

RE-IMAGINING THE PAST, NEGOTIATING THE PRESENT: THE LIVED DIASPORIC  
EXPERIENCE IN S.J. NAUDÉ AND JACO VAN SCHALKWYK'S FICTION

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Minor dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
award of the degree of

**MASTERS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE AND MODERNITY**

Faculty of Humanities  
University of Cape Town  
2017

DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to and quotation in this dissertation from the work or works of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signed by candidate

7 September 2017

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<sup>1</sup> Total number of words is 24 932 (excluding Title Page, Abstract, Contents, Footnotes and List of References).

**Re-imagining the Past, Negotiating the Present: The Lived Diasporic Experience  
in S.J. Naudé and Jaco van Schalkwyk's Fiction<sup>2</sup>**

ABSTRACT

S.J. Naudé's collection of short stories, *The Alphabet of Birds*, foregrounds the diasporic experiences of its marginalised, transnational subjects. The stories unearth profound grief and a deep sense of loss and displacement. The title of the collection suggests that the content grapples with issues that are central to the discourse of diaspora: movement, freedom, borders, home, dwelling, meaning, and identity. Jaco van Schalkwyk's debut novel, *The Alibi Club*, is structured around the story of a young man's efforts to build a new life in an unfamiliar country. Although very different in style, tone, and form, Naudé and Van Schalkwyk both ask questions about the nature of belonging, pain and loss associated with the diasporic experience: How does one come to terms with one's past?; How does one navigate oneself in an increasingly estranging global world?; Is it possible to re-imagine the past, to rewrite the stories one tells about oneself? Naudé and Van Schalkwyk are not the first South Africans to give thought to these questions; in fact, our country has a rich history of pre- and post-apartheid diasporic writings. What I find compelling, however, is how a new generation of authors – a group of writers that faces unique challenges – draws on the literary form to engage with and relate to the past and present, their country of birth, and their language. I consider in what ways the literary form allows these two authors to articulate and re-imagine the lived diasporic experiences of their Afrikaans-speaking, contemporary transnational subjects who inhabit multiple identities.

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<sup>2</sup> Keywords: Afrikaner; Diaspora; Fiction; Home and Homecoming; Identity; Memory; Narrative; Nostalgia.

## PART I Context and Research Objectives

...the Afrikaners are instinctive nomads; you could say because they're restless or runaways, because they want to conquer and to tame, but also because they want to be different and apart or simply pioneers or explorers... They carry with them a deep conviction of self (of belief and of destiny) and an equally profound uncertainty: continuously, from the time the umbilical cord was cut with a blunt knife they had to define and purge and situate the collective self... They project themselves as being conservative and yet they are constantly engaged in the act of changing and adaptation. Survival was premised on having 'to make different' (*die groot andersmaak*) – actually a metamorphosis. Then, and now again, to survive you had to initiate change and unleash potential.

– Breyten Breytenbach<sup>3</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

#### Research Questions and Aims

In his essay "*Leë wit ruimtes en die politiek van nostalgie*," S.J. Naudé considers the possible literary contributions writers of his generation can make – a generation whose childhood and young adult years were severed from adulthood by the political change in 1994, one that experiences a distinct before and after, a here and there.<sup>4</sup> Naudé contemplates how a writer like him might approach questions of belonging, home and identity. He asks: How can contemporary South African authors write about the past and present without succumbing to cheap nostalgia?<sup>5</sup>

What is still possible on paper? How does one integrate the amputated, absurd past with the absurd present? How does one react to the muddy and fragmented new socio-political landscape? And besides, how do you do this in light of your hesitant and distant understanding of this place, this country? And in light of your persistent position as an outsider, here and in the northern hemisphere where you had spent most of your adult life?

In this paper, I use these questions as a point of departure to consider how contemporary writers like Naudé and Jaco van Schalkwyk draw on the literary style and form to re-imagine the lived diasporic experiences of their subjects. I explore how the authors use the mechanisms of memory and nostalgia to respond to the past and present and to "integrate the amputated absurd past with the absurd present".

South Africa has a strong history of pre- and post-apartheid diasporic writings (e.g. Breyten Breytenbach, Zakes Mda, Aziz Hassim, Karel Schoeman, J.M. Coetzee, Eben Venter and André P. Brink), but triggered by Naudé's collection and Van Schalkwyk's novel, I want to give thought to the ways in which the literary form allows a contemporary generation of transnational subjects to give expression to their growing sense of loss, estrangement, displacement and disillusionment to represent alternative lived experiences distinctly disparate from "the official discourses of history".<sup>6</sup> To do this, I draw on

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<sup>3</sup> Breytenbach, 2009c:77-8.

