tirade of complaints at him about the poor standard of construction. He is not in fact responsible for this aspect of the project, but "because he is seemingly 'official'", Michael Titlestad and Mike Kissack suggest, in their article, that he "becomes *the* representative of authority, and is held accountable for an array of things that have nothing to do with him, from the proportions of the house to its structural faults" (14, original emphasis). Of course, technically their point is absolutely valid. But I think that the question of what precisely Egan is "accountable for" is a major theme of the story. Undoubtedly, he cannot be held liable (in the strictly legal sense of the word) for the shoddy workmanship or cramped space afforded to Mrs Ntlaka. Nonetheless, I do not think he is entirely blameless either. What the story shows is that he has a way of interacting and especially of seeing the world which allows him to consider the lives of others (such as the residents of Hani View) as separate, and as little more than so many statistics to be noted and then discarded. This approach to others is not new, or unique and, quite obviously, the poverty and disregard that Mrs Ntlaka rails against is a product thereof.

The story culminates with Egan alone in his hotel room, where he is troubled by the "multiple shortcomings of the room" (Titlestad and Kissack 16). He is, however, unable to recognise that his distaste for the room is strikingly similar to Mrs Ntlaka's feelings about her place of residence. Titlestad and Kissack conclude, therefore, that "[n]ot only is he denied reflexive distance, but the faults of the world become increasingly immanent and unavoidable" and that, ultimately, "there is no escape [for him] in the face of the overwhelming nature of the immediate" (16). While I am unable to do this story or the collection of which it is a part justice, I have tried to draw out the concerns regarding home which connect it with *Double Negative*. If "the overwhelming nature of the immediate" is only tangentially related to the home and hearth in *The Exploded View*, that connection is fully realised in the later text. For instance, Auerbach's comments atop the *koppie* about domestic dramas imply that there is simply too much world, even in the seemingly more limited, private and familiar space of home.

A very similar interest in the places one lives is evident in Vladislavić's 2006 publication *Portrait with Keys*, which begins with the extraordinary line, "[w]hen a house has

been alarmed, it becomes explosive" (*Portrait* 11). Given that the book starts in this way, it is interesting that it and its predecessor have been analysed almost exclusively as examples of Johannesburg 'city fiction'. For example, Titlestad and Kissack attempt to apply both Michel de Certeau's work on urban pedestrian movement and Pierre Bourdieu's thought on what he terms *habitus*. Though they agree that Bourdieu's work can usefully be used to "mute Certeau's politically optimistic version of pedestrian epistemology", that conclusion does not stop them from declaring that "the territory of the narratives [which form *The Exploded View*]" are the "borderlands of the sprawling metropolis of Johannesburg" (11). There is nothing factually wrong with this account of the text, and indeed it could accurately describe much of Vladislavić's writing. I cite it here because the claim is typical of so much criticism of this writer's work. The field assumes the necessity of asserting the importance of Johannesburg even when other theoretical frameworks might be more appropriate. For instance, in Kissack and Titlestad's work, which argues for the theoretical advantages of habitation rather than (or at least in conjunction with) what others have termed 'metropoetics', there is still a tendency to overemphasise Vladislavić's interest in Johannesburg the city rather than the space of home.

When Andie Miller interviewed this writer in March 2007 (after the publication of *Portrait with Keys*), he observed that "all of [Vladislavić's] writing is about Johannesburg", and he then asked, "I wonder if you see Johannesburg as your muse?" (136). Vladislavić's perhaps somewhat unexpected response was that some of his earlier work "ha[d] more a Pretoria setting" (136). Miller was led to postulate that perhaps his interviewee wrote about the place in which he lived, his home as it were, which the latter admitted was a fair assumption (136).While I do not wish to imply that the urban space is not a huge influence on Vladislavić's *oeuvre*, it seems to me that there is value in considering his work through frameworks that can still consider the functions of space and place, but do not necessarily draw exhaustively on notions of the city to do so. This study, which analyses this important South African writer's representations of home and hospitality, aims to make some small contribution in that direction.

One might ask precisely what value there is in analysing the space of home in this writer's work. Also, is it possible to extricate the home from the city in which it is set? By what right, and with what methodology, may this be done? Let me respond to these questions, first, by stating in no uncertain terms that a focus on the domicile which negates or denies its place within a larger socio-political framework (such as metropoetics might provide) is not my intention at all. In fact, as should already be clear from the previous chapters of this study,

my interest is quite the opposite. My research is preoccupied with the ways in which the 'outside' comes 'in' (though I have tried to show that terms such as 'in' and 'out' need to be written under erasure). In Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, it is the public discourse of race which invades the privacy of the Campbell family, and all but destroys that privacy. *The Silent Minaret* also deals with a powerful grand narrative that oppressively subdues the private narratives that occur in the home so as to perpetuate a homogenous and normative understanding of the world. I have argued that this form of historical discourse un-homes the politically conscious Issa.

So, I would say that my concern with the relatively limited and traditionally private space of home is informed by an abiding interest in the socio-political landscape. This seems appropriate to me on at least two levels: first, houses are hubs of human activity. As such, they are inherently places of contestation, violence, and history. As Bill Bryson puts it, "[h]ouses aren't refuges from history. They are where history ends up" (5). While Bryson's claim is undeniably accurate, the aporia at the heart of the notion of home is that it is, nevertheless, ineluctably associated with the notion of refuge (which he rightly refutes).That is, home is always conceived as private space, the owner's own property which is therefore inviolable. It is this paradox which animates my own project. How can one conceive of homes, which are safe spaces for human intimacy, in the face of the abiding and terrible threats that exist in society in general? What if the borders of one's property are always at risk from a world outside that places little or no value on one's desire to be safe and comfortable? It seems to me that the very concept of private property and home is irrevocably destabilised once such questions are asked. Yet, by the same token, I am led to wonder if perhaps it is not necessary to ask such questions precisely so as to deconstruct the very idea of home. That is, I think there is an ethical demand that I open my home, in the process rendering it vulnerable beyond measure. Infinite, unconditional hospitality to and for the other is only possible on such terms, and let us recall that any hospitality which aspires to anything less than the infinite is not really hospitable or ethical at all.

In the context of South Africa, where crime statistics are stupefying, and where the unequal distribution of wealth is, according to Oxfam, the most pronounced in the world, these matters are not merely theoretical (Rees par. 2). They underpin a central and overwhelming problem in determining what is mine, mine by right, and what is for the other. Is it ethical, for example, to acquire the comfort and wealth of a typically middle class South African household when, according to statistics taken in 2012, fifty percent of the population

live below the poverty line ("National Estimates")? Then again, how can I open my home to the other when the threat of violence is so real, so imminent?

Questions such as these reveal the ways in which what happens between one person and another has wide ramifications. Minute gestures of hospitality, care and respect are not without value in the grander scheme of things because infinite hospitality dislodges the fixed categories of inside as opposed to outside, private as distinct from public, and personal and domestic as distinct from the broader socio-political, national, and international realm. Hospitality is by its very nature the act of letting the outside in, of allowing the public to enter the private space. Accordingly, the more unconditional one's hospitality becomes, the less the binary between personal/private/domestic and public/national/international holds sway.

My second reason for wishing to focus on the space of home is because the borders of that space define a conventional limit between 'what matters in the larger scheme of things' and 'what does not'. The power with which societies monitor these borders suggests an intense desire to cordon off personal responsibility for others. One is able to throw up one's arms, declare the problems of others beyond any means of assistance, and seek refuge in one's home. But, personal responsibility for the other does not stop once one steps across the threshold of one's front door. To the extent that responsibility is instantiated by the recognition of the other as other, the private interactions that happen 'at home' are important in allowing the world to turn the tide against the globalised violence of the modern world (xenophobia, homophobia, genocide, sexism and war etc.).

Neville Lister: The Liberal Conservative

In many ways, it is these concerns over personal responsibility that trouble Neville as he stands with Brookes and Auerbach on the hill. He is white, affluent, and educated, but is also very aware that his class and race make him complicit with the National Party government. Moreover, he is conscious that this collusion with a racist regime does not cease when he enters his house. As early as the first page of the novel, he describes sitting down at the dinner table and arguing with his parents about his "wishy-washy liberalism and the wages of domestic workers" (Vladislavić, *Double Negative* 9). All the while, he cannot ignore that Paulina, "who ha[s] been with [his] family since before [he] was born, clatter[s] the dishes away through the serving hatch" (9). Although he is not blind to the fact that an ethical political discourse would need to account for the treatment of others within his own home, his "wish-washy liberalism" extends only to the plight of domestic workers *in general*. Neville is

unable (perhaps unwilling) to consider Paulina as an individual – presumably because she works for his parents and not for him, but also because taking his argument too far would lead to discomfort.[2] Where his political views cease to function in any real sense is in the 'sanctuary' of his home. In the abstract, he, because of his liberalism, values personal accountability and the rights of the individual. Yet he treats Paulina not as an individual but generically in terms of her class, race and profession. Even though (admittedly from a distance) he would like to make her life better, by increasing her wages for instance, he does not know her beyond the terms which have always been used to subjugate her – namely, that she is poor, black, and in service.

It seems the narrative voice (which might be older) is aware of the futility of such a compromised stance. If this is so, it would suggest that in time Neville will successfully reconcile his politics and his personal practice, which is palpably not the case. He never escapes from the bind. At times, in the novel, it seems he might develop a more ethical way of living, yet those instances are few and far between. What *Double Negative* traces is the protagonist's increasing need to wall himself in, both literally and metaphorically. This is not the 'development' of a trait or attitude, since it has clearly been there in some form since youth. Rather, what readers see is the calcification of the reasoning which justified his lack of action on Paulina's behalf. There is no arc to the main character. What the reader observes is not movement, not even in the sense of a move toward conservatism, but rather the realisation of a conservative attitude that was always latent.[3] *Double Negative* is no *Bildungsroman*. As such, this chapter will not attempt to outline 'change' in Neville's character, but rather elucidate how and why the restless spirit that the reader encounters at the beginning of the novel is becalmed by the very things that made him restless in the first place. Where once he felt he did not belong and sought a way to engage with the world more directly, he, in later life, seems all too comfortable (though not happy) within the confines of his suburban lifestyle and home.

When Neville stands on Langerman Kop, almost literally at the precipice of an experience that will influence him for years to come in ways he is never fully able to explain, his dissatisfaction with his "whitely" habitual life is at its peak (Frye, qtd. in Matthews 174).[4] He has already quit university since, although they "had awakened a social conscience in [him]", his studies could not show him how to "act" on it (9). It is apt that he describes his desire "to be in the real world" in terms of *acting* appropriately because, as can be seen throughout the novel, he very rarely does more than play the part of the socially conscious liberal concerned with the welfare of others. His performance at this point in the text is a fine

one. He has the right 'lingo', the suitable political rhetoric, and a vaguely dissatisfied attitude. But, for all that, what has he done? When action requires him to move beyond the performative, he finds himself at a loss. For example, after leaving varsity, he works for Jaco Els painting lines on the road. If ever there were a job that had no chance of engaging effectively with the politics of the time, this menial labour would surely be it. Significantly, too, Jaco tells stories that point to his involvement in state repression, perhaps even torture. While Neville is appalled, even disgusted, he finds himself laughing at these accounts of violence. The role that he takes on is that of a complicit audience of one (11). One should not ignore the strange inversion that his use of the stage metaphor seems to evoke: this 'actor' who is unable to act effectively cannot help but become the audience for tales of horror. Vladislavić is a subtle writer, and here I think he is pointing out that much political posturing is no more than a voyeuristic experience of the suffering of others.

As I have already said, the discomfort that Neville feels at this stage of his life is one with which he will become far more comfortable as time goes on. Though he will never overcome the vague need to connect, and to be a part of social change, he will settle into the easy knowledge that it is much easier not to look, or to care. In this way, he believes, he can come to avoid if not complicity in a general sense then certainly the kind of complicity that might demand he do something.

I think that this disregard for others, which can be traced from youth to middle age, goes some way to explaining why it is that, despite his disaffected stance, he finds the day with Auerbach and Brookes so exhausting and generally troubling. Though he claims to desire change and to experience the reality of his country, this opportunity to do so registers as discomforting and unnerving, as emerges from his following reflection: "I felt that I was swaying slightly, the way you do after a long journey when the bubble in an internal spirit keeps rocking even though your body has come to rest" (44). The metaphor of the end of a long journey implies return, as if the young man desires only to find his way back home. Similarly, his sense of an "internal spirit level" that keeps moving betrays a need for equilibrium or balance, a craving for order and stasis. He wants the level to find centre and for the straight and narrow path to be discovered. For all his rhetoric about "seeking out bitter lessons" (12), the journey that he actually hopes to undertake is not one which will radically alter his conception of himself or of others. His is the aspiration of the tourist: to see that which is unusual, exotic or different, and then to go back to where he belongs. While his posturing positions him in opposition to the status quo, his unwillingness to endure discomforting experiences reveals that he is, in fact, stationed right where he wants to be.

This is not to say that he actively endorses the racist state: undoubtedly, he does not advocate apartheid policies or practices. The more pertinent issue is what he is willing to sacrifice to see the end of institutionalised racism. And the answer is very little, very little indeed.

This point about his unwillingness to make himself vulnerable is also implicit in the very form of the novel. One could argue quite convincingly that Vladislavić, in *Double Negative*, provides his readers with three snapshots, three captured moments in the life of his protagonist.[5] As the novel is partly a meditation on the power of photography, this connection between form and content makes perfect sense. Furthermore, one should not forget that the text is a companion piece to a collection of photographs entitled *TJ* by David Goldblatt. So, as is the case when one leafs through the collection of pictures, reading this book feels a little like seeing a sequence of photographs. There are links between the stills, places where common motifs or recurrent images come up. But there are also disjunctures, unavoidable gaps where the image was not captured, and which the pen could not describe.

What, then, is one to make of the moments between those that the writer has chosen to focus on? Moreover, what should one imagine of Neville's life after the novel's final page? It seems necessary to wonder to what extent these 'snapshots' allow for a real and comprehensive understanding of this character. In order to address these questions, the critic must ask what the 'snapshots' reveal, and what they obscure. My sense is that the answers to these questions must be somewhat equivocal. On the one hand, as the novel makes quite clear, the 'full picture' can (paradoxically) never take the form of a picture. This is to say, reality is always vaster and more indeterminate than any representation of it. Yet, what the snippets reveal of Neville's life, on the other hand, is a man who does not so much change as settle in. One therefore does not require more than a few telling incidents to grasp the defining feature of his character. The possibility of him changing resides not with him but with others, and since (as I will show) he has little appreciation of otherness, one may justifiably conclude that he has, for the most part, been the same person throughout his life and that he will continue to be so in the hypothetical future. I would not say that it is an effort of will that allows him to disregard the lives of others, for will implies effort. Actually, my sense is that it is the habitual, effortless comfort of his privileged life which precludes the experience of alterity.

I thus think it is fair to say that the novel captures the 'gist' of who Neville is. Yet, obviously, to some extent, such a statement is problematic precisely because what it implies is that other less significant or more peripheral moments in his life (ones not depicted in the text) are somehow without value when compared to those which are written about and

therefore, one presumes, central. Thankfully, postcolonial and feminist theory has forever problematised such thinking by revealing the violence that underpins it. Nonetheless, one is led to speculate on what the point would be in recording only the most fleeting moments if they did not point to some integral theme or characteristic. Why would Vladislavić write such a novel, and who would bother to read it? Here, it seems to me, is the inescapable tension that determines the space of possibility for postcolonial writers and artists. They are obliged to be aware of and attuned to the quotidian, the ancillary, the fleeting. Such an awareness allows for untold stories to be told, and for lives deemed unremarkable to become worthy of representation and recollection. Simultaneously, the narration of such stories forms a rebuke to the notion of a centre (be it Western, patriarchal, heteronormative, or whatever) which has the right to perpetuate a master narrative. The duty of the postcolonial writer is to make what was once thought irrelevant, exotic or savage meaningful, beautiful and worthwhile. And, in the process, such writing raises profound questions about what has been constructed as central: it demands that we ask in whose name such narratives acquired legitimacy, how they did so, why, and who might have been harmed in the process. Having said that, the risk of collusion is still inherent in the enterprise because, by placing previously untold or ignored stories at the centre of their narratives, these writers cannot help but maintain the order which they resist. That is, the structure of centre and periphery, which is so key to Western metaphysics and which acquired a violent political dimension in the form of nineteenth-century colonial doctrine, can be deconstructed (and this work is infinite, it must be undertaken again and again without respite) but not utterly undone.[6]

Both the form and the content of *Double Negative* gesture at this irreconcilable tension between centre and periphery. The text describes three seemingly random periods in the life of its protagonist as if, somehow, that might allow it to avoid the accusation of having recorded *the most salient* events only. But, of course, those 'random' moments, being all the reader has to go on, start to look and feel very much like crucial, central times in his life. And, indeed, they are important times in his life, since they are the periods he chooses to narrate. Not coincidentally, the three periods recall a stage just before he leaves South Africa for Britain, the years immediately after he returns from the former colonial power, and a time during which he has become settled in himself but is contemplating leaving the country again – this time for good. Does Neville's uncertain to-ing and fro-ing between the traditional centre and its conventional periphery not imply that though the structure has been destabilised, it has not been destroyed? Without conflating Vladislavić and his character, I would think that the writer is all too aware that, at some level, his text performs a similarly

incessant movement that can have no ultimate destination. His writing must hover in the in-between space where belonging is impossible, lest the work collude in perpetrating the very violence it would reject. Consequently, he achieves what his main character cannot: he remains unanchored but not politically unengaged. Rather than falling prey to the fantasy of home and belonging, he embraces un-homeliness and displacement. Un-home, for this writer, is not simply the antonym of home. It is a liminal space which resists mapping and definition. Instead of dreaming of that liminal space as one which can be understood (and thus rendered static) in terms of the idea that it precedes an imminent and catastrophic fall, this novelist reveals that liminality can never be fixed, that 'the fall' itself is a myth, and that ethics is only possible from such a precarious, ever-changing position.