<sup>4</sup> "Empty White Spaces and the Politics of Nostalgia" (Naudé, 2016). Naudé was born in 1970 and Van Schalkwyk in 1979.

<sup>5</sup> Naudé, 2016. Original Afrikaans: "Wat is voortaan moontlik op papier? Hoe integreer mens die geamputeerde absurde verlede met die absurde hede? En hoe reageer mens op die troebel en gefragmenteerde nuwe sosiopolitieke landskap?... En hoe doen jy dit, daarby, in die lig van jou huiwerige en afstandelike begrip van hierdie plek, hierdie land? En in die lig van jou knaende buitestaanderskap, hier sowel as in die noordelike halfrond waar jy die meeste van jou volwasse lewe deurgebring het?" (own translation).

<sup>6</sup> Lourens, 2006:177; and Braziel & Mannur, 2003:5.

contemporary debates on diaspora and its related issues, including narrative, nostalgia, identity and home. I also reflect on the Afrikaner as a diaspora and how Afrikaans-speaking South Africans navigate themselves in a post-apartheid South Africa and a “borderless runaway world”.<sup>7</sup>

The insights I have gained from a literature review on contemporary debates and discourses on diaspora are elaborated upon in the following section, which aims to provide context. The review also allowed me to identify and consider appropriate theoretical points of departure and arguments that I used to engage with Naudé and Van Schalkwyk’s works. For this project, I have analysed Van Schalkwyk’s novel, as well as six of the seven short stories in Naudé’s collection. (These are ‘A Master from Germany,’ ‘Loose,’ ‘War, Blossoms,’ ‘VNLS,’ ‘Mother’s Quartet,’ and ‘The Noise Machine.’) A comparative reading of these texts – with a focus on content, structure and style – enabled me to consider the ways in which the authors re-imagine the contemporary Afrikaans-speaking subject’s lived experience.

### The Texts

South Africa has a rich history of diaspora writings and continuing in this tradition, Naudé and Van Schalkwyk engage with similar issues. Although Van Schalkwyk’s engagement with the discourse is not as conspicuous as Naudé’s, issues central to the diaspora nevertheless pervade his narrative.<sup>8</sup> The novel chronicles a young man’s ten years working as a cleaner and barman at the seedy The Alibi Club in New York. During these years, he never manages (or seems to want) to escape the confinements of his dreary life – his time in America is mostly spent in debauchery. In contrast to Naudé’s main characters who are all on the move, catalysts that “act upon” their worlds, Van Schalkwyk’s characters are “acted upon” – they are stagnant, seemingly content with their inauspicious lives until they are forced to make changes after 9/11 and the resulting gentrification of their neighbourhood.<sup>9</sup> Van Schalkwyk’s novel focuses on the intricacies and dynamics of a diasporic community, and he probes into issues of belonging, home and community.

In contrast, Naudé concentrates on the traumatising and disillusioning experience of homecoming.<sup>10</sup> The entire collection (233 pages long) consists of only seven rather long short stories that explore the effect of homecoming and transnationalism. In one story, a young White woman and her two black friends travel from Paris to Cape Town to Lesotho to perform their unusual fusion music in front of local crowds. In another, a man returns to South Africa to tend to his dying mother. In a ramshackle country villa in the heart of industrial Milan, a man encounters a long-forgotten childhood friend. Another leaves his lover in Berlin to spend his mother’s last days with her in South Africa. All Naudé’s characters are marginalised in some way: the majority of the male characters are Afrikaans and gay; all his characters are solitary figures, introverts; and they all function on the periphery, unable to identify with the mainstream and in particular the Afrikaner culture.

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<sup>7</sup> See Nnaemeka (2007:129).

<sup>8</sup> The Afrikaans-version of his debut novel, *Die Alibi Klub*, published by Umuzi, was shortlisted for the Jan Rabie Rapport Prize, and the English-version was shortlisted for the University of Johannesburg’s Debut Prize and longlisted for the Sunday Times Barry Ronge Fiction Award.

<sup>9</sup> Nnaemeka, 2007:129.

<sup>10</sup> His debut work, published in Afrikaans as *Alfabet van die voëls*, received high critical acclaim and was awarded the University of Johannesburg’s Debut Prize and the Jan Rabie Rapport Prize. The English-version, translated by Naudé himself, was published in 2014. Naudé’s first novel, *Die derde spoel* (*The Third Reel*), was published in Afrikaans and English in May 2017.