Hospitality and the Quotidian

In the following section, I explore the connection between the quotidian and the ethics of hospitality at which Vladislavić gestures. I do so by considering the actual instances of visiting and guest–host interactions in the novel, and by tracing the link to photography which characterises these instances.

Generally speaking, the three periods of Neville's life, which make up the three parts of the novel, all have moments of hospitality at their core. In part one, "Available Light", the two major events are the visit to his family home of the new neighbours, the van Huysteens, and his own visit to the two houses picked out on Langermann Kop by Auerbach and Brookes respectively.[7] The second section of the tripartite text traces his uneasy time when he first arrives in the UK, and his equally uncertain sense of belonging once he returns to South Africa (and one could easily characterise these two sojourns as those of a visitor). Both his recollection of the time in England and his first few years back in the country of his birth circle around the most peculiar strand of narrative in that section of the work, that is, the story of the many trips he takes to visit Camilla, the woman who lives in the third house that was chosen that day with Auerbach. She gives him the "Dead Letters", which provide this section with its name, and which trouble him for years to come. Finally, the third section details Janie's visit to his house to conduct her interview. The two also go out together to photograph a wall in which he has shown an interest, and that episode too can quite fairly be read in terms of hospitality.

I think it is equally accurate to say that the three sections of the novel all centre, in varying degrees, on photography. Janie, as already mentioned, is interviewing Neville to

discuss his first collection of 'high-art' works, while he, of course, develops his more commercial style of photography in the second section of the text. Notably, in that section, he uses his camera to 'trick' his way into Dr Pinheiro's abode. And, finally, "Available Light" gathers all of its considerable power from Auerbach's attempt to capture the lives of the people living in the three randomly chosen houses. It is as if, in this novel, there can be no discussion of hospitality without the mention of photography. Such is the intertwining of these two threads that the reader begins to sense that their points of difference are merely a matter of perspective, as if they amounted to no more than ways of looking at what is, ultimately, the same object.

But if that is so, if indeed both are ways of knowing (or not knowing, as the case may be) and of capturing the same 'thing', then what precisely is it that they seek to understand? Let me answer immediately and in an utterly general way: they both attempt to capture everything. By this, I mean that they are both forms through which one attempts to grasp all that is, all that exists and has ever existed. Obviously, not everything can be known and represented. There are inherent limits, which define not only hospitality but also photography. No photograph or series of photographs can contain all the vicissitudes and complexities of quotidian life. What I would like to argue in the section to follow is that, though this limitation of photography is clear and self-evident, there is nevertheless, in the novel, an attempt to transgress that boundary. Through the use of ekphrasis, the text attempts to describe pictures which motion beyond their own confines, and thus detail everything. Infinite hospitality, the novel seems to imply, is only possible when the boundaries and limitations of representation are violated.

Furthermore, in addressing the limitations of both representation (through the trope of photography) and hospitality, I will suggest that Vladislavić is able to reconcile the divide (which has been pernicious in the literary history of this country) between realist art, often used as a means of protest, and modernist or postmodernist art, which is often accused of a lack of political engagement. On the one hand, the novel seems like a high modernist (and postmodernist) exploration of the potentialities and limitations of mimesis, or representation more generally. On the other hand, like its protagonist, the text is driven to ask in which ways it might contribute to direct socio-political engagement, to the changing of a country where interpersonal violence and the disregard for others has become rote, to an ethical engagement with others.[8] For Vladislavić, this binary proves flawed and the style of his novel, as well as its content, problematises it.

The case to be made for the novel's concern with mimesis is overtly suggested by the name of Neville's photographic hero, Auerbach, which is surely an allusion to Erich Auerbach and his most famous work, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1974). That text takes as its premise the contention that realism is a representational mode which has been changing and developing throughout the course of Western literary history. As I say, for Erich Auerbach, this point is a given; it is not up for debate and therefore need not be explicitly stated. Indeed, his concern is far more nuanced and precise than merely proving that mimesis is a style of work which can and has changed over time. Rather, his work explores, by way of analysis of diverse literature from antiquity to the writings of early modernists such as Proust and Woolf, how it is that modern Western literature came to break completely "with the classical rule of distinct levels of style, for according to this rule, everyday practical reality could find a place in literature only within the frame of a low or pleasant, light, colourful and elegant entertainment" (Auerbach 554). He argues that "modern realism, which has ever since developed increasingly rich forms, in keeping with the constantly changing and expanding reality of modern life", begins with the likes of Stendhal and Balzac, who were able to take quotidian life as their focus (554).

Like the greats of modern realism who are analysed by Auerbach, Vladislavić's writing is deeply concerned with the possibilities of mimetic representation of the quotidian. As Leon de Kock explains, in his piece on the novel, the allusion to Erich Auerbach and his scholarly endeavours both implies that "Goldblatt is a classic, old-school realist in his photography", and that *Double Negative* "is intent on unsettling any simplistic idea of the real and its mimetic capturing" (9). He then goes on to argue that the text reveals the ways in which "'reality' and representation become *complicit* with each other, affecting each other's stability" because of the implicit dialogue that is set up "between the work of old-school realists (Auerbach/Goldblatt) and that of the newer kids on the block (Neville, Jane Amanpour), in both writing and image-capturing" (9). It is not clear from De Kock's work what he means by "old-school realist". If, however, the phrase means an artist who believes in the idea that mimesis is able to capture 'the real', then that title is not wholly applicable to Auerbach, the photographer. While it is true that the day-to-day lives of ordinary people preoccupy him, his work nevertheless shows an awareness of its own limitations. Indeed, the two stills described in great detail are both quite self-conscious; as much about the medium of photography itself as they are about their animate subjects.

Interestingly, De Kock is well aware that Auerbach's photography is "unable to penetrate the 'real' in any but a slivered, or partial manner" (10), but he seems to imply that

this thought could not be a deliberate aspect of the character's work. Accordingly, the thematic concern with photography, which Neville sees in his pictures (and, which he assures the readers is obvious to any who view them), is, for De Kock, only the product of the narrator's interpretation of the stills. The point of view of the observer is thus over-emphasised, whereas that of the artist is unnecessarily undervalued. As a result, De Kock is able to maintain his argument that Auerbach (and Goldblatt) is a realist in the traditional sense, while noting the postmodern concerns that the descriptions of his work engender. My feeling is that, in the world of the novel, there is evidence enough that Auerbach is more than merely a realist, and that his work is self-reflexive for this very reason. The corollary of that contention is that the distinction De Kock draws between Auerbach, on the one hand, and Jane and Neville, on the other, is problematic. There are certainly many differences in their approaches to depicting 'reality', yet, despite them, they have in common a desire to transgress the boundaries of which their works show an overt awareness.

Another curious and perhaps somewhat telling parallel between *Mimesis* and *Double Negative*, which De Kock does not address, is that many of the literary examples Auerbach chooses to write about deal directly with hospitality. One thinks, for example, of the section on Chrétien de Troyes' *Yvan*, which recalls the hospitality bestowed upon one of King Arthur's knights by a kind lord of a mysterious castle. Indeed, Auerbach's work begins with a consideration of an instance of hospitality: the command by Penelope to her housekeeper Eurydea to wash the feet of a stranger who is none other than Penelope's long-lost husband, Odysseus (3). *Mimesis* begins with hospitality – and not just any form of hospitality either. The form which concerns it is one that is given to a stranger who is not actually a stranger, that is, a stranger who is in fact finally home. I will return to the issue of the hospitality of representation in due course.

In a discussion with the audience at a reading of *Double Negative* at Rhodes University in 2012, Vladislavić revealed that, as well as being an allusion to the work of the great German critic, he had chosen the name Auerbach because the first two letters ('Au') are the chemical symbol for gold, which is apt as the character is loosely based on David Goldblatt. This is a decision typical of this writer at his postmodern, playful best. The chemical symbol is the most arbitrary of signifiers; it makes absolutely no claim to mimesis in the sense of imitation or mimicry. That said, the connection between the symbol and the element it represents is given the weight of scientific certitude. For instance, the symbol 'Au' (and that symbol alone) must signify the element gold and nothing else. The symbol must have no connotations for denotation and fact anchor the scientific project. And yet,

Vladislavić is using the chemical signifier precisely for an idiosyncratic connotative connection which he would like to establish. That connection, ironically, is mimetic, as it allows the symbol to refer to a man who exists in the real, phenomenal world.

While such significatory gymnastics are a hallmark of this South African author, they do not really distinguish him from writers such as Paul Auster and Jorge Luis Borges (both of whom are undoubtedly influences on him). Where I think that he does differ from the likes of Auster, though, is in his intense desire to marry his narrative experimentation with a local socio-political reality. This yoking-together of the real with a formal self-reflexivity and a thematic concern with the certainty of categories such as 'real' and/or 'constructed' may have its roots in earlier South African fiction (the apartheid writing of Nadine Gordimer, for instance, or the so-called "Township Plays" that Athol Fugard wrote in collaboration with Winston Ntshona and John Kani, among others). That said, in *Double Negative*, it is near-seamless, and, as I will try to show, also rigorous, for it draws on the aporia of conditional and unconditional hospitality to illuminate what is and what is not possible in terms of ethical, direct engagement with the other. Where Vladislavić develops Derrida's work on hospitality, in my opinion, is in his explicit consideration of the role that photography, fiction and art might (or might not) play in creating a more ethical engagement with others.

To illustrate this connection between hospitality and art, I would now like to consider in some detail the section of the novel in which Brookes, Neville and Auerbach visit the house of Veronica. The location, chosen by Brookes, is simulacral, uncanny and yet also quite beautiful. "On a balustrade" stands "a birdcage made of bamboo" which Neville realises is "a Victorian replica" (47). On the other side of the house is an extraordinary menagerie of animal bones, which the narrator describes as follows:

> Animal skulls, pale as driftwood, bleached to sea-shades against the power blue plaster. The centrepiece was obviously the skull of a horse. There were others whose shapes suggested the flesh in which they had once been embedded: a dog, a rabbit, and more I could only guess at [. . .]. The way they were arranged [. . .] each in its own proper station [. . .], made them seem less like trophies than ghosts, passing through the wall that instant, hungry for meat and grass, for air and company, breaking back into the realm of the living.
>
> (48–49)

The collection of bones is deeply *Unheimlich*; not merely uncanny, but also un-homely. It is a bizarre and strange configuration which leaves the narrator, in particular, very discomforted and unsure of his surrounds. Also, it is an inscrutable sign: Neville guesses he is looking at an altar, while Auerbach (tellingly) muses that the configuration is "almost art" (49). Although

the house might have certain markers which can be read – Neville, for instance, is convinced that it is a student's house because of the material used for curtains – there is nevertheless an aspect of this dwelling that resists simple definition. As such, it is a singularly appropriate way for Vladislavić to set the scene for the trio's encounter with Veronica, which in numerous ways will not tally with convention.

When the protagonist and narrator describes the creatures on the wall as hungry to break "back into the realm of the living", this comment too is portentous (49). First, the photograph that Auerbach will soon take of Veronica seems to represent the unbearably thin line between life and death (as we shall see). Secondly, the line resonates with Neville's own desired trajectory. It is he who hovers in the indeterminate and ineffectual realm of his liberal, privileged whiteness, and it is he who wishes, somehow, to break into a world of meaning and purpose – what he characterises as "the realm of the living".

Precisely because the reader sees the world through his eyes, I would argue that s/he, like Neville, feels profoundly unnerved by the strange, macabre scene. More than that, though, s/he feels un-homed, that s/he is not *at home*, where it is safe and comfortable. In short, s/he feels like a trespasser. It is thus appropriate that Neville's first encounter with Veronica has her slamming the door in his face, and therefore, in a sense, in the reader's, too (49). When Neville infers that, from her perspective, their reason for being there is irrelevant, that as far as she is concerned their whiteness means that they can do as they please (51), the reader must surely wonder if s/he too has barged in, privileged and insensitive, where s/he does not belong and is not welcome.

It is not the first time that this thesis has described a scene in which whiteness and invasion, or trespass, are aligned. The sexual abuse by Carter of Helen, in Wicomb's *Playing in the Light*, is also premised on the former's whiteness, which 'allows' him to violate her. Also, if one assumes that the customs officials, in Ishtiyaq Shukri's *The Silent Minaret*, who detain Issa are white (and by that I mean that they are the recipients of the unfair privileges of whiteness), and I think that assumption is surely valid given the authority they wield over the detainees and the racism which informs their practices (see Shukri 181), then it seems accurate to say that their violation is also the product of the power of whiteness. The deconstruction of whiteness is a subject of all three texts, though I must concede that it has not always been the central focus of this project. An explication of that concern in the three texts would constitute a different thesis – a very powerful and interesting one perhaps, but a different one nonetheless.

So, to return to the scene of the crime, the three men's entrance onto Veronica's property reminds the youngest of them of his father's interactions with Paulina, the domestic worker. He recalls that when his father went to speak to her in the yard, she would come out of her room "pull[ing] the door closed behind her, drawing the only line she could" (51). It is passages such as this one that show the limits of hospitality in a South African context. Paulina must close the door, draw the line where and when she can, because she lives in a world of unequal power relations. Her employer does not enter the interaction on equal footing: his wealth, his race, his provision of her salary all predetermine how he may engage with her. Similarly, they create, before a word has been said or a gesture offered, the sense that she is less than, dependent on and circumscribed by the power he brings to the relationship. Consequently, the point is not *what* Neville's father does once he engages with Paulina. His very presence is the crux of the matter. The encounter is defined by his power, which negates or limits any kindness he might then offer. As such, it smacks of inhospitality and it is sensible that it is met with inhospitality. Paulina shuts the door. What else can she do?

As I have already intimated, the novel seems to implicate the reader in the inhospitality of Auerbach, Neville, Brookes, and Neville's father. Nowhere else in the text is one quite so aware of having to follow in Neville's footsteps, and of having to see the world through his eyes. When Auerbach speaks in hushed tones to Veronica, gaining access through words the narrator never hears, the reader may wish that s/he could ascertain what is being said. And when, just as he is leaving, Neville reflects on the embarrassment he initially felt on Veronica's behalf, because she could do little other than allow them to do as they pleased, and muses that perhaps it "was entirely misplaced", one is disoriented yet again.

It is only logical, then, that the reader should consider what else Neville might misconstrue, or misinterpret. For instance, the reader may well ponder on what more happened that day which he missed, which he did not see or did not hear. The difficulty, finally, is to know how to align oneself with a narrator whose limitations are so clear and whose mistakes are so glaring. This struggle takes a particular form in this novel, as it is not just the product of the unreliability of the narrator. Participant narrators are, by definition, unreliable, and readers come to expect that. But in this novel, the problem is exacerbated by the reader's inability to locate a clearly defined implied author whose views and attitudes can be inferred through a recognition of the failures of the narrator.[9] In *Double Negative*, there are things that cannot be deduced simply by being critical of Neville. While it is clear that he is unreliable, it does not follow that one is able to draw away from his perspective to, say,

guess at what Auerbach might have said to calm Veronica after she first saw the men, and became afraid. Did he use his whiteness as leverage, as Neville fears they might have done earlier? Did he manipulate her, bribe her? Or, perhaps, just possibly, was he able to offer something other than coercion and violence, some small measure of kindness, compassion and empathy? If that is so, what words were those?

Such questions trouble the conscientious reader of the novel. S/he is motivated by his/her own desire for a more ethical way of engaging to learn what Auerbach might have said to Veronica, so that s/he too may express him/herself in a truly hospitable way. But, for better or worse, the reader stands with Neville – yet another idealistic white man with little comprehension of how to actually respect others. The demand placed on him/her by this text seems untenable: s/he is required to see what Neville cannot see, and what no reader can therefore see. Were that possible, perhaps, like Auerbach, one might find a more humane practice than the one presented by Neville.[10] Hospitality is, after all, only possible when boundaries are transgressed, and impossible demands are met. Since such transgression is impossible, the tragedy and the futility of the reader's position must feel overwhelming. What the narrator does not hear, the reader cannot guess at (but is nevertheless required to guess at). So one intrudes – one always intrudes. A better way, a more hospitable way, haunts words one will never hear, as if they were a language one could never speak.

The difference between Vladislavić and, say, J. D. Salinger, is that the latter's most famous narrative voice has flaws that can be judged from a distance. The more Holden claims to be mature and wise, for example, the more obvious it is that he is young and scared. By contrast, in the case of the South African writer, there is no distance that ensures a safe and stable ground. Of course, one is critical of Neville (and becomes more so as the story continues, I think), but this critique never allows one to arrive at a fixed and final point. What one would like to dismiss about him, one finds lurking in oneself. It is not as simple as saying that readers are prisoners of the narrator's perspective. Instead, I would contend that even though one is able to escape his myopic point of view, one is unable to escape what informs that point of view. Perhaps a respectful reader would not or does not exclude from his/her life the people and experiences which Neville does, but s/he does not and cannot exclude exclusion. Is it not the case that all perspective is only possible on the grounds of exclusion? Perspective is always framed because it proceeds from a point or position, and the corollary is that no perspective can ever be infinite. Imagine a photograph that captured everything all at once. Where would one point the camera, what would be one's focus? To use Auerbach's words, "[h]ow could you ever do justice to something so rich in detail?" (45).

Justice is a highly appropriate word to use in this context, for it, in Derrida's writing, is synonymous with infinite hospitality, which exists always just beyond the frame, where perspective ceases to function. Exclusion must be considered a limitation of hospitality; it is inhospitality, technically speaking. Having said that, one should not forget that it is also the condition of hospitality. In being hospitable, one is being forced to overcome the exclusions that enable and disable hospitality. Neville's character is a warning to those who find such an impossible ethical demand utterly exhausting. The lack of empathy and decency which he shows others by the end of the novel is a product of a weariness born, whether he realises it or not, of the aporia of conditional and unconditional hospitality with which he grapples all his life (particularly, when he is young). Clearly, it is easy, perhaps even sensible, to give up in the face of such an outrageous burden. It makes perfect sense, then, that one settle for viewing others from one's own point of view, since there is, in any event, no escape from it. That path is well lit, and well worn, too. One may walk it very comfortably should one choose. It does not lead to justice, however.

Yet what role does art play, then? What purpose does it serve if indeed perspective is always a hindrance to justice, and art is always a perspectival endeavour? Such questions are intrinsic to *Double Negative*. In reading, one intuits that the desire to become more actively engaged is not simply Neville's but the novel's too.[11] The temporal setting of the first section is highly suggestive in this regard because the precise role of art as a political tool for change was a serious and heated debate in the late 1980s and early 90s. A key polemic of this debate is Njabulo Ndebele's influential work, *South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary* (1994). In the essay which gives the collection its name, Ndebele critiques the value of art which focuses only on spectacular political realities of the day, and forgets or ignores the ordinary, complex lives of people. He argues that such art fixates on exteriority, and thus negates the interior lives of people (42–43). When Auerbach wonders about the "domestic dramas" happening in the homes of 'ordinary' South Africans, his words must surely be read in light of this conversation on aesthetics and politics, and particularly in relation to Ndebele's work on the matter.

My sense is that the increased use of ekphrasis in Vladislavić's writing in recent years comes into sharper focus when it is placed in the context of the argument on the role of art in instigating change. This context has not, however, been one to which scholars have always been attentive. Sally-Ann Murray, for instance, contends that writing about art is one way in which this writer is able to "manage his uncertainty about the place of art, the arts, and artistic practice in a dramatically altered South Africa", while also allowing him to

contemplate "his own art of writing in this swirl" (35). In a very general way, Murray is correct, but it is telling that she cannot attest to precisely what it is about his "own art of writing" that Vladislavić might hope to unearth. She does not take into account that his writing career began and developed in the midst of the dispute on art's role in the Struggle, and, as such, she is unable to properly situate his interest in ekphrasis.

Furthermore, I am not sure that Murray is correct in contending that writing on art allows Vladislavić to "manage his uncertainty", since I think that uncertainty, displacement, the loss of order and control are, first, and quite obviously, unmanageable and, secondly, precisely what he wants to reveal in its inchoate, disordered state. This is to say, the desire for a manageable universe may reflect the ideal to which some of his most famous protagonists strive (Tearle, Budlender, even Neville), but I am not sure it is what their creator longs for. Like them, as I will show in due course, he cannot help but order and manage (and perhaps this is what Murray senses and then misconstrues slightly), but his real desire is to show chaos, to write the incoherent, and to represent the madness. Writing cannot but fail in this task, and is in some ways therefore inimical to the project. So, what he does, tellingly, is thematise that failure by making it his inspiration and overt concern. Accordingly, the chaos, the undeniable, unfathomable grandeur and complexity of quotidian life, is revealed not by its presence, but by its absence. Chaos cannot be domesticated by the order of language, or any representational system of any kind. Let us call that the first negative. Vladislavić stages this impossibility, as he constructs his narrative around it. That is the second negative, the negative doubled. In the English language, the use of a double negative in a sentence is prohibited. It breaks the rules and introduces chaos.[12] Similarly, in the novel, what the thematic concern with the failure of management and order reveals (and it is revealed by not being revealed) is the disharmony and profound anarchy which underpin all systems of control. The deformed, turbulent world is exposed without exposition. It is like seeing a photograph and then trying to imagine the negative that produced it.[13]

Could it be that what power art might have to change the world is determined by such an aporia? To answer this question, let me return to Murray's article, in which she makes the case for the unusual role that the quotidian plays in the writing of Ivan Vladislavić. She notes that his work "is invested in demonstrating the rampant creativity that informs the everyday, a space not conventionally considered 'art', but which is yet [for this writer] a source, for the imagination, of all the perverse possibilities of artistic, the artful, and the artless" (32–33).[14] A little later, and she is writing of *The Exploded View* at this stage, she contends that the author of that text sees "'art' as a diverse form of making, where the limits and opportunities

of individual imagination are conceptualised within the paradoxically limiting and liberating parameters of South African socio-political change" (Murray 33). It makes sense that out of a "limiting and liberating" context, Vladislavić would produce an art characterised by "limits and opportunities". One might ask though, what limits? What opportunities?

Granted, there are probably countless answers to such questions. Still, I would argue that some of the most persuasive and intriguing are suggested in *Double Negative*, particularly by the passages describing the photograph of Veronica. You will recall that she agrees to pose, that she has shared with Auerbach (who then shares the information with Brookes and Neville, and thus with the reader) that she has lost a child to a fire, and that the child was one of a set of identical triplets. In the picture, she holds the two surviving children, and "her head is turned aside, as if to make it clear that the children are the subject of the photograph, but also showing the lovely line of her cheek and the hoop in her ear" (Vladislavić, *Double Negative* 54). Neville continues his description (which we should realise is also an interpretation) of the photograph thus:

> The mere handfuls of their heads in the soft caps, lolling against her breast, make you fear for the slender stems of their necks. Their eyes are open, their fingers are curled, and for all their delicacy, they look vital and ready to grow. Behind the mother, over her turned shoulder, is the snapshot of the triplets, propped on a wooded crossbeam against the iron wall.
>
> (54)

He muses that "[i]t is possible to miss that picture-within-a-picture entirely, but once seen it looms large, or you wish it would" (54). We, his readers, are forced into a complicit position. Because we have no photograph which we can see for ourselves, we are obliged to see what he sees, and perhaps even to see it as he does. When he contends that "you wish it [that is, the picture of the triplets taken when they were all still alive] would" loom larger, who else can this "you" invoke but the reader? This realisation of a forced perspective shared by reader and Neville, from which s/he is unable to escape entirely, makes his next proclamations even more problematic. Though, he claims, you *must* "bend your head to the paper, trying to get closer", you (the reader, in other words) must also realise that "this distance is fixed, once and for all". Hence, "[t]he third child, the dead one, irreplaceably absent in Auerbach's photograph, persists in that smaller one like an echo" (54). A viewer is unable even to differentiate between the living and the deceased and therefore, according to Neville, "[i]n the circle of [one's] eye, they all go on, living and dying, then and now" (55).

Veronica is turned away from the camera, which means that she is effectively turned away from the gaze of any who would look on her in the photograph. The narrator claims that the effect of this is to make it seem as if she wishes her boys to be the viewer's main focus. Perhaps that is so; no reader can be sure. What s/he does know is a kind of negative knowledge: that is, s/he is aware of a gaze directed elsewhere, though it is impossible to know what has caught Veronica's eye. All that is certain is that she is not looking at those who hypothetically might look on her. She is in the photograph, and as such commands some attention (despite what Neville might say) but does not reciprocate. For whatever reason, she is not as interested in her onlookers as they are in her. There is no way of ascertaining why this should be so. Did something distract her at the crucial moment? Or, did Auerbach ask her to pose that way? Does she look on her living children, or are her thoughts with the tiny figure in the other photograph who is irretrievably absent? Readers may speculate endlessly but there is no point of rest to such speculation.

Since Veronica resolutely refuses to ease the inquisitive reader's burden, let us turn our attention to her children (living and dead), and hope that they might provide us with answers. They are exquisitely delicate and very young. Like all babies, they are full of promise, as yet unrealised, and which might never be realised. That fact is poignantly suggested by the image of the deceased brother. Perhaps they are, as the narrator contends, "vital and ready to grow" (54). Yet, that is potential held in infinite abeyance within the confines of the still. And lest one forget what often happens to innocence, vitality and potential (particularly in perverse places such as apartheid South Africa), there is a sombre, terrible reminder. Over their mother's shoulder is another family – the members of which stare out at the diminished, damaged form which is their inevitable future. The family in which all three boys are alive and well do not know their future, at least not in the eternal instant captured by the snapshot. Those who read of this photograph are led to wonder how many other losses this family will endure in the future. The two remaining children, their vitality so palpable it could almost radiate heat, are already the product of an unimaginable loss. Already they are less than what they once were. Viewers of Auerbach's photograph (or, more accurately, readers of Neville's description thereof) are troubled by the awful sense of increasingly diminished opportunities for the boys, and cannot but be aware that because of their race, socio-economic status, and the prevailing regime, they may never reach their potential. The state may curtail their progress before it has even really begun. It may be the case that, in the future, they will look back at the picture Auerbach took and see hope unrealised, or vitality quashed by the day-to-day drudgery of apartheid life. Is this not the

point of the "picture-within-a-picture"? That is to say, does the presence of the older photograph not fundamentally problematise the energy and life captured in the later one? When Neville reminds the reader that no viewer is able to know the difference between the three boys, and that, as such, s/he should concede that the children "all go on, living and dying, then and now" (55), his logic is fairly inescapable. What life and energy is supposedly visible is not even eternal within what is captured by the lens of the camera. There, in the frame, barely visible, indistinguishable from others and yet unique, is the lurking presence of death, loss and tragedy.

In the photograph, then, there is the promise of youth and the inevitability of death (seemingly, life's full spectrum). There are, however, also gaps, absences, details which perpetually elude viewers. It is as if the picture of Veronica and her children dramatises or stages in an overt fashion the tensions that characterise photography as a medium. That is, the more closely it captures (or seems to at any rate) reality, the more one senses a reality which exists beyond the frame. The realism-effect of the medium is implicit and yet nowhere is one more aware of the artifice than when one reads of that photograph. Walter Benjamin analyses this very contradiction in his work. Significantly, in this regard, Vladislavić references Benjamin directly at least thrice in *Double Negative* (twice he refers to his interpretation of Klee's 'angel of history' and on page ninety-three he quotes him again). So it is perhaps somewhat surprising that, in a novel about photographs and photography, he never mentions the German thinker's ideas on the medium (which was an abiding interest). Nevertheless, it seems likely that Vladislavić's writing is indebted to that unacknowledged source. Here, for example, is Benjamin writing on the history of photography:

> No matter how artful the photographer, no matter how carefully posed his subject, the beholder feels an irresistible compulsion to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, the here and now, with which reality has, so to speak, seared through the image-character of the photograph, to find the inconspicuous place where, within the suchness [*Sosein*] of that long-past minute, the future nests still today [. . .]. For it is another nature that speaks to the camera than to the eye: 'other' above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to one informed by the unconscious.
>
> (276–78)

It is surely not farfetched to say that these words might as well be a direct response to Auerbach's photograph of Veronica, so accurately and elegantly do they convey Neville's feelings about that piece of work. What Benjamin calls contingency, in particular, troubles the viewer (or reader) of that picture in so many ways. Those who read Neville's description

of the image strive to follow Veronica's gaze, and to see what she does, though it is not captured by the camera or described by the narrator. As for the boys, viewers cannot tell the dead from the living, which is why Neville speculates that they are all living and dying eternally in the image. One might even say that the image of the dead child, in the corner of the photograph, is a picture of death in life. It reminds one of losses which have not even taken place yet: the future "nest[s]" there, in the "long-past minute", to use Benjamin's language. That small detail, so small or contingent that one could almost miss it, once seen, "looms large", or you "wish it would" at any rate (Vladislavić, *Double Negative* 54). Death, the essential structural element of the unconscious, threatens to "sear through the image-character of the photograph" (Benjamin, "History of Photography" 276). As such, it hovers on the brink of consciousness, and while the reader wishes it would be more conspicuous, come more into focus, as it were, ineluctably, death does not reveal itself in the image. Despite its immanence, paradoxically, it remains "'other' above all in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to one informed by the unconscious" (277–78).

So there is life and death in the picture described by Neville, which I have been considering. But I would also say that there is an *excess of life and death* that it intimates yet is unable to contain (as if such surplus were the unconscious of the image). Those boys, their mother, all of them are (or were) more alive than what Auerbach is able to capture in his photograph. In the world of the novel, these characters are capable of experiencing loss, even death, which their picture implies but cannot display or render visible. And, strictly speaking, even the life and death which is there, in the photograph, and thus available for perception and conscious contemplation by the likes of Neville, is not actually there, not actually in the image (which is, after all, a representation, a supplement, of reality). The photographic medium is thus inherently one which orients itself to loss, and to death, precisely because it always depicts absence. Ironically, in this case, one of the things that is absent is death, since Auerbach's image does not depict the real and actual death of the third child.

It is perhaps not a coincidence that, particularly in the early days of photography, though the trend continues to a lesser degree to this day, the technology was used extensively to attempt to prove the existence of ghosts and afterlife phenomena. Why would a device designed to record what is visible be employed to demonstrate the invisible, or otherworldly? Could it be that we have always known, at some level, that photography necessarily intimates loss, and that its work is to show the unrelenting passing of things?

What is seen, in any shot, is what is, properly speaking, *not there*, not in the image but inexplicably elsewhere. Photography is the power, the wonder, of seeing before your very

eyes some manner of record of the unrecordable, unrepresentable, absolutely real. Let me not dwell too long on this point which is obvious and commonsensical. It is a simple fact that the 'contingency' of the here and the now can never be bracketed off, or rendered static. The camera may give the illusion that such a 'bracketing off' is possible, but its failure in this regard is the unconscious that haunts its work. For many painters and sketch artists the dawn of the age of photography signalled the death of realism as a philosophical project (though not necessarily as a style or mode, obviously). And it is therefore not a coincidence that surrealism and modernism both develop in the wake of the invention of the camera. Those artists who felt that photography had made the realism of art untenable were more right than they could have known. This is not because the photograph is any more 'realistic' than, say, a painting or drawing could hope to be, but, rather, that even the most 'realistic' medium cannot overcome its limitations. Those limitations remain, somewhat like the tiny image of Veronica's lost child in the corner of Auerbach's photograph, and they threaten to loom large.

Susan Sontag, in her concise and extraordinary essay "Photography: A Little Summa", also begins by noting the finite capabilities of the medium. "Photography is, first of all, a way of seeing. It is not seeing itself", she says by way of introduction (124). This way of seeing is, according to her, distinctly modern and fragmentary, for "reality is essentially unlimited, and knowledge is open-ended" (124). Accordingly, all unifying notions of perspective, although they have "the undeniable advantage of giving shape and form to our experience", also obscure "the infinite variety and complexity of the real" (125). Fascinatingly, she uses this idea as a base from which to consider the social value of the technology. She asserts that, in the modern world, an inherently fragmented world in her assessment, events only become meaningful or significant once they are photographed: "for a war, an atrocity, a pandemic, a so-called natural disaster to become the subject of large concern, it has to reach people through the various systems (from television and the internet to newspapers and magazines) that diffuse photographic images to millions" (125). Furthermore, she contends that "[t]he photographs of the terrible cruelties and injustices that afflict most people in the world seem to be telling us – we who are privileged and relatively safe – that we should be aroused; that we should want something done to stop these horrors" (126). By contrast, claims Sontag, there is another kind of photography, one which demands "a different kind of attention" (126). This body of work "is not a species of social or moral agitation, meant to prod us to feel and to act, but an enterprise of notation" (126). As such, the viewing public may look or acknowledge the work without being driven to feel or act. As Sontag puts it, "[t]his is a cooler way of looking" and we "identify [it] as art" (126).

Accordingly, there is, broadly speaking, a divide between photography which is socially conscious, and which is often "reproached if it seems too much like art", and a genre of art which might deaden our conscience by showing "us events and situations and conflicts that we might deplore" while requesting that we remain "detached" (127).

I have quoted Sontag's essay at some length because it seems to provide a framework within which I might think about the possibilities and limitations of socially engaged photography, though I will have recourse to question her schema. What I do not think her description of art as opposed to journalistic photography can account for is a socially engaged photograph that is also artistic but not detached (and Auerbach's work is the obvious example). If Sontag is right in arguing that, despite its obvious limitations, photography has become the means by which war, atrocity and suffering enter the collective psyches of the privileged (and I see no reason to doubt the assertion), then there is, of course, a great deal at stake in contemplating what the medium can and cannot do. Deprived of the images of suffering and humanity, such as those taken by Auerbach, the privileged world would be blind to what is in need of urgent intervention. If, however, such images become co-opted by the art world, they run the risk of losing their social or didactic purpose. Indeed, they might well then achieve the opposite of their intended purpose, by deadening their onlookers to the horrors they depict (supposing that Sontag is correct in claiming that artistic photography can engender detachment in its audience).