While Naudé's narratives zoom in on individual lives, Van Schalkwyk's novel, although told from the perspective of a young South African, is inhabited by an assortment of characters that find themselves in some form of exile in a poor neighbourhood in New York. (In this way, it is somewhat similar to Biyi Bandele's *The Street*, which is set in London.)<sup>11</sup> The reader is briefly introduced to the characters that frequent The Alibi Club. Like Naudé's characters, The Alibi Club's visitors live on the fringe of society: they are immigrants, criminals, expatriates. The narrative revolves around a small community of outsiders that succeeds in creating a precious new home, only to experience its destruction by gentrification.

Although one work focuses on homecoming and the other on departure and the construction of a new home, both are acute enquiries into the lived experiences of their diasporic subjects, and their attempts to reclaim a home, to belong, and to reach stability in an evolving and increasingly unfamiliar and estranging world.

## BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

### **Diaspora in a Contemporary World**

The rapid dispersal of people who find themselves displaced and marginalised in foreign host countries around the globe necessitates a reconsideration of the nature and implications of diasporas.<sup>12</sup> In light of recent figures released by the United Nations, it is not surprising that the attention to migration-related issues has seen fast growth in a variety of fields.<sup>13</sup> (In Robin Cohen's view, the increase in research on diasporas – especially in the humanities – is “truly astonishing”).<sup>14</sup> Importantly, Cohen points out that diasporas are continually being formed and reformed in response to unpredictable changes in the environment, and the global age has propelled these forces.<sup>15</sup> He also notes that “globalization and diasporization are separate phenomena with no necessary causal connections, but they ‘go together’ extraordinarily well”.<sup>16</sup>

Referring to the etymological roots of the Greek term *diasperien* (*dia-* for “across” and *-sperien* for “to sow or scatter seeds”), Brazier and Mannur write that “diaspora can perhaps be seen as a naming of the other which has historically referred to displaced communities of people who have been dislocated from their native homeland through the movements of migration, immigration, or exile”.<sup>17</sup> In his book *Global Diasporas*, Cohen identifies four phases of diaspora studies: (i) In the 1960s-70s scholars prioritised the Diaspora (capitalised and used in the singular) that describes the Jewish experience of victimhood, suffering, and dispersal following a traumatic event; (ii) In the 1980s, attention shifted to the “metaphoric

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<sup>11</sup> Bandele, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> See Esman (2009:4), Nnaemeka (2007:128-9), Fouron (2004:462), Akyeampong (2000:183) and Gordon & Anderson (1999:284). According to reports released by the United Nations (2016a, 2016b & 2013), 175 million people lived outside their countries of birth in 2000. The number increased to 232 million in 2013 and the 2015 statistics point to 244 million.

<sup>13</sup> Cohen, 2008:176-7; Okoye, 2008:81; Nnaemeka, 2007:129; Brazier & Mannur, 2004:2-3; and Akyeampong, 2000:183. These fields include literature, sociology, anthropology, and ethnic and queer studies. Furthermore, Bakewell (2008:7) notes that the number of academic articles on diasporas published between 2003 and 2008 was twice more than those published in the previous five years. This topped the total number of articles published in the previous 20 years. Bakewell also draws attention to the growing interest on African diasporas. Also see Rosenau (2004:29).

<sup>14</sup> Cohen, 2008:xv.

<sup>15</sup> Cohen, 2008:141. Esman (2009:9, 19) agrees that diasporas move through stages in response to their environments. Also see Morcillo-Espina, King and Louw (2014:12).

<sup>16</sup> Cohen, 2008:154.

<sup>17</sup> Brazier & Mannur, 2004:1. Also see Butler (2001:189) and Cohen (2008:xiv).

designation” of the term, and it was used to describe categories of people, including migrants, racial minorities, expatriates and refugees, and a range of different peoples; (iii) From the mid-1990s onward, social constructionists reasoned that in a world marked by postmodernism, identities have become more complex, “deterritorialised and constructed and deconstructed in a flexible and situational way”. These scholars concentrated on deconstructing ideas of homeland and ethnic/religious community – two central elements that determined the boundaries of the diasporic concept – and advocated a complete overhaul of the notion: (iv) In its current phase, scholars acknowledge that identities are intricate and deterritorialised, but they also reaffirm that ideas of home and homeland remain central to the dialogue.<sup>18</sup>