Neville's artistic work corresponds quite well with the cool, detached style of photography of which Sontag speaks. His collection of wall images is a potent sign of a mind that values private property, and it is also evidence of a lack of connection to others, which allows him to take such pictures in the first place.[15] In other words, he likes walls because they keep others out and thus enable him to negate any sense of responsibility he might otherwise be obliged to feel. In his work, detachment is (in an obvious sense) both his subject and his attitude to any other subject matter.

Auerbach's work, by contrast, is far more difficult to define according to the binary set out by Sontag. It is not, strictly speaking, the kind of socially conscious photojournalism which strives only to inform and to mobilise its viewers (and which as a result has no artistic value). Yet, it is also impossible to deny that the work is quite a powerful social and political commentary. In fact, the ambiguity of the status of his photography is explicitly discussed in the novel by Claudia, the woman who takes a group of people, including Neville, on a walking tour of a gallery showing of Auerbach's collected work. Her language is somewhat hyperbolic and overly flowery but we need not let that distract us. Her point, that his work

straddles "the frontier between photography and art, which [have] been portrayed as hostile territories too often in the past", surely has merit (Vladislavić, *Double Negative* 123).

Where hostility ceases, one hopes hospitality becomes possible. It seems to me that in drawing a distinction between art and a certain kind of photography, whose only goal is social mobilisation, it becomes untenable to imagine art that might have some contribution to make to social justice. According to Sontag, that distinction is common, ubiquitous even. The divide ensures that artistic photography is perceived as a 'cool', reflexive body of work which, perhaps inadvertently, perhaps intentionally, deadens the privileged to the suffering of others. And, I should note here that Sontag's essay on photography, which I have cited in some detail, is descriptive, not prescriptive. It is near impossible to tell how she feels about the existence of a binary between photojournalism and art by reading the essay. Her primary aim is to say how things are at the moment, not how one should feel about that state of affairs. In this regard, the piece is very much like the art it describes: quite cool and detached.[16] What I think *Double Negative* allows its reader to do is to contemplate the possibility of a different role for artistic photography, and art in general. Is it not conceivable, the text seems to ask, that art can function to engage empathy rather than subduing it? Or are such ideas hopelessly sentimental, unrealistic and old fashioned?

Double Negative tackles this debate head-on. But rather than arguing for or against the value of art as a weapon of social transformation, the text asserts that there is a limit beyond which neither art nor more photojournalistic work can go – that the "depth of field is fixed, once and for all" (54). The conventional division between these two forms ignores this limitation which they share, and from which they draw their distinctive qualities. Simply put, photographs are at best supplements or representations of the real. They are never and can never be the real itself.[17]

I would like to consider how it is that the impossibility of becoming the real gives photography what Sontag identifies as its crucial role, in the modern world, of depicting atrocity and war. And, I would hope to show that the same impossibility leads to the 'cool' detachment which she claims typifies the more artistic genre of photography. Let me first address the issue in relation to photojournalistic work, the primary aim of which is to capture 'real life', or at the least to freeze a moment thereof. It may be assumed that this type of photography plays a part in the development of social justice (and, in this regard, war photography is the example *par excellence*) by revealing suffering or danger. The viewer is then asked to do something to alleviate that suffering or to curb the danger. Of course, it is worth asking what exactly can be done to quell the violence of society, since it is a question

that troubles Neville constantly as a young man. In order to act, the viewer of the image must move beyond it. S/he cannot bring about change by changing the photograph, precisely because that image is static and fixed for all time. Reality exists (in all of its vicissitudes and its incalculable anguish) where the photograph ceases to function. As Benjamin maintains, one always looks beyond the photograph for the reality that it intimates. No matter how engaged a photographer might be with his/her material, and no matter how heartrending and demanding that material might be, the photograph itself is, by definition, detached. And that very detachment calls its viewer to action. It draws him/her in and then through the image to the place where, it is hoped, s/he might at last enact change.

Such an optimistic belief in what the detachment of photojournalistic material might inspire others to do is, undoubtedly, problematic. It is equally likely that the 'distant' suffering of others might move the affluent and privileged very little. Indeed, it is possible, perhaps even probable, that they might become desensitised, even entertained by these images. The matter hinges on the definition of 'distant', which can become yet another word that implies the stranger. If the sufferers are treated as strangers, they can also be excluded from care or concern. Hospitality need not be extended to unknown masses from distant shores. If, however, the strangers are at home, inaction or voyeurism becomes far more difficult. In many ways, what *Double Negative* implies is that the suffering of others is not distinct from the affluence of middle class, suburban life. The text implies that such lifestyles are built on the suffering of others, who are then deemed strange, or distant. Suburban homes, such as Neville's, are already more intimately connected to those deemed strange than one might think.

It should be clear from my preceding observations that the detachment which Sontag associates with artistic photography is problematic. Perhaps some artists seek to elicit a cold, unengaged reflection, and it may be that they do so by announcing the artifice of what they photograph. That is, they may show, in ways both overt and covert, that what is being viewed is a photograph. The image is thus of that which is not 'real' but 'staged', by which I mean that the action captured by the photograph is developed, first and foremost, to be photographed. In other words, a 'staged' photograph would show events which would not exist, at that time, were it not for the purpose of being shot. Yet, there is nevertheless reality. It exists beyond the artificial forms of the still, and that cannot be denied. For this reason, the detachment is in some senses a feature not only of the work, but also of the medium. I do not mean to imply that all photography is equally socially engaged, or equally incapable of social commentary. Needless to say, that is certainly not the case, and one need only compare

Auerbach's work with Neville's to see the extent to which different photographers, in the novel, are able to work differently for very divergent aims. Nonetheless, we cannot refute the fact that there is no photograph of all of reality. What should stem from this very obvious point is a realisation that the possibility of an ethical encounter lies outside of the picture. While it is perhaps true that some photographs are cool and detached, it does not follow that they therefore necessarily deaden one to suffering, any more than it can be claimed with certainty that the photographing of suffering, along with the subsequent dissemination of such images, leads to a socially conscious viewer driven to act for the betterment of others.

Not only do such ideas ascribe too much power to art, but in a very real sense they prescribe the kind of art that it is conscionable to produce. Faced with the choice between taking pictures of suffering which lead to the lessening of that pain, or capturing highly stylised images which lead to apathy, one would have to be a bit heartless to choose the latter. Again, Njabulo Ndebele's call to represent the ordinary is relevant here. He argues persuasively that it is necessary to represent more than merely the large-scale machinations of power, and that one should never forget the lives of ordinary people. A literature concerned only with the spectacular would inadvertently reproduce power inequalities by marginalising the stories of everyday citizens precisely as the state (and before it, the colonial centre) had done. And, Ndebele's argument is but one way in which one may critique the validity of the binary between protest art and other forms of creative production.

My own research on representations of home is premised on a desire, similar to that which animates Ndebele's work, to deconstruct the privilege accorded to grand narratives of power, such as those of race and gender, among others. In the process of perpetuating such grand narratives, what is created is a space which we are told is our own and which we are simultaneously informed does not matter, that is, the home. I think it is important to reconsider the power dynamics which such a dichotomy maintains. For this reason, I have tried to show that the site of immense power struggles *is* the home – that there, in one's domicile, one encounters race, gender, the forces of global capital, and so on. Moreover, this invasion of one's domestic sphere by discourse and by agents of power cannot be stopped by closing the door or by attempting to shut the world out. Instead, that insidious process demands an even more extraordinary ethical response: one must open the door wider, and engage even more often with the vast and dangerous reality that tends to be thought of as 'the outside'. What Derrida describes as infinite hospitality is therefore the only valid, ethical and just response to the violence that ravages our lives, our homes, and interactions with others (*On Cosmopolitanism* 4–5). But infinite hospitality means precisely what it says, that is, it

means allowing *everything in*. Anything less and one not only condones but is also complicit with violence.

The supposed difference between art and photography can be rethought in light of the aporia of infinite hospitality. It is not accurate to say that one is the tool of social justice, and the other merely the distracted production of an increasingly numb bourgeoisie. This classificatory distinction assumes that the one form is inherently hospitable while the other is not. Yet, since both function by bracketing off, or by detaching what they capture from what is phenomenally real, they are both, strictly speaking, limited. Some art, and perhaps Auerbach's stills are the best example, is able to gesture beyond these limits in ways which may engage one (though those means are not only realist in nature) while some art is not. Nevertheless, the limits are always there: they can be denied, made overt, or even be the subject matter of the work, but they cannot be erased.

My sense is that *Double Negative* is a text that thematises its own failures, its un-crossable barriers. For instance, consider Neville's moment of reverie when, from Mrs Ditton's house, he looks out at the property next door, which he picked out earlier that day when the men stood on Langermann Kop. While he cannot see into the house, due to the drawn venetian blinds, he nevertheless wonders what is happening inside. Finally, he concedes: "I [can]not imagine what [is] going on in that room. Anything is possible. Everything" (65). The room is beyond his sight, undocumented and unknown. As such, it holds out the promise that "[a]nything is possible". He goes further, though, and contends that "[e]verything" is possible behind those blinds. The earlier assessment makes perfect sense: since he cannot know what is happening in that room, anything might be. It is less clear how everything can be possible in there.

I think that Vladislavić's point is that it is sight, sensory perception more generally, and the knowledge that it produces which limits phenomenal reality. Though our senses do make reality sensible (an expression with a dual meaning), they simultaneously deny us access to certain phenomena, experiences, and forms of being. Properly speaking, since the room into which Neville desires to look exists in time and space, only a certain number of things can possibly be occurring within it. On a metaphoric level, however, that room represents the full, unimaginable, diverse, contingent and contradictory whole that we call everything.[18] Everything, then, is the unknown: it is not what we do not yet know, or fail to understand properly, but what exceeds knowledge and understanding entirely. The room is a catachresis for the infinite, which can never be defined, represented or understood in its entirety. One might characterise it as a 'dark room', not only in that what happens within it

remains hidden and obscure, but also in the sense that like a photographer's dark room, the space precedes the production of representational forms. All such representations occur within it – they come to light there, but only on condition that the darkness remains.

But why and how is it that the darkness of that room resists the light? And what desire drives Neville to want to see inside? What does he wish to see? Gazing is a recurrent motif in *Double Negative*, and is arguably most pronounced in the sections that describe the two photographs (not three, crucially) which Auerbach takes. You will recall that Veronica gazes away from the camera, in turn directing the viewer's gaze beyond the frame. Similarly, Neville implores his readers to see the picture-within-a-picture from which three living children look out. The reader, in turn, is burdened with the awful knowledge that the family 'look out' at their future, in which one of them, ironically, has no part. It is as if the dead were looking out at the living. That photograph, more than any other described in the novel, alerts the reader to the unrelenting movement of time. As I have already observed, it therefore thematises the vulnerability of youth. It preserves the promise of youth while simultaneously revealing the inevitable end to all such promise.

In the section describing how Mrs Ditton was photographed, gazing is also of paramount importance. Before he takes the picture, Auerbach twice "step[s] away from the camera and look[s] toward the door with a grimace", in turn causing his subject "to look at the door enquiringly" too (66). Neville imagines this door opening, but then imagines "the room opening rather than the door, the door standing still while the house [swings] away on small hinges and close[s] into the eye of the camera with a bang" (66). And, tellingly, it is when Neville is distracted, probably not looking, in other words, that Auerbach takes his picture. One is alerted to the violence and detachment of the process when Neville observes that for "the second time that day, the shutter fell through the moment like a guillotine" (66).

Bizarrely, the narrator again forces readers to collude with his way of seeing things when he contends that, in the photograph, "[y]ou can see the relief on Mrs Ditton's face as she drops from the fulness [sic] of life into a smaller, diminished immortality" (66). Furthermore, he observes that "[s]he looks grateful to have the air knocked out of her" by the photograph, and describes her "float[ing] free of the fat-thighed cushions and the sticky shadows", and levitating (66). Finally, he assures us that her relief, symbolised by her floating body, "is there in the photograph, you have only to look" (66). This "you" is akin to the generic 'one' but it also refers to the reader, who cannot look. Indeed, this is apposite because, as I hope to show, what Vladislavić would have the reader look on is a darkness beyond sight, and a reality beyond perception.

Once she has been photographed by Auerbach, Neville feels that Mrs Ditton seems unwilling to rise from her chair, and he interprets this as her attempt to hover between "two destinies", one which she still occupies, the "other", which he contends, "[has] stepped away from her" and is "receding into the past, but with its face turned to the future" (67). This last phrase obviously alludes to Walter Benjamin's description of the 'angel of history', which reminds one that, while the sections of the novel with which I have concerned myself are principally instances of ekphrasis, Vladislavić is aware that the gaze, about which he writes so much, has a long history of violence, which connects it inexorably to the suffering of the world throughout history. Klee's angel, according to Benjamin, is turned to the incalculable harm, destruction and suffering of the past while the storm from paradise propels him toward the future ("Concept of History" 392).[19] Mrs Ditton's destiny in the photograph is, as De Kock notes (12), the opposite, as it is turned to the future head-on, but is drawn the other way, toward the loss and wreckage of days gone. According to Neville, her future in the picture is a "diminished immortality", which is a beautiful, troubling phrase that implies that there, in the photograph, where one can preserve a moment, where life itself can be conserved, loss occurs (66). Like the picture of Veronica and her children, the photograph of Mrs Ditton is thus to be interpreted in terms of death. But it is a particular kind of death which one must consider: that is, unceasing death, the death one encounters when one cannot die.

From the temporal perspective of one who views the photograph, it is always the case that one is looking on what has passed. By contrast, any animate subject in a still has its face turned to the future, which it, nevertheless, cannot see. In a sense, then, both viewer and subject look on what does not exist, is not present, or phenomenally real. The photograph orients their sight beyond what can be seen. It is as if, metaphorically speaking, both viewer and subject look on one another but see, instead, only darkness.

The many strands of thought which seem to obsess Vladislavić in the sections of the novel which I have been discussing – death, darkness, the work of art, and the gaze – all seem to gesture toward Maurice Blanchot's evocative reading of the myth of Orpheus, in which the Greek hero is granted access to the Underworld to retrieve his beloved wife, Eurydice. He carries a lyre, is the prototypical poet, and, in some versions, his admission to the land of the dead is granted by the gods because of his ability with song. His one decree from the gods is that he shall not look on Eurydice in the dark. Should he do so, he will lose her forever. Orpheus cannot help but disobey this injunction. According to Blanchot, his sole aim, in

entering the Underworld, is "to look in the night at what that night hides, the *other* night, the dissimulation that appears" ("Orpheus's Gaze" 172).

But that objective is futile, and is in fact undone by the very act of looking back. When he does so, "the essence of night is revealed as inessential. For this reason, he betrays the work, and Eurydice, and the night" (172). Yet, for Blanchot,

> not to look would be infidelity to the measureless, imprudent force of his movement, which does not want Eurydice in her daytime truth and her everyday appeal, but wants her in her nocturnal obscurity, [. . .] wants to see her not when she is visible, but when she is invisible, and not as the intimacy of a familiar life, but as the foreignness of what excludes all intimacy, and wants not to make her live, but to have living in her the plenitude of her death.
>
> (172)

For Blanchot, this paradox defines not only Orpheus's time in the Underworld, but also his art: "Eurydice is the furthest that art can reach. Under a name that hides her and a veil that covers her, she is the profoundly obscure point toward which art and desire, death and night, seem to tend" (171).The power of Orpheus's art gains him the right to enter the world of the dead, the realm of the inessential. Because of it, writes Blanchot, "night welcomes him; it becomes welcoming intimacy" (171). No matter how great is his mastery of his art, however, it cannot master "the night". It has "measured limits" (a need for clarity, rules and order), which the night overwhelms.

Orpheus and his wife and his work are enveloped by the night at the very moment that he defies the gods and looks on his wife: "the inspired and forbidden gaze destines Orpheus to lose everything", says Blanchot, "not only himself, not only day's reality; but night's essence" (174).What inspires the work also ensures its failure. Maddeningly, Orpheus's work (and, by extension, the work of all art) is to do the impossible. As such, he must see Eurydice in the "plenitude of her death", though to do so renders her inessential and lost to darkness. Yet, in Blanchot's reading, that failure is not only inevitable but also necessary, for inspiration "turns Orpheus and it propels him toward that failure and that insignificance irresistibly, as if to renounce failure were much graver than to renounce success, as if what we call insignificant, the inessential, error, could, to one who accepts the risk and surrenders to it without restraint, reveal itself as the source of all authenticity" (174).

One of the risks that such a work – which refuses to renounce failure, but wills it, instead – would need to accept is that it might be characterised as mad. The desire to see night in its darkness, its invisibility, when it is not illuminated or exposed to light or sense, is immoderate, "is in itself excessive" (172). That said, the madness, the immoderation, is

implied by Orpheus's "first step toward the shades" (172). As a result, Blanchot determines that "Orpheus has in fact, never ceased to be turned toward Eurydice" (172). This ineluctable orientation toward her in the shades means that, paradoxically, he "saw her invisible, he touched her intact, in her shadowy absence, in that veiled presence which did not hide her absence, which was the presence of her infinite absence" (172). In effect, had he not looked on her, he would not have been able to draw her to him, and though she cannot be there with him, in the movement, the irony is that "[h]e is no less dead than she – dead, not of that tranquil worldly death which is rest, silence, and end, but of that other death which is death without end, the ordeal of the end's absence" (172).

Blanchot's reading of the myth is very rich – in it are subtleties and complexities which my somewhat schematic explanation of his work does not register. Nevertheless, even set out as it is, it is clear that the essay revolves around an aporia which defines all art. That which art desires to gaze upon and capture is always beyond its reach, and yet that beyond, what Blanchot calls the "*other* night", is the source that irresistibly draws the gaze and the work. Art can therefore neither reject nor affirm the source, and failure is an *a priori* inevitability. Having said that, one must not forget that those who are willing to risk that failure, by giving themselves and their work over to it without restraint, allow for the utterly impossible, which Orpheus most desires. That is, artists who risk the worst are, perhaps, able to see the invisible as invisible within the work, and to experience the "presence of [the] infinite absence" (172).

Vladislavić's use of ekphrasis in *Double Negative* seems doomed to failure. The reader is provided with descriptions of Auerbach's photographs, and, moreover, the text often draws attention to the fact that these depictions are not unbiased, but Neville's problematic recollection of the images. Between the words and the image they are meant to detail, readers sense a gulf. As a result, those who read the text are driven to want what is thoroughly unfeasible, unreasonable and undoable, which is to see images that they know exist only in words. And, even were that preposterous desire achievable, I suspect that the reader would still be unsatisfied. The image, made visible beyond its worded prison, would bring him/her merely to another level of representation. But, like Orpheus, who wants what is beyond sight, it is the nature of the work that it demand the onlooker see further than is possible. There is a fullness of time, a moment in its plenitude, that photographs intimate but to which they resolutely deny access. Failure to see such plenitude drives the reader back to Neville's words (the very words s/he hopes can be moved beyond): the "depth of field is [indeed] fixed, once and for all" (Vladislavić, *Double Negative* 54). Accordingly, the reader is left, once and for

all, to share Neville's pessimistic perspective. Aware that what he misses the reader will never see, and that what he misrepresents s/he is unable to critique with any greater sense of certainty than he, the reader must surely feel that s/he has (foolishly, madly too) oriented him/herself toward the impossible. His/her sight (like Orpheus's) is directed at that which cannot be seen, his/her desire for knowledge fixated on that which can never be known.

And yet, in Auerbach's work, limits seem always on the verge of collapse. You stare (or imagine you do at any rate) at the face of a vital young child and think on death, as if death were not merely the end point of life but the impossible possibility that gives life its inspiration. Or, when Neville looks on Mrs Ditton's picture and muses that she is relieved to be immortal in it, it is understood that her relief is not that she will live forever in the image but that she will die there, relentlessly. Faced with the awful prospect of mortality, which allows her but one death, at which she can never even be present, she seems to choose instead the photograph that takes her from life, and does so again, and again, unceasingly. In it, she is never alive, for it is not her phenomenally real self in the real world. Yet the *deadness* of the image is overwhelmed by the life which it intimates that, ironically, exists outside of it. To put it differently, and in terms in line with Benjamin's ideas on photography, Mrs Ditton is (or was, as she may have subsequently passed away) alive, somewhere, out there beyond the lens. It is this life beyond the picture of which the still makes its viewer aware. But there, in the photograph itself, she is not alive, though she was alive when it was taken, which is not to say that she is dead in it. No, her death cannot be pictured. Readers cannot imagine her demise, and yet, paradoxically, the description of the photograph almost demands they do so. Like Orpheus, readers of the text give themselves to descent without respite. They look into a darkness they cannot see, dying all the time, creatures of the day who nonetheless desire the night.

One must, I think, take seriously Blanchot's point that art gains Orpheus access to the night, that because of it the night "becomes welcoming intimacy" (171). Also, when he contends that suffering the inevitable failure of the work requires a "true patience" which "does not exclude impatience" but is instead "intimacy with impatience – impatience suffered and endured endlessly" (171), one should not ignore that a notion of an intimacy with the unendurable sounds very much like Derrida's later work on hospitality. To "endure endlessly" one's own impatient desire to "exhaust the infinite", by putting a "term to the interminable", implies that one gives oneself over to the infinite as an indefinite responsibility.

This relentless task of enduring the unendurable desire to see beyond can, according to Blanchot, create something truly astonishing. It can create a masterpiece wherein "the brilliance and resolution of the beginning shine[s]", and "we confront something extinguished: a work suddenly become invisible again, which is no longer there, has never been there" ("Orpheus's Gaze" 174). It is beyond my powers to say whether *Double Negative* deserves such an extraordinary commendation. In fact, I am not entirely sure that there are any criteria by which one could objectively determine whether or not a piece of art is what Blanchot calls a masterpiece. I suspect that assessment must surely fail to recognise what belongs on the other side of reason and clarity. What I have tried to show, however, is that Vladislavić's novel is troubled by a responsibility to and perhaps even for a world of which it is formally only a representation. Its protagonist, at least at first, wants nothing more than to make a difference. Similarly, my sense is that the text itself would like to engage the world beyond its pages. Yet, Vladislavić's work can only stage that engagement as a failure (or series of failures). One reads in it about various forms of art, some realist, some not, some of it overtly political, and others (such as Neville's own pictures) want nothing whatsoever to do with politics and power. But all the while, the reader has Neville demanding that s/he should see more, and see further. In particular, the photographs by Auerbach are troubling to the narrator because in ways, both obvious and subtle, they are excessive. They seem to gesture at a real which he and his readers know they can merely depict. And yet, I think they are also disconcerting to him because within them is the failure of representation. In Veronica's photograph, there is the dead child who was not alive when the picture was taken, and who is nonetheless present. He is present in his deathly aspect, alive in his absence. That child may well be a discomforting figure for South Africa's traumatic past (which is similarly always absent and present in the psyches and the structures of the country). He is also an image for photography itself: his simultaneous living and dying, presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, realness and fictiveness, is the work of photography laid bare. For me, it is not coincidental that he should serve as metaphor for the real, undeniable violence and loss of this country, and for the very nature of photography, perhaps even art more generally. To engage with that past, with the suffering of others in general, one is obliged to move beyond representations of them (in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and so on), and to experience them as profoundly other. Representation is a limited form of understanding and thus necessarily leads to a limited form of engagement. Unconditional hospitality would have to be hospitality beyond representation for precisely this reason.

It is not certain, however, that one can ever move beyond representation. Some limited form of understanding is always inevitable. Unless, of course, one could represent in such a way that representation would fail in the act itself. One would then be drawn to the failures of the work and thus to an invisible "*other* night" which exists beyond limit. If that were possible (impossibly possible), one might find the lost child, the one who is never present, and who despite that demands to be reckoned with.[20] In post-transitional South Africa, the 'angel of history' must seem an obscure image to many. The image of a child, singular but also another in a long line of children fallen victim to oppression and systemic violence, might be more apt. Does that child not look out, accusingly or pleadingly, we can never be sure, from every image and in every space? S/he invokes us from his/her invisible and silent world. If "we who are privileged" (to borrow Sontag's phrase) are ever to offer him/her care and solace, we must do so beyond the image where we see him/her. We must find him/her where s/he is, where absence is endured and light is unwelcomed. I do not know that we can really 'classify' such a 'place' in any way. But I do suspect that the language of home and private property would be inadequate. I suspect, in short, that we will have to leave home behind indefinitely if we are to make the lost child our priority.

"Dead letters", and the Impossibility of Absolute Inhospitality

When Neville returns to South Africa after years of self-imposed exile, the country's traumatic past is never far from his mind. His distance and lack of presence for the final, violent years of apartheid, in particular, causes him a great deal of angst. It is that sense of non-belonging which leads him to watch the TRC hearings, or at least "as much as [he] could stand", in the hope of "plug[ging] the gaps in [his] knowledge" and "reanimate[ing] the deadened nerve-endings of [his] sympathy" (Vladislavić, *Double Negative* 183).[21]

In the previous section of this chapter, I addressed the difficulties that art faces in awakening or developing sympathy or compassion for others' suffering. The following section returns to the issue of the limitations of Neville's capacity for empathy. Through a careful examination of his relation with Camilla and the so-called "dead letters" she gives to him, I hope to consider an issue similar to that which I addressed in the previous section, that is, the terrible debt and responsibility Vladislavić seems to feel one owes to those who are no longer present.

Camilla lives in the house which Neville never managed to visit that day with Auerbach and Brookes. Before he ever sees it, he says that "[i]t had the appeal of an

incomplete gesture, always on the tip of [his] memory, just about to come back to [him]" (87). It is strange that he thinks of a property he has never visited as if it were a memory that might at any minute return to him. The reader is made to wonder how it is that he can remember what he has never known.

The inclination on his part to recall what was never actually experienced is nonetheless perfectly sensible to those who read the text. Like him, the reader is promised that s/he will see three houses. That does not happen, yet the third house "looms large" in his/her mind by virtue of its absence. Curiosity leads him/her to imagine what it is that is happening inside. To use Neville's words, it holds the promise of anything and everything occurring within the confines of its walls. There is a third photograph that should have been taken, that was never taken, that would have captured all of that promise. That picture is like a memory which cannot be remembered, and the very thought of it is overwhelming.[22]

Finally, Neville's compulsion to see the house, to know what he feels has always been on the "tip of [his] mind", becomes too strong, and he goes to find out who lives in the house which eluded him all those years ago. He gains access by lying: claiming to be a scholar researching the life of Rosco Dunn, a boxer who never actually existed, he assures his host that Dunn lived on her street, possibly in her house, years before. The lie is strategic as he fears that the truth may seem more dubious (96). I also suspect that the act of dissembling allows the narrator a degree of distance, an anonymity which lessens any possible responsibility he might otherwise be obliged to feel. Ironically, his time in the house is marked by an increasing sense of accountability to Camilla, and also to the dead and dying over whom she watches.

The other 'trick' that Neville has at his disposal is the promise that he will photograph Camilla and her home. Although she can never know this, the image he wishes to capture is not of her. He wants to take the picture that Auerbach never did, that can never be taken and, therefore, can also never be duplicated. Since photographs are representations which can, by definition, be accurately duplicated, one should realise that this is a photograph *like no other*.[23] Neville has 'come back' to a home he has never visited before, to discover a photograph that was never taken, implying that his project is to reproduce (exactly) the still that Auerbach never managed to take. Impossibility marks the contours and the heart of such a project. In other words, Neville's work is oriented beyond limits, and thus the distance and facade he has created to define his relationship with the occupants of the house is always bound to be frustrated and overwhelmed.

If he is to succeed in his aims, he must do the impossible, which is to reverse time, visit the house that was never visited, and capture the reality inside. To compare his challenge with that of Orpheus's in the Underworld seems not just appropriate but commensurate. That is to say, their tasks are the same: to enter the space of impossibility and render it in terms which are legible, determinable, visible, while all the while maintaining what makes that space invisible and illegible. This is the work of all art – so at least says Blanchot. *Double Negative* is a novel about art, and in it one reads of the impossible endeavour of art (such as Neville's). Does this imply that the novel knows its limits? Is one meant to understand that it describes Neville's perpetual failure because it can safely say that it is not as foolish, and that it has not gone where even angels would fear to tread? In short, the question of whether this text knows its place is important.

In order to broach that topic, it is necessary, first, to describe in more detail Neville's time with Camilla. From the first visit, he finds that his own obscure, personal motivations are beside the point, and that her stories become the focus of their time together. At one point, he even realises that "[s]he no longer needed me to speak, it was enough that I listen" (102). He notes, with a touch of exasperation, that "[a]s hard as it had been to get into the house, it now seemed harder to get out again" (103). The outlandish lies about research seem utterly irrelevant once he is face to face with his host. And though he lies, in part to protect himself from becoming too involved, he seems utterly undone by her desire to tell her stories. What began as a banal and highly conventional greeting quickly escalates into something far more demanding.

Not coincidentally, the next time he visits his new acquaintance, she refuses to accept the lie and he has to tell the truth. In return, she shows him a copy of the picture of Mrs Ditton taken by Auerbach which, she informs him, her neighbour left her as a gift when she moved away. As I have said, there are contradictory and never clearly articulated impulses which draw Neville to Camilla's place. On the one hand, he wants to see what he did not see years before, and in that sense it is as if he wishes to reproduce a photograph that only ever existed as a possibility. On the other hand, he has no real desire to become embroiled in the lives of the occupants of the house. Yet, from the outset, he is indeed involved and entangled in Camilla's life and in her stories.

Neville is surprised by Camilla's possession of the still, particularly since his feelings about this picture, which he saw taken, are complex. At one point, he admits that, "[i]n the flesh, on the same street, [he] would have kept [his] distance" from the likes of Mrs Ditton and Veronica, but, ironically, at the scale and at the remove of a photograph he finds that he

cannot do so. He claims that "they dr[a]w close and [feel] familiar" (112). "I know this person. I know this kind of person", he keeps thinking (112). Quite clearly, then, there are at least two things one might say about Neville: first, his expectations of his time at the third house, whatever precisely they might be, are not remotely in line with what actually happens once he goes there. It is as if he set out on a journey knowing the destination, and immediately became lost. Despite having come to the house he has always wanted to see, Neville is not where he expected to be. Secondly, and here the spatial metaphor of maintaining one's distance is very useful, the formal and fixed relationship he had hoped to initiate with Camilla has little to do with the messy, complex one to which he actually becomes party.

The question that intrigues me is why it is that control seems so elusive (and illusive) for this character. His inability to continue to adopt an attitude of disregard once he is faced with Camilla implies that, perhaps, it is not possible to decide on a destination, plot out a route, and then follow it. He arrives at her home, which is the destination he had hoped to reach, but then feels lost, un-homed, or unsure that he is where he expected to be – which, in my opinion, suggests that disorientation and displacement mark every journey, even the one home. My sense is that it is constructive to consider Neville's time with Camilla in terms of displacement and un-home, since the exchange is marked by a loss of control, and images which imply un-homeliness.

One of the most powerful and poignant motifs in the second section of the novel also concerns the un-arrived-at destination. Dr Pinheiro, Camilla's partner, who Neville is led to believe is lying sick in bed in a closed room, takes a job as a postal worker when he comes to South Africa in the mid-seventies. There is a class of letters, those "not properly addressed or illegible", which he would take home (illegally) in the hope of eventually finding their proper recipients. In conversation with his mother on the topic, Neville tells her the following: "I keep thinking about what the letters must say, the good news and the bad, and about the people who wrote them and the people who never received them. Lost souls, calling after one another in the dark" (129). In the previous chapter, I cited Derrida's contention that any letter, any message of any kind really, is always sent on condition that it may not be received, and may not reach its intended recipient (*Post Card* 33). Dr Pinheiro's 'dead letters' are, of course, ample evidence of the validity of Derrida's point. They are also (as Neville intimates) the voices of those not present calling out endlessly across the ether. It is worth remembering that Pinheiro is also no longer present; he is, in fact, dead. Camilla is the keeper of the stories of the absent. Her own husband is gone and all the stories which she shares with Neville are

of the past. She is rich with absence, if such a thing is possible. In her and around her there is loss, palpable and imminent, always beyond access. For Neville, and the reader too, she is both the threshold and the barrier: through her, he hears the dead calling to one another. At one stage she even hears voices which he does not, the implication being that they are the voices of the vanished. Clearly, Neville cannot walk in the realm of the dead. He is not Orpheus, blessed twice by the gods with, first, ability with song, and, secondly, with a right to wander in "the *other* night" (Blanchot, "Orpheus's Gaze" 172). Rather, he must keep company with Camilla, an aging woman whose stories seem heavy with the aura of death, but who nevertheless persists. She is alive, though her allegiance is not with the living, and she is out of time with time.

Little wonder then that the most surreal incident in the novel occurs while Neville is in her presence. They are sitting in her garden, which is cluttered by the many strange letterboxes that Dr Pinheiro collected with an "eye to posterity" (117). Like the "dead letters", this odd assortment of boxes, that will never again be conduits by which letters can be received, also implies that some messages will not and cannot find their way home. It is worth bearing in mind that, though later in life Neville is reticent of photographing homeowners, he occasionally does so by posing them beside their letterboxes. Obviously, at some level, it is Dr Pinheiro's collection that inspired Neville's fascination with these particular and curious physical objects. What they imply, I think, is that despite his work's overt intent to capture limits and detachment, there is (quite literally) a hole in his defences. Like the doors which concerned Marion in *Playing in the Light*, his walls are inadequate, and can always be scaled. Letterboxes are one way in which one allows the world in. One condones the breach, or legitimises the invasion. There are, no doubt, conventions that determine the nature of this point of access: most notably, one expects that any letter placed in one's letterbox will be addressed to him/her. But Dr Pinheiro and Camilla know all too well that not all letters end up at their prescribed destination. They would concur with Derrida that the sending and/or receiving of messages is a risky business. One can never be sure of what might arrive.