Although the concept originally described the Jewish and the black African diasporas, it has evolved.<sup>19</sup> In reaction to globalisation and the expansion of interest in the global dispersion of people, it has developed and transcended its limited definition.<sup>20</sup> Esman sums up the accepted contemporary definition as follows: “A migrant community that maintains material or sentimental linkages with its home country, while adapting to the environment and institutions of its host country.”<sup>21</sup> The discourse now accommodates various kinds of diasporas, including victim, labour, trade and business, and deterritorialised diasporas.<sup>22</sup> Some critics go as far as to insist that “the postmodern borderless capital and commodity space which we now inhabit seems to already endow us all with a diasporic identity...”<sup>23</sup> To illustrate this, Walder points out that writers often represent the present as “a place marked by a trail of survivors searching for their roots, for a home, in the ruins of history”.<sup>24</sup> Cohen refers to it as “a discourse that is travelling in new global conditions”.<sup>25</sup> Recent endeavours “seek to represent the lived experience of people whose lives have unfolded in myriad diasporic communities across the globe,” write Braziel and Mannur.<sup>26</sup> Rosenau observes that enquiries now focus on the micro-level, on individual reactions to change, new cultures and identities or, as Walder articulates it, “how the processes of globalisation capture and overwhelm individual lives and communities”.<sup>27</sup> Nnaemeka, for example, is curious about “how people of African descent act in and are acted upon in a world in motion”.<sup>28</sup> The focus of diasporic enquiries has shifted to the lived experiences of individuals, and to their reactions to change and dislocation.

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<sup>18</sup> Cohen, 2008:1-2. Also see Butler (2001:189-90).

<sup>19</sup> In tracing African diasporas, Du Toit (2003:16-7) maintains that “strictly speaking,” the term diaspora does not apply to the African slaves as they were dispersed in “a haphazard fashion”. He asserts that the original Greek word *diaspeirein* is “characterized by the decision of people to disperse due to a perceived or actual threat to their ethnic, religious, or physical continuity as a group”. Cohen (2008:21-2 & 1996:507) also draws attention to the origin of the word and its original positive connotation that has, through its association with the Jewish diaspora, “virtually been lost” by placing emphasis on victimisation (see Tölölyan, 1996:10). Cohen and Tölölyan’s lists of features of a diaspora make room for those who are forced to uproot and resettle (e.g. the Jews and the African slaves), as well as those who experience a threat to their culture and identities (see Tölölyan, 1996:12-3).

<sup>20</sup> Morcillo-Espina et al., 2014:12; Cohen, 2008:1; Butler, 2001:189; and Cohen, 1996:512.

<sup>21</sup> Esman, 2009:14. Also see Cohen (1996:514).

<sup>22</sup> Rosenthal, 2016; Tölölyan, 2011:4-6; Esman, 2009:14-5; Jacobs, 2006:115-6; and Braziel & Mannur, 2003:4.

<sup>23</sup> Okoye, 2008:83. Also see Naudé (2016).

<sup>24</sup> Walder, 2011:2.

<sup>25</sup> Cohen, 2008:22.

<sup>26</sup> Braziel & Mannur, 2004:5.

<sup>27</sup> Walder, 2011:11; and Rosenau, 2004:25.

<sup>28</sup> Nnaemeka, 2007:129.



The terms diaspora, diasporic and diaspora-isation are contested, and the field is still in the process of being theorised.<sup>29</sup> In this regard, Brubaker writes: “As the term has proliferated, its meaning has been stretched to accommodate the various intellectual, cultural and political agendas in the service of which it has been enlisted. This has resulted in what one might call a ‘diaspora’ diaspora – a dispersion of the meanings of the term in semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space.”<sup>30</sup> As a result, many critics caution against an uncritical and unreflective application of the concept.<sup>31</sup> Braziel and Mannur, for example, remind us that it “risks losing specificity and critical merit if it is deemed to speak for all movements and migrations between nations, within nations, between cities, within cities *ad infinitum*,” in other words, if applied to “any and every nameable population category that is to some extent dispersed in space”.<sup>32</sup> Brubaker refers to this as a “let-a-thousand-diasporas-bloom” approach that will undoubtedly result in the discourse being “stretched to the point of uselessness”.<sup>33</sup> Bakewell also warns that “the term has stretched almost to breaking point”.<sup>34</sup>