It is thus appropriate that, surrounded by letterboxes that no longer receive letters, Neville and Camilla read messages which will never be read by those for whom they were intended. Vladislavić's depiction is not merely of reading, however. What he describes is a process whereby the stories that are read literally come to life. Adopting a magical realist mode at this point in the novel, he portrays fantastic scenes where word and world are indeed one. For instance, the first letter read aloud allows a prison cell to unfold from the silence.

Before Neville's very eyes, he sees a man lying on his bed in the cell. In folding the letter (one assumes so at any rate), the narrator claims that Camilla also folds "him into an upright position against the wall" (130). And, "[w]ith a sweep of her hand, she smooth[s] his damp, bloodied body out against the table" (130). It is important to note the use of the active voice in this section. Also, there are no phrases such as 'it seemed' or 'it appeared to me' or even 'I imagined that'. As an act of language (and let us not forget that the entire novel is an act of language), what is here at stake is not merely a reflection of a likeness, of similarity between reading and imagining that which is read. Instead, the unfolding of letter and man are the same. The two things happen simultaneously and are accorded the same degree of phenomenal reality. It is not *as if* contiguity has been so harnessed as to negate difference. In this case, the term 'as if' is simply inappropriate and contiguity is *in fact* obliterated by sameness. As De Kock observes, "these are figures of people come alive in the moment of their literal 'unfolding', which is also a figurative unfolding within a diminished but nevertheless real immortality" (13). Accordingly, he argues that "[t]here is no limit to these figures coming alive [. . .], except the limit of being unfolded (i. e. 'read')" (13). These comments reveal the connection between the 'dead letters' and Auerbach's stills, which also provide a "diminished immortality" for those photographed.

The next letter which Camilla reads is even more intriguing. They are discussing the letters in general when, "[w]ithout another word, she unfold[s] a small girl into a shady corner of the garden" (131). The phrase "[w]ithout another word" is curious: almost certainly, it denotes that Camilla did not say another word in the conversation, proceeding instead to open and then read another letter. Given the nature of the scene we are considering, however, it would perhaps be prudent to question assumptions of certainty. For instance, the phrase could mean that she unfolded the girl from the letter without uttering another word. But it is unclear how that could be possible. Surely, she would have to read the letter, say words aloud, to conjure its inhabitants? Again, the implication is that, during the reading of the letters, there is no difference between words and the things which they denote. Only on that condition, which is quite literally fabulous, would the actual uttering of words be irrelevant. When words are the things they signify, they are, ironically, no longer necessary. This is, of course, a point that has been made in countless ways by numerous linguists and philosophers (such as Ferdinand de Saussure, Maurice Blanchot and Jacques Derrida). Language is necessary precisely because it is not the same as that which it designates. We develop and employ modes of representation such as language because we cannot conjure or make present every 'thing' that we wish to communicate. Instead, we are obliged to convey meaning in the

absence of things – and language is (for better or worse) the richest, though admittedly ineffective, tool at our disposal in that regard.

All of this Vladislavić knows better than most. He is, after all, a writer of fiction – one who conjures, with language, what is absent, and, by virtue of being unreal, remains absent indefinitely. Yet he seems to want a world of letters (and I use the word letters deliberately to suggest both written messages sent by post and literature) that breaks free of its constraints. He is striving, throughout *Double Negative*, for a mode of writing that will spill out over the page. It is as if he has been told, 'in fiction you may do as you please, create whatever world you wish, but there is one condition, which is that you must do so in words. As such, your work may never enter the realm of the real'. And, in the face of that perfectly sensible limitation, he seems obsessed by the desire to write a text which wants nothing more or less than the impossible. It wants what it depicts to be real, like letters that unfold as people made present. The novel's greatest desire, a feverish maddening compulsion, is to go beyond words, to make words irrelevant.[24] The novel would like to speak, speak without speaking, in the space where words are rendered silent. But in what language? Only a language devoid of words, a language of silence, will do.

Given that the novel seems driven by this irrational, aporetic compulsion, it is somewhat apposite that, when faced with the little girl from the second letter, Neville has a bizarre, irresistible inclination to act unusually. He describes her as a poor scrap, "barefoot and weeping" (131). And her 'presence' leads him to muse that "[t]here [is] too much unhappiness in the world [. . .], in the world of letters, at least" (131). We can ignore the distinction he makes between the "world of letters" and the more expansive 'real world beyond' because in this section of the novel, as I have tried to show, the use of magical realism conflates, in the most radical way, precisely that difference. In any case, the thought that there is "too much unhappiness in the world" is one of Neville's deepest held beliefs. What he means, of course, is that there is too much suffering *for him*, too much he must witness and then respond to in one way or another. The sentiment also resonates with Derrida's contention, that I have mentioned previously, that absolute hospitality is impossible since beings are finite and alterity is infinite. Furthermore, it reveals the inherent limitation of all the many forms of kindness, social engagement, and even sympathy which Neville has tried to show others. Whether he would admit to it or not, in this regard, he is his own worst enemy. Because all of his ethical gestures are ultimately designed to make him feel better, none of them is therefore actually *for* the other. Over and over again, he finds his efforts to be an ethical and conscientious person frustrated. The reader is aware of why this is so: he is

incapable of giving when it is "too much" for him (131). The phrase "too much" is an excellent one as it implies excess, which, in its way, implies alterity. So, in sum, when he is faced with excessive alterity, Neville recoils. He searches instead for a 'manageable burden' (as if there were such a thing). As the novel progresses, his desire for a more ordered, quantifiable and reasonable world becomes a defining characteristic, and he therefore makes his life smaller and smaller. For instance, he can prepare the odd meal for the family, photograph the occasional wall – nothing too drastic, nothing too demanding. The corollary is that more and more of the outside world is excluded.

Yet, when faced with the weeping, barefoot girl, and though he states outright that he "resolve[s] to stay out of it", he cannot help but lick his finger and clean "the corners of the child's eye" (131). It is curious: he resolves not to care, not to take responsibility (presumably because it is "too much" for him), and then he offers a small but quite beautiful gesture of kindness and concern. The reader is led to wonder why he finds it impossible to remain aloof, which was his stated intention. While unconditional hospitality is indeed impossible, Neville's loss of control at this point in the text might imply that remaining distant and isolated is a similarly complicated matter. He is aware that he can never do enough, but the novel is also concerned with whether it is possible for him to do nothing.

In response to such questions, it is crucial to grasp fully the subtlety of Derrida's engagement with the notion of hospitality. Unconditional and conditional hospitality are locked in an irreconcilable tension, an aporia. There is a pervertability which mediates the two forms (*On Hospitality* 25). For the most part, this thesis has concerned itself with the one form of that 'perversion', which is that any desire for infinite hospitality will always find itself faced with obstacles, limits and conditions. But the reverse is also, and at the same time, true: that is, when one attempts to be only conditionally hospitable, one finds that such hospitality is insufficient (to the very notion of hospitality). The unconditional form thus asserts itself as a condition of possibility for all more limited forms. In other words, the desire for the one form always gestures at the other.

I think that Neville's initial approach when engaging with the weeping little girl exemplifies his interaction with the world at large. In his relations with her, all he wants is to establish certain borders. He is willing to go so far and no further when faced with her suffering. Yet he finds himself overwhelmed by a compulsion to cross the line he has himself drawn. He gives what he assures the reader and himself he is unwilling to offer. At the end of the day, the limit he has imposed proves too limiting. The gesture of hospitality, and therefore of responsibility, which he describes, is one he gives *in spite of himself*. This might seem to

contradict the point I made earlier, that Neville is unable to give beyond himself. I must now clarify that contention, by noting that the problem is his orientation, his intended point of arrival – which is always his self. It is very much as though he is going on a journey and intending to arrive home eventually. For as long as that destination is fixed, the journey is for naught. There is (to reiterate Malabou's argument [2], which I cited at some length in the previous chapter), in such cases, no experience of the other and therefore no real travel. Ironically, though, one should not lose sight of the fact that, in a sense, travel is unavoidable. From moment to moment, the self experiences difference, a drifting, from itself. Stability, a fixed sense of self in other words, is an illusion created to negate our own difference (différance actually) from ourselves. We imagine ourselves as a continuity across time and space by ignoring the fact that time and space ineluctably produce disunity, spacing, difference. To be oneself, in the sense of never exceeding that self, would entail the suspension of time itself. How could one be oneself all the time unless time were an absolutely irrelevant factor?

In effect, what I am trying to point out is that travel is inevitable, as is some experience of alterity. One is, of course, capable of a variety of reactions to otherness, but one is not able to deny utterly its phenomenal existence. In Neville's case, his stock response to alterity is to reject it, to subdue it, and to treat it with suspicion and disdain. Even when he does desire a more ethical response to the world, that desire is hugely problematic because it is premised on a more innate longing to maintain the illusion of a stable self. The latter desire precludes the possibility of the former. What he obviates in advance is therefore the possibility of the very thing for which he claims to be searching.

Yet in his relation with the weeping child, I would say that (momentarily) his guard drops. What he does, at first, is quite typical, ordinary and proper (for him): he erects walls which he trusts will protect him. As I have already observed, however, there are no impermeable walls. When he sees the child, he catches a glimpse of the world outside of his home. And, despite himself, he offers her care. At that moment, the limits of his hospitality are undone by the infinite. And, the reader catches a glimpse of a different Neville. This other self, who has been affected by otherness, could be the man who the young Neville of the first section of the novel wanted to become. He might have been able to engage ethically with the world. That hope, however, which one sees in his gesture to the girl, is fleeting and has been totally devastated by the time the reader encounters him in the third section of the book.

It is worth pausing, at this stage of the discussion, to reflect on the fact that the three sections of the novel provide three snapshots of the protagonist, at three different periods in

his life. Between those periods, there are unaccounted for gaps and fissures. Neville admits as much when he concedes that "the awkward truth of [his] life takes shape in [the] negative spaces" between the "fragments" that he is able to recall and relate to others (174).[25] If indeed the fragmented narrative he is able to provide is devoid of the "awkward truths of [his] life", one wonders why he chooses to tell his story at all. Surely, one could do without a potted history which is, by his own admission, incomplete and lacking in the truth? Is it not unseemly, at the very least, to tell one's life story if the truth of one's life is unnarratable?

I would say that there is indeed a degree of bad faith in Neville's narration. On the one hand, he is fully willing to admit that there are "negative spaces" in his life story that cannot be recuperated. And, seemingly, his decision to divide his story into three parts (with obvious gaps) reinforces this notion. But, on the other hand, there is an inescapable sense that, by virtue of his narration, that is, because of the fact that he is telling his own story in his own words, he will be able to establish the coherence one expects of a life story. 'Read this story', he seems to want to assure the reader, 'and you will read the story of me'. The implication, undoubtedly, is that the 'me' here is a cohesive force, and that, around the 'I' of first-person narration, he will be able to organise a fluent and uninterrupted narrative. Accordingly, the reader of the text should not ever forget that the sense of the character as seamless, as unchanging (which I discussed earlier), is a product of the narrative point of view. Neville, the storyteller, tells us quite a tale. He informs us that this person is who he was and is. Wherever there are cracks and holes in that story, where we are able to see another kind of story perhaps, he is there to assert control.

Control, however, is a tricky thing: you begin writing in the belief that you have it and then, in writing, you discover that it has slipped from your grasp. Or, perhaps you tell yourself you are in command of your life (and the story you would tell of it), but there is a process of negation you employ to make that claim. You are then forced, by a force greater than your so-called control, to ignore the many gaps, the "negative spaces", where you dimly perceive that the truth might be. From moment to moment, and so as to feel like yourself, you are obliged to deny that there are parts of you, parts of your life, that are unfamiliar to you. Is the story you tell of yourself not, in the final analysis, therefore a simultaneous affirmation and denunciation of the stranger you are, even at home?

The problematic nature of control is suggested by Neville's first-person narration of his story. He asserts control by telling his story, though his narration makes the reader suspicious of him. Similarly, he wills himself to control his impulse to become involved, or to show care. As is implied when he offers both Camilla and the weeping child more care and

concern than he ever intended, however, responsibility for the other (which, of course, involves a loss of control) can come quickly, unexpectedly, like magic.

"The art of getting lost"

When Neville thinks of Mrs Magwaza, the first person to occupy any space in his project on walls, and to whom he refers as his "first thresholder", he recalls that she "gave [him] faith in the human subject" (153). He is "moved" by the "way she stood between [him] and her privacy like an amiable security guard" (153). It is awful to think that his reason for including a person in his stills is her inclination to guard what is private, rather than, say, anything she might want to reveal or share about herself. When Janie, the interviewer whose curiosity is insatiable, is told the story of Mrs Magwaza's picture, she expresses disbelief at Neville's admission that he did not want to go inside and see her house itself. Neville is adamant, though, that he made the right choice, and tells her that "[j]ust thinking about the interior makes [him] squirm" (154).

It is difficult to reconcile such a sentiment with those of the man who the reader encountered in the previous section of the novel, who was so overwhelmed by his desire to see Camilla's home that he knocked on her door and told an elaborate lie so that he could be let inside. As I suggested in the previous section of this chapter, there is no absolute coherence to the main character and thus slips and contradictions are bound to occur. I must reiterate, too, that the impulse not to go inside, to remain detached and disengaged has been there from the beginning. It intensifies and reifies as the narrative progresses, and by the time he is interviewed by Janie, is not just an impulse, but a worldview. Noting its progression is like charting a congenital and chronic disorder rather than a communicable infection. In effect, he has had this 'illness' which afflicts him all of his life.

Evidence of Neville's solipsistic way of being is abundant throughout the novel. One telling instance of his limited engagement with alterity is provided when he takes Janie out on a shoot with him. He is there to photograph the wall of Antoine K, and is disappointed to find that he is outside waiting for him, hoping to be part of the picture. Neville already knows something of his subject's story – "the hardships he'd endured in the Congo before escaping to South Africa" – but now gets the "unabridged version" (159). Antoine's tale is harrowing, though exceptional. It reveals the man's courage, and describes the great loss and suffering he had to bear. Despite the nature of the events being relayed to him, the narrator of *Double*

Negative gives clear indications of boredom with them all. Evidently, "the scale of [Antoine's] suffering" is not what he has come to capture or comprehend.

Notably, while he is trying to get the shot, Janie has wandered off and discovered that, behind the facade, there is the equivalent of a village, "twenty shacks [. . .], a whole shanty town in the middle of a suburb" (160). The inquisitive journalist is fascinated, and assumes that he will be too. She even attempts to entice him by claiming that, should he investigate, he would "get some great shots" (160). His response is to inform her that he is no more than mildly curious and, moreover, is "allergic to drama" (160). He cannot, he assures her, "go poking around in the pitiful contents of strangers' lives" (161). According to him, "[e]ven the miraculous tales of endurance are too much for [him]" to abide (161). Readers have seen this attitude before – it is Neville at his most inhospitable. Rather than relinquish comfort, he forgoes any possibility of an encounter with the other. For this reason, the suffering of others, even their stories of achievement and triumph, are annoying and distracting to him. He has not travelled to Antoine's wall to be surprised, to discover, or to feel, but merely to get the shot.

To an extent, Neville can be summed up using the word that he uses (somewhat ironically) to describe Antoine. He is "prodigal". As he observes, the word literally "means wastefully extravagant, and yet it seems to mean returned home" (161). The word is doubly apt since both its dictionary definition and its acquired meaning are fitting. Neville wastes opportunities all the time, such as the chance he squanders to see the community that live behind the facade of a suburban wall. His extravagance, which I read as the privilege of his whiteness and middle-class lifestyle, forms an insulating barrier that is rarely penetrated. Also, he is prodigal in the sense that he is always trying to 'return home'. He has no desire to be away from the comfort, affluence and solipsism of his home.

The final series of memories with which Neville ends the narrative would seem to confirm precisely this point. They revolve around a game he played with his father in his boyhood, which involved him lying down in the backseat of the car while his father drove. With a very limited view, confined to "streetlights and treetops, sometimes a robot or the roof of a building" (201), he would attempt to keep track of the route his father was taking. According to Neville, the skill was to match the route his father might take with "an internal landscape", a "journey in memory" (202). In the beginning, he recalls being easily "bamboozled" (202). He recounts that "[o]ne unexpected turn down a street [they] normally dr[o]ve past and he would be lost" (202). As Neville becomes more accustomed to the game, however, he recalls becoming cannier, more adept at reading "the bumps in the road, the

rumble of tar under the wheels", or recognising the exact way in which "the car jolted across railway lines or yawed through subway lines" (202). Eventually, he comes to a point where his father is unable to trick him anymore. Despite using an intricate and strange route to get home one day, he finds that his son is sure of the way. They arrive home and Neville lies on the backseat "in the dark with the bitter knowledge that [he has] unlearn[t] the art of getting lost" (204). To find that one is unable to be lost is indeed a "bitter knowledge" since it means that one always knows where one is. No place in the world is strange, unfamiliar, or unexplored. Home is the point of destination of all such journeys because nothing has been seen or experienced that would destabilise the space of home and so render it *Unheimlich*. The possibility of an unforeseen encounter is denied in advance. All the world becomes a claustrophobic space because there is nowhere you can go that you have not been before.

Clearly, the game Neville plays with his father is an apt metaphor for the journey the readers have embarked upon with the protagonist. When we first meet him, he wants to find his way but cannot. He hopes to be a part of change but finds that his ability to be a part of anti-racist movements is severely limited. By the end of the novel, he knows (or thinks he does at any rate) who he is and where he belongs. Gone is the angst of youth, replaced with a comforting, if somewhat bitter, sense of propriety and place. If as a young man there was a war waging within him between his privilege and his conscience, that war has now been won. As with all internal battles, he finds he is both victor and casualty.

Actually, I am not really convinced that things are as simple as this. I am not sure that, for example, Neville's journey from confusion to apathy is the only one that *Double Negative* takes its readers on. My principal objection to the reading of the text that I have just proposed is based on my feeling that, perhaps, it is not possible *never* to be lost.

Neville, for instance, does not ever investigate the thriving community behind Antoine's wall. If he did, would he be sure of his coordinates, of his place in relation to others? It is difficult to know. Of course, it is *possible* that he would treat this world in much the same way that he treats Antoine's life story: as so much noise to be disregarded while he does what he set out to do. One cannot know with any degree of certainty that that is what would happen, however. An unforeseen encounter is precisely that: it is an engagement that cannot be expected or determined in advance. Consider, for example, Neville's interactions with Camilla. He did not plan for them to go as they did. Nor did he expect to visit as often as he did, and to be the solitary hearer of her stories and her memories. Similarly, when he sees the weeping girl unfold from her letter, he resolves not to become involved. And then, with his very next gesture, he demonstrates his concern for her. These are small examples, the sum

of which do not amount to much. They certainly do not shake the overall sense of who Neville is and of how he interacts with the world. That is not really the point, though. What they do is suggest a loss of control, a loss of ipseity, which is unanticipated and, from his perspective, even unwelcomed.

Now, it seems to me that being unable to be lost is the same as being always at home in the sense that both are usually associated with a sense of comfort, assurance and safety. Being lost, by contrast, usually instantiates some degree of discomfort and uncertainty. But, can one ever be always at home? Moreover, can one be at home everywhere, as Neville's story about the game implies he is? What effort of will or determination could produce such a world, a world-as-home? Such questions can, in my opinion, be recast in terms of hospitality: can one keep all others utterly out of one's home? Is absolute inhospitality even possible? The answer, of course, is no. For as long as there are thresholds, they are, at least theoretically, crossable. Each dividing line is also already a point of access. The very reason for borders is because we must establish difference between ourselves and others. This means, paradoxically, that others are a condition of possibility for the border. They are there, at the very border we created to keep them out. We invoke others as we renounce them. In a sense, we welcome them despite ourselves.

Double Negative cannot merely be the story of a man who unlearns "the art of getting lost" (204). That may well be the story of which the narrator feels he is in control, but control is limited. In the process of writing, becoming lost is inevitable. Language, the most powerful tool at the disposal of the writer, is always insufficient and therefore generative of excess. What bursts forth beyond the means of language is also, by definition, beyond the control of the writer. Excess is an otherness which no writer can plan to host. And yet there is no writing without this unanticipated guest. All writers are hostage to it. For this reason, they write without home and they wander without respite.

Maurice Blanchot, in another exceptional essay, entitled "Literature and the Right to Death", explains this point quite beautifully. He considers the act of writing, and determines that a writer's "starting point is a certain state of language, a certain form of culture, certain books, and also certain objective elements – ink, paper, printing press" (Blanchot, "Right to Death" 314). Having said that, Blanchot observes that "in order to write, [the writer] must destroy language in its present form and create it in another form, denying books as he forms a book out of what other books are not" (314). He concludes that, though it was not expected, "[t]his new book is certainly a reality – it can be seen, touched, even read. In any case, it is not nothing" (314). He continues as follows:

> [b]efore I wrote [the book], I had an idea of it, at least I had the project of writing it, but I believe there is the same difference between that idea and the volume in which it is realised as between the desire for heat and the stove which makes me warm. For me, the written volume is an extraordinary, unforeseeable innovation – such that it is impossible for me to conceive what it is capable of being without writing it. This is why it seems to me to be an experiment whose effects I cannot grasp, no matter how consciously they were produced, and in the face of which I shall be unable to remain the same, for this reason: in the presence of something other, I become other. But there is an even more decisive reason: this other thing – the book – of which I had only an idea and which I could not possibly have known in advance, is precisely myself become other.
>
> (314)

Writing is an experience of alterity within oneself. From the moment the pen touches the page (or, I suppose, one's fingers touch the keyboard), one is hopelessly, irrevocably lost. Despite all conscious effort, one gives oneself over to that which is not available for conscious experience. To use Neville's phrase, one swims out into "the sea of what is forgotten" (Vladislavić, *Double Negative* 153).

In middle age, Neville Lister believes that he has unlearnt the art of getting lost. The unstated implication is that, once upon a time, he learnt that art, or that learning it is even possible. I do not think that one can consciously set out to be lost. A place one cannot know cannot be one's point of arrival. Getting lost happens to one, which is to say that it is an epiphenomenon, or a loss of control. One can, though, set out without a point of arrival, which means also that one set out knowing one would never return (home). One is then obliged to wander endlessly, a vagrant at the mercy of others. If there is a skill, an art and an ethics Neville has "unlearned", it is surely that one (204). This character would probably choose to live the rest of his days behind his walls, both literal and photographed. There is unfortunately not much hope for him.

By contrast, *Double Negative* is a text whose limits are always being announced, so as to gesture beyond them. It is a novel where what exceeds it seems to be bursting through every word and every image. In the most profound sense of the phrase, *we lose ourselves in it*. This powerful novel is the art of getting lost.

Conclusion

Neville Lister is never sure of what is the decent, ethical thing to do. In the first section of the novel, he seems to rebel against the privilege of his life because he is aware of the violence which underpins it. By the end, he has become comfortable with the fact that, as far as he can tell, there is little he can do to change the world outside. What this chapter has tried to show is that it is precisely his conviction that the world is 'outside' which is problematic, and ensures he is never able to enact change. This is to say, he treats the world as an 'outsider' and is therefore not willing to consider that the stranger may in fact already be in his home. His choice of photographic material, walls, is an apt metaphor for his yearning to barricade himself from others. And, as I have tried to show, this terribly solipsistic behaviour is only masked by liberal politics in his youth. It is not, unfortunately, learnt as he grows from adolescence to middle age, but is noticeable from his earliest years.

That said, what this chapter has tried to show is that *Double Negative* is no less concerned than its protagonist with developing a truly hospitable form of interaction. Unlike Neville, however, this text does not seek to accept its limitations. It grapples with them, discusses them from every angle and, in the process, gestures beyond them. Through its poignant descriptions of Auerbach's photographs, the text explores what might be possible if one gives oneself over to failure, "as if to renounce failure were much graver than to renounce success, as if what we call insignificant, the inessential, error, could, to one who accepts the risk and surrenders to it without restraint, reveal itself as the source of all authenticity" (Blanchot, "Orpheus's Gaze" 174).

What Vladislavić's novel implies is that unconditional hospitality is possible beyond the means which are available to the writer. Beyond language, beyond representation, and beyond control there is the promise of a gesture that surpasses all limits, which, to abuse Walter Benjamin's words, can "awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" ("Concept of History" 392). What I have tried to argue is that the space for such work is not, as Vladislavić makes clear, the space of home. Or, rather, if one is still obliged to use the concept of home, one must realise that it would be unlike any other that has ever been conceived. This space would not have doors or walls at all. There would be no proprietor and all would be welcomed. Neville's bitter realisation that he has unlearnt the "art of getting lost" would make no sense were such a space possible. Being lost, being a wanderer and a stranger would be ordinary, familiar, even homely.

I would add that, although it is aware that such an un-homely home made homely is impossible, and thus too infinite hospitality, the novel refuses to let its readers off the hook. Neville is a warning to those who read him that accepting the limits of one's life can lead to apathy and detachment. The reader is thus obliged to do what Neville could not, and what *Double Negative* could not. S/he is obliged to walk out the door, to climb the walls which comfort him/her, and find the lost child who is nowhere to be found.

Notes

[1] Vladislavić has written of characters obsessed with walls before. In the collection *Missing Persons* (1989), one reads the account of a man who decides to write a journal that will detail the construction of his neighbour's wall. As Mr Groeneweld meticulously builds it, the unnamed narrator becomes increasingly fascinated by the structure and the man who lives behind it. Yet, he fails to introduce himself immediately, and when he finally does, he feels snubbed (*Missing Persons* 41). The irony of the story is that in much the same way as his neighbour seeks to isolate himself and his wife from others, the narrator is trapped by his pathological need to detail every event from a distance. Both men value that which keeps them at a distance from others. When the story, titled "Journal of a Wall" ends, the reader senses the wasted opportunities for friendship and community that such a detached stance creates.

[2] This scene at the dinner table is not only reminiscent of similar ones playing out in households all over South Africa to this day, but is also intimately related to broader national challenges such as poverty alleviation and the creation of equal opportunities for all.

[3] I do not mean to imply that Neville was 'born' to be conservative. As I proceed it will become clear that his most abiding characteristic is his desire for self-protection. His early liberal politics hide that trait (to an extent) but do not eradicate it. As for the trait itself, though it is all too human, in Neville's case, it is clearly also one of the more telling privileges of his whiteness.

[4] Sally Matthews, following Marylin Frye, defines "whiteliness" as "white privilege in unconscious attitudes and practices common to many white people which result in the perpetuation of white privilege even while those who hold these attitudes or enact these practices do not explicitly intend to perpetuate their own privilege" (174). Matthews's article is an interesting companion to *Double Negative* because her primary concern is the limitations which "whiteliness" might create for white people who are interested in entering anti-racist politics and public discourses. In many ways, Neville's failures to effectively become involved in anti-apartheid work can be traced back to his "whiteliness", as well as other limitations that are a product of white privilege.

[5] Leon de Kock describes the text as a "three-part novel" and even analyses the sections separately in his article (9). This approach is interesting, not least of all because it can be thought to imply that the form of *Double Negative* is much like Vladislavić's previous publication, *The Exploded View*. What De Kock suggests is that the three parts of the novel allow this writer to consider issues of representation and what he calls, following Sarah Nuttall, "the now" as they relate to the apartheid, "postapartheid" and "post-postapartheid South African cultural imaginary (14)

[6] I think that in some ways Vladislavić's choice of central characters for his works is itself an attempt to deconstruct the binary of periphery and centre. He often chooses white, privileged males – people who one assumes have most benefited from the prevailing structures of power and domination. Yet, what he shows is that they are not only increasingly at odds with the changing society in which they struggle to function (one thinks, for instance, of Audrey Tearle's inability to negotiate South Africa's transition, or of Egan, who feels completely out of place and marginalised at Bra Zama's), but also incredibly limited and closed off. Their prison is their privilege; their sentence is their lives. Accordingly, at the centre, at the place one expects to find the centre, one finds marginalised characters clinging to the facade of comfort and the illusion of still being in control. Vladislavić's texts ask a simple but profound question: what is the point of being at the centre if it is a space from which one can never escape?

[7] The name van Huysteen reminds one of two Afrikaans words: '*huis*' meaning house and '*baksteen*' meaning brick. That Mr van Huysteen is a hard man, closed off from the realities of his country by an impenetrable racial rhetoric, is surely implied by his name.

[8] *Playing in the Light* and *The Silent Minaret* are also texts which I feel conflate the arbitrary distinction between modernist/postmodernist concerns over language and representation and a general attempt to engage with the political and ethical realities of this country. In Shukri and Wicomb's work, I would characterise the entanglement of these two concerns in the following way: they both investigate the political ramifications of so-called master narratives which inevitably attempt to present themselves as real or mimetic but which are in fact constructed, and always at the service of hegemonic powers. In the case of Wicomb, her reflections on the value of art itself in engaging with this matter is more pronounced in her latest collection of short stories, *The One that Got Away* (2008). In that regard, her recent writing shares many affinities with Vladislavić's own recent work. More scholarship is required in order to tease out the connections between these two influential post-apartheid writers.

[9] Holden Caulfield in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (2010), Joseph Conrad's Marlowe, and Nick Carraway from F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (2000) are amongst the most famous participant narrators who are written in just this way. Their unreliable narration, inconsistencies of character and flaws provide the reader with a sense of the perspective of the implied author.

[10] Auerbach and Neville are contrasted in many ways in the novel. Most obviously, Neville is constantly in awe of the older man's work – by contrast, he deems his own photography wanting. More subtly, Vladislavić contrasts the two men's respective ways of engaging with the world. For instance, while Neville wants very little to do with the few human subjects who he photographs, Auerbach shows a great deal of care for his subjects, and makes a point of getting to know them. Moreover, this concern does not cease once the photograph is taken, as is evidenced by the fact that he continues to photograph Veronica and her children throughout their lives and knows them quite intimately (Vladislavić, *Double Negative* 196). His willingness to take on such a responsibility is suggestive of an ethical engagement which is more indefinite and, therefore, quite at odds with Neville's. Finally, Auerbach is criticised for being "overly concerned with buildings" and "insufficiently concerned with the people who live in them" (126), which echoes Janie's distaste for Neville's decision to photograph walls rather than the people who live behind them (161). Auerbach's response to such criticism, however, reveals how different the two men's projects are: "the distinction [is] immaterial, because people ma[k]e the buildings and buildings [shape] the people", he says (126). Those comments reveal precisely the connection between the physical and the social which is a primary tenet of this study.

[11] Here again we should realise that the ironic distance between the dashed hopes of the narrator and the values of the implied author is not so clearly identifiable. In effect, the ironic distance is itself rendered somewhat ironic.

[12] Doubling, in Leon de Kock's reading of the text, is a key motif, which is produced by mimetic practice. For instance, a photograph creates a 'double' of the subject which is the subject's other (De Kock 8). According to De Kock, such 'doubling' is not merely "a kind of negative 'ghosting', suggesting spectres of the real such as in Plato's cave. It is, rather, a 'double negative' which thereby paradoxically suggests a positive" (12). What he is saying, in other words, is that the real and the represented are caught in a "representational loop" in which the real is neither negated nor actualised, but is suggested through its non-presence (12). His interpretation of the text is therefore very close to my own in this regard.

[13] I must note that Sally-Ann Murray's article on Vladislavić is interesting. Her argument that he is, in many ways, a conceptual artist who uses words in material ways, is persuasive. Also, she is sensitive to the fact that the writer she is considering is fascinated by chaos. The section of the article which discusses his "mobile predilection" and the literal and conceptual value he places on 'getting lost' attests to this (21–22). That section also informs my thinking on the end of *Double Negative*, and I acknowledge my debt here.

[14] It is worth noting that Murray's description of Vladislavić's work is very redolent of Erich Auerbach's analysis in *Mimesis* of the work of Balzac. That is, both writers make the everyday their overt concern. And in doing so, both push the boundaries of what might be called 'realism'.

[15] It is worth noting that this desire to isolate himself is very different from the impulse that leads Katinka to move to a town in the shadow of the Separation Barrier or 'Apartheid wall' in *The Silent Minaret*. Unlike

Neville, she moves there to connect with people. In order to do this, she must endure the wall that has been created to keep the various factions apart. As such, the community she forges in the face of literal structures of separation is very different from the solipsism that Neville cultivates.

[16] This lack of a clearly identifiable attitude to her subject matter, in the essay, is all the stranger because Sontag is recognised as one of the most overtly politically-active critics of her generation. As I have already intimated, the detachment is really a product of the nature of the essay, which is a schematic description of the state of photography in the modern world, rather than an analysis of underlying issues and concerns related to photography.

[17] It is interesting to consider how Vladislavić's work both invokes and critiques the core values of the Russian Formalists. On the one hand, his writing certainly shows an awareness of the ethical danger of habitual forms of perception and behaviour: that, to cite Viktor Shklovsky's seminal article "Art as Technique", "[h]abitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war" (12). On the other hand, unlike the Formalists, Vladislavić would not concur that "*[a]rt is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object*" and that, as a result, "*the object is not important*" (12, original emphasis). Where this novel departs most notably from the tenets of the Formalists is in the way in which it determines the value of defamiliarisation. For the likes of Shklovsky, the value was implicit and self-contained as it rendered art artful. By contrast, this modern South African writer conceives of the value of a defamiliarised image as existing beyond the text. That is, he is cognisant of the fact that the object *is of importance* and that, in fact, ethical engagement with the world can only happen if the text gestures outside of itself.

[18] While the use of the word 'contingent' might seem problematic, the whole of which I am speaking (i.e. everything) would need to include its own contingency. If it did not allow for contingency, it would be incomplete. The whole must include that which negates its wholeness in order to be whole at all. Is this not the paradox of infinity, too?

[19] According to Benjamin, faced with the growing wreckage of the past, "[t]he angel [of history] would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" – but the "storm from [. . .] Paradise" which we call "progress" makes that impossible ("Concept of History" 392). In some ways, I think *Double Negative* is in a similar position. It is unable to offer those who suffer the care and concern that they need, for it cannot exceed its own form and, as such, is necessarily detached from the suffering of those in the phenomenally real world. Leon de Kock notes that the novel is premised on a speculative 'what if' which he characterises in the following way: "*what if* one could divine the true nature, the deep heart, of the real, which is always a blur, a passing show?" (9). The question of why the novel is so desperate to divine this "deep heart" of the real is not one De Kock can adequately address, however. My feeling is that it is because Vladislavić is aware that only once one is able to overcome representations is one able to offer comfort, "awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" (Benjamin, "Concept of History" 392).

[20] Mike Marais traces the motif of the 'lost child' in relation to hospitality in the works of J. M. Coetzee in his book, *Secretary of the Invisible*. The similarity of the image in the works of these two South African writers is not, in my opinion, a coincidence. It points to a very similar notion of the unrepresentable nature of trauma.

[21] For slightly different reasons, Marion in *Playing in the Light* is also compelled to watch the hearings. Those who flee from history, as Marion and Neville do, find that they are nevertheless implicated in it.

[22] Scholars such as Cathy Caruth have written extensively on the idea that deeply traumatic events are not experienced in ways which allow them to be assimilated and processed; they are retained as non-experiences, impenetrable to language and representation. Nevertheless, the victim is haunted by a compulsion to return to the event, to remember it accurately and render it in legible terms. See Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996) for more on this. This chapter is not an exploration of trauma per se, but the traumatic past of this country and the impossibility of narrating it are certainly a concern.

[23] It is Walter Benjamin who I am reminded of yet again. His essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of its technological Reproducibility", grapples directly with what becomes of the notions of originality, genius and history itself when all art can be accurately reproduced thanks to technological advances. It is probable that, given the nature of the themes and issues explored in *Double Negative*, Vladislavić is aware of this essay and is drawing on its ideas in interesting ways.

[24] It is worth recalling that after this visit in the garden in which letters spring to life, Neville falls ill. He comes down with a terrible fever. Once he has recovered, he describes a feeling of being overexposed and paper thin (132). One could argue that he never stops feeling that way. That is to say, the fever of the real has lasting consequences for the protagonist, and probably for the reader too.

[25] The speaker of T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* also mentions "fragments" which s/he has "shored up against his ruin" (430). In *Double Negative* fragmentation is also both a theme and a formal aspect of the work. As in Eliot's poem, the gaps and holes point to the limits of language and narration. Finally, both the famous modernist work and the South African text are, in my opinion, concerned with the necessity and also the limitations of empathy for the other. After all, the last lines of Eliot's poem are "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. / Shantih shantih shantih" (432–33). While I cannot provide a detailed gloss of these lines, it behoves me at least to note the following: Eliot's invocation of the Hindu holy script is an appeal for a peace premised on 'giving', 'sympathising' and 'control' (the last imperative almost at odds with the previous two).

Conclusion: Reproducing the Irreproducible

One of the difficulties of reading novels like those which anchor this study is that they make the reading process un-homely, often by implicating the reader in ways which are quite disturbing. In *Playing in the Light*, for instance, the sexual violation of Helen is discomforting because, as I have already stated, one is aware of a nagging similarity between oneself and Carter, the rapist. While the reader is meant to sympathise with Helen's ordeal, s/he cannot avoid sensing that his/her violation of her privacy mimics Carter's shameful behaviour.

The problem of who to identify with is even more challenging in *The Silent Minaret* because Issa, who is sensitive and openly aligns himself with the oppressed and marginalised, is largely absent from the text, even though he is its protagonist. As such, connecting with him and his ethical way of living is difficult, as is emphasised by the fact that, once he vanishes, the reader is literally unable to follow or find him. His disappearance is therefore the illegible lacuna around which Shukri constructs this novel. It is as if Issa is provided to the reader as an example of what is impossible: a promise that lies always just beyond the horizon of what is achievable.

Double Negative also has at its centre a character who is troubled by the violence of modern society, which history either affirms or denies for political and pragmatic reasons. This connection between Issa and Neville is reinforced by the fact that both are admirers of Walter Benjamin's writings on the devastation wrought in the name of history. That said, their respective reactions to the suffering of others are very different. Issa is far too vulnerable, can barely stop himself from empathising with the plight of others, and is overwhelmed by the atrocities of the 'War on Terror'. By contrast, Neville feels that since there is simply too much pain in the world, his only recourse is to ignore it by shutting it out. As a reader, it is frustrating to trace this character's journey in the novel. He begins as a man who (while limited in all sorts of ways) is at least capable of seeing that the hardships of those beyond his community demand some form of ethical intervention, and becomes the sluggish, self-satisfied man who Janie interviews at the end of the text. And, as I have suggested, the narrative perspective is claustrophobic because, though the reader can and probably is critical of this unfolding of his character, s/he is unable to refute completely his way of seeing the world. That is, the reader may not like Neville's disregard for others, which is reflected in his increasing need to wall himself in, both literally and metaphorically, but the impulse that gives rise to that behaviour is clearly shown to be human and unavoidable.

As is the case with the other two texts, *Double Negative* implies that exclusion is inevitable, and is an ineluctable function of the construction of home, community or self. This is a lesson which Derrida teaches us through his writings on hospitality, and is one that modern South African writers are clearly staging and developing in interesting ways. There is a kind of violence to exclusion that speaks to those who wish to engage imaginatively with the post-apartheid experience. Increasingly, as writers grapple with how to describe a more just, more ethical nation, they are faced with the terrible realisation that the past is not done with those who inhabit the present, and that its systems of control, domination, and marginalisation are morphing and, in some cases, even becoming more invisible and/or ubiquitous.

As I have tried to show in the course of this thesis, all these systems are, at some level, premised on exclusion. Whether it is race, which is Wicomb's primary concern, or history, as with Shukri, or even Vladislavić's fascination with art, there are ways in which these discursive formations fail to recognise, respect and welcome the other. They make no home for him/her, because they refuse access to the strangeness of the stranger.[1]

What the three novels also show is that it is therefore necessary to un-home those things that are thought to be familiar. In so doing, they reveal the uncanniness or strangeness of the world. The normal begins to look disturbing, and the choice of what to exclude (on the basis that it is unfamiliar) becomes far more complex. For example, how could one exclude another race from one's homelife if one were aware that one's own race is equally un-homely? How could one say, 'I do not want you in my home because you are a stranger with strange ways', if one were to discover that the things by which one defined oneself were constructions that have made one a stranger to oneself? Is this not exactly what Marion learns about herself? And is it not also the basis for her increased capacity for friendship and vulnerability?

Home, the focus of this study, is thus both a physical and social space that is complicit with the creation of a standard narrative, or a normative form of existence. The things which belong in the home are 'normal', and the things that are excluded are not. There is a great deal of violence which inheres in this conception of 'normality'. Within it, I would argue, there is a hostility that cannot and should never be disentangled from much 'grander' forms of aggression – such as racism, sexism, homophobia, genocide, terror, state-sponsored violations of human rights, and so forth.

Consequently, it seems to me that these novels I have discussed proffer un-homeliness as a space of possibility in which a more ethical form of engagement might occur. In effect,

they oblige one to offer an unconditional hospitality that welcomes in the unfamiliar, and does not try to tame it, domesticate it, or understand it in any way. The difficulty, however, is that there is no comfort in the un-homely home in which the stranger is welcome. In order to even begin to create it, one must forgo notions of ownership, privacy and safety. Most certainly, the un-homeliness of the infinitely hospitable home does not allow for a stable and unified sense of self. Rather, it demands the dissolution of self, by which I mean a giving of oneself to the other.

With regard to this issue of selfhood, Neville chooses to abandon his early political idealism because the cost is too high. He finds that it requires him to lose himself in an interminable struggle with no clearly articulated goal. Instead, he chooses not to be *so lost*, and his final, bitter words acknowledge this. Although he regrets that he has "unlearned the art of getting lost" (Vladislavić, *Double Negative* 204), one should be aware that he tells the reader this in a section of the novel called "Small Talk". His lament for what has been lost is indeed little more that 'small talk': it is idle chatter, and the ramblings of an inconsequential man who has become comfortable with being irrelevant. In order for him to make a meaningful change, he would have to begin at home, and with a form of action that did more than pay mere lip service to people who live outside of his frame of reference.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, one could place Issa. Unlike Neville, he is certainly willing to risk what is most dear to him, including his very life. In the late 1980s, Neville is keen to involve himself in the Struggle but finds that politics "confound" him, and he spends "[h]alf the time [. . .] trying to convince [him]self, through [his] posturing, that [he gets] it" (22). By contrast, Issa joins the Movement as soon as he is able, and leaves his old, familiar life, disappointing his family in the process (Shukri 113–14). Later in his life, when he sees the 'War on Terror' repeating the strategies of domination and exclusion that he writes of in his thesis on the Cape Colony, he finds the recursion unbearable. For this reason, one night, as police invasively search a mosque, he runs out into the night, never to be seen again. While it is impossible to know what has happened to him, I have tried to show that his disappearance can be read as a final, radical form of resistance. That is, rather than have anything more to do with the will of Empire and its dogged, age-old forms of oppression, he renounces this world completely. He goes where it is 'clean', metaphorically speaking – where he need no longer be complicit with violence in any of its manifestations.

The problem, though, as I have suggested, is the impossibility of following Issa to that pure space where history is finally silenced. Where is that place? What are its coordinates, and by what path can one arrive there? It seems to me that implicit in such questions is the

issue of reproducibility. It is simply impossible to repeat Issa's journey, and to go where he has. The reader is left behind, in the world he rejected, and whether s/he likes it or not, is an agent of it. This point is made not only by Shukri, but by all the writers on whom I have focussed. In all three texts, those scenes in which the reader is discomforted by the sense that s/he is aligned with perpetrators of violence (and the process of exclusion which underpins it) gesture at a complicity that cannot be utterly denied.

As a consequence, I would say that it is easy to reproduce the hostility that Issa disavows. Subjects necessarily collude with Empire and its discursive and material forms of domination, and, in the process, help to ensure that the power matrix in its current form is endlessly perpetuated. For this reason, I would say that those who are a part of society are very much like the young Neville: perhaps their words and posturing might resemble those of people who desire change, but their practices are taken from history. That is, they maintain a standard narrative that has no place for that which is strange or unfamiliar.

By contrast, the kind of un-homeliness that I have argued is made possible when one is infinitely hospitable is irreproducible. Not even the fine writers considered in this thesis can lay out a road that one might follow to arrive at un-home. Such a road, if indeed it exists, is obscure and cannot be mapped out. There is no rational, sensible way in which it can be revealed *because* rationality and sense belong to systems of exclusion (and homing). They draw on Enlightenment and colonial forms of thought, and therefore reproduce this violent mindset.

If I may, I would like, one last time, to turn to Derrida's *oeuvre*. He began his academic career by deconstructing the work of those scholars and philosophers (such as Hegel, Saussure and Condillac) who privilege speech over writing. In all their work, he finds that the essential reason for this hierarchy is an innate belief that speech is closer to the 'source', and more 'original' as a result (see Derrida, *Positions* 22). As he points out, however, spoken language is merely a particular form of writing (in the Derridean sense) because it can be reproduced, quoted, rendered again in a different context. Were it not in this way iterable, it would also not be legible (*Limited Inc* 7). Accordingly, the condition of possibility for any form of communication (be it pictograph, written or spoken word) is this iterability that "structures the mark of writing itself" (7). While this is so, one should be aware that Derrida also notes that no citation is a perfect repetition of what has come before. The new context, the change in time and space, ensures that each iteration is slightly different. For this reason, one should recognise that repetition produces that which is legible *and* that which is illegible. That is to say, the process of communicating always produces

'traces' of something other that cannot be captured, and is not utterly contained by what has been repeated. No doubt, this is why language fails to contain the otherness of the other.

What Derrida's thoughts on the nature of communication suggest is that it is inevitable that one reproduce old forms. How else could one speak to another other person, or create communities? "'[E]veryday language' is not innocent or neutral. It is the language of Western metaphysics, and it carries with it not only a considerable number of presuppositions of all types, but also presuppositions inseparable from metaphysics", observes Derrida (*Positions* 19). Nevertheless, what one also creates in the process of repeating the banal and 'everyday' (as one must) is an otherness which exceeds communicability and Western metaphysics. This alterity might not be 'reproducible' in the ordinary sense of the word. That does not, however, mean that it should be ignored.

In a slightly different context, Wicomb describes the possibilities inherent in echolalia. Not coincidentally, the discussion revolves around the need to represent space in certain well-established ways. According to her, while writers are "doomed to echolalia, it is also the case that repetition re-presents, reverses or revises, or simply asks the reader to reflect on indeterminate meanings produced by citations" ("Setting, Intertextuality" 14). She therefore concludes that in South African writing, settings such as "the servant's room in the backyard or the master bedroom in the suburbs operate as intertexts with ready-made conventionalised meanings that interact with the narrative discourse and presentation of character to offer revised meanings for the latter" (14). In Wicomb's estimation, this intertextual dialogue between the typical setting and its placement in a particular narrative "brings into being, or makes visible, the interconnectedness, the interdiscursivity of the human world" (15). I am intrigued by the idea that while writers are prone to the endless repetitive gesture of representing certain spaces, it is nevertheless possible to produce something new *in the very process of echolalia*. New meaning can be found by doubling the old connotations and associations within the work.

Like Derrida, Wicomb is aware that no citation duplicates exactly what it cites, and that context produces new meanings which scar the repeated phrase or image in ways which might be of use to writers. In my opinion, this is exactly what occurs in the three novels I have discussed in this thesis. They all focus on the space of the home. Indeed, in novels such as *Playing in the Light* and Vladislavić's *Double Negative*, this space is so central that it begins to feel like a prison from which neither the characters nor the reader can escape. For me, this is quite apposite because one's desire for homeliness can indeed become a kind of incarceration, whereby the yearning for safety, comfort, inviolability and ownership

overdetermine one's ability to interact with the world outside. Yet, despite this, I also believe that this inevitable recourse to representations of home produces something unexpected in the texts under consideration: it produces a homeliness rendered strange and inhospitable. In other words, there is an un-homeliness to the homes that are depicted, and it radically destabilises the ways in which one is obliged to encounter the other. These texts call out for one to abandon one's innate need for safety, comfort and belonging and, ironically, do so by writing about the concept which most encapsulates these all-too-human needs. It is as is they recognise that there can be no home without the things which we associate with it, and thus they have no choice but to write of them, while simultaneously calling for them to be rendered strange, unnecessary and irrelevant.

The sense one gets from these novels, as a result, is that they ask the impossible, and what they themselves represent as impossible, which is that one walk away from one's home and live as a vagrant for the other. Consequently, they request that the reader do what they cannot: that is, find a way of abandoning altogether those things which make the home homely, thereby enacting an infinite form of hospitality.

It seems to me that, in effect, the novels call into question the values around which modern Western society has constructed the very ideas of community and home. Rather than reproducing those values *ad nauseum*, they imply that one must construct a home that is infinitely violable, without any border or restriction. That such a home is quite literally unimaginable does not lessen the force of the ethical imperative. Undoubtedly, one cannot construct such a space using the language or the forms that have made the world what it is (for, as Derrida observes, they are implicated in and made possible by Western metaphysics). A new language, and with it a new way of being, is necessary – one that would have to respect the alterity and singularity of every other at every instant. As such, it could never be set out in advance. Even if one were to achieve such a respect once, and for one person, one could not repeat that behaviour at the next instant, or for the next person. It is tiring to even imagine living this way, and the interminable responsibility instantiated by infinite hospitality is thrown into a clearer light when thought of in relation to the challenge posed by the absolute singularity of the other. To be unconditionally hospitable to the stranger is to do so over and over again, while never repeating one's behaviour.

Nonetheless, that which is reproducible is aporetically entangled with that which is irreproducible. The former produces the latter, which in turn reveals its creator as inadequate. Every time one repeats old forms (of hospitality, for instance), one creates the need for that which exceeds them. I think notions such as safety, comfort and belonging blind most to this

necessity for excess. This is to say, they allow the majority of people to familiarise the unfamiliar – to render it homely in other words. To do so is easy: it requires little effort, except the vacuous energy necessary to do what is mind-numbingly repetitive. However, the same lack of effort which makes this so simple allows for the catastrophic reproduction of racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, homophobia, sexism, and so forth. These manifestations of violence are guests one welcomes in (with the least amount of thought or conscious effort) when one reproduces the homely home.

There is another guest who I have tried to argue is excluded in the process. One shudders to think how often the door has been closed in his/her face. Dare one ask what else has denied him/her? The simple right to dignity and love can be kept within the walls of the home, and refused to those who one thinks belong outside. But, as Shukri in particular shows, the kind of love which extends only to those who are familiar and safe amounts to very little. It is a kind of self-love that contains within it a hatred of others. It is impossible to love unconditionally, and to love all in such a way is even more absurd. However, the novels which I have chosen to analyse all imply that the time has come to attempt the impossible. They detail the terrible, cruel and petty forms which society continues to reproduce. And they plead, against all hope, that the reader orient him/herself otherwise, and choose instead the irreproducible.

Can one do so? And can one live with the lack of home and homeliness that it demands? Who can say? For there is no path and no destination. That is not what these novels offer their readers. Rather, they show that a route and a destination must be forgotten, and that the 'place' one will find instead is irreproducible, unique, and burdensome. To go there does not involve a journey so much as the frustration of all conventional ideas of journeying. It is not a home so much as the world bereft of the comfort and violence of home.

Notes

[1] While art is incapable of containing absolute alterity, and is therefore a way in which the other is limited and harmed, Vladislavić does go to great lengths to show that it is uniquely capable of staging its own failure. As such, it is able to do what history, for example, cannot, which is gesture at a world beyond its borders that would allow the other to remain other or strange. Its connection to the sublime is therefore not simple but nevertheless valid.

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