While Cohen also rejects such a hands-off approach, he doesn't have confidence in an obverse strategy.<sup>35</sup> Instead, he proposes that we utilise the four tools of social science to describe a specific diaspora: (i) the emic/etic relationship (self-declaration doesn't necessarily mean a community is indeed a diaspora; diasporas can be constructed and mobilised and, therefore, opportunity structures, the history, and experiences of the particular group, as well as the active political, social and cultural forces, should be considered); (ii) the passage of time (not all immigrants or refugees become diasporic once they cross borders; subjects continue to have powerful ties to the past and they experience difficulties in integrating themselves into the present); (iii) common features (although not all diasporas will exhibit all the listed features, a list that identifies the main components that constitute a diaspora could be a powerful descriptive tool); (iv) the “ideal type” (measuring real diasporas against prototypical diasporas provides insight into a phenomenon “by acknowledging and evaluating the extent of real life deviation from the ideal type”).<sup>36</sup> Cohen's ideal types are victim (e.g. Jewish and African), labour (e.g. indentured Indians); imperial (e.g. British), trade (e.g. Chinese) and deterritorialised (e.g. Caribbean peoples) diasporas. (Esman's categories correspond with these; he includes conquerors and settlers, refugees, peasants, unemployed labourers, skilled workers and highly educated professionals, and merchants, although he limits his taxonomy to labour, entrepreneurial and settler classes.)<sup>37</sup> With regards to the emic/etic tool, it is paramount to keep in mind that diasporic communities are shaped over time, and they continually evolve in response to a number of influences. Diasporas are in a “continuing process of negotiation or exchange” and in a “contunious state of formation and reformation,” write Du Toit and Cohen

<sup>29</sup> See Braziel and Mannur (2003:2-7).

<sup>30</sup> Brubaker, 2005:1.

<sup>31</sup> Braziel & Mannur, 2004:3-5; cf. Tölölyan, 2011:4. Also see Bakewell (2008:6).

<sup>32</sup> Brubaker, 2005:3; and Braziel & Mannur, 2004:7. Also see Cohen (2008:9).

<sup>33</sup> Brubaker, 2005:3. To illustrate the proliferation of the concept, Brubaker (2005:4) mentions the expansion of related terms: the diasporic condition (diasporicity or diasporism), the process (diasporisation, de-diasporisation and re-diasporisation), the field of inquiry (diasporology or diasporistics), and the adjectives diasporic and diasporan.

<sup>34</sup> Bakewell, 2008:6.

<sup>35</sup> Cohen, 2008:4, 15-9.

<sup>36</sup> Cohen (2008:161) emphasises that diaspora researchers should not “take an ideal type too literally”. He writes: “The ideal is a yardstick, an abstraction and a simplification, a means of showing up similarities and differences in trying to encompass an array of possibilities that would otherwise have little form or shape... A creative imagination is always preferable to a dogged application of a formula.”

<sup>37</sup> Esman, 2009:3, 15-6. Also see Cohen (2008:74-5).

respectively'.<sup>38</sup> Palmer refers to its construction as "an organic process".<sup>39</sup> As Bakewell points out, "not all migrants become diasporas and not all diasporas can be considered migrants".<sup>40</sup> In other words, claiming a diasporic condition or experience does not result in *being* diasporic, and if we were to rely solely on self-declaration, or the emic view, we risk losing the usefulness of the discourse. Therefore, while diaspora scholars urge us to focus on the lived diasporic experience (i.e. follow a bottom-up approach by drawing on the accounts of the subject), a community should display the core elements of a diaspora in order to be considered as such.<sup>41</sup> Many scholars rely on Cohen's nine features of a diaspora – an expansion on Brubaker's three core elements and Safran's six features – to identify and research diasporic communities. Cohen's features are: (i) an often (but not always) traumatic dispersal from a homeland; (ii) leaving home in pursuit of work, trade or colonial ambitions; (iii) collective memories and myths about the past and the homeland; (iv) idealising the homeland, or the ancestral country; (v) continuous efforts to maintain connections, or movements to return to the country; (vi) a solid, established group consciousness; (vii) fraught relationships with host countries; (viii) the chance of creating and maintaining well-defined and meaningful lives in new countries; (ix) experiencing a universal sense of "co-responsibility" with other members of the same group.<sup>42</sup> However, since no diasporic community will display all of Cohen's nine features associated with the condition, I argue that it is crucial to return to Brubaker's three core elements of a diaspora since it is widely agreed upon that these characteristics remain central to any diaspora: dispersal in space (within or across state borders, and voluntarily or involuntarily, and to more than two destinations); homeland orientation (to a real or imagined place); and boundary maintenance (mobilising and sustaining a distinct identity and a group unity).<sup>43</sup>

### **Re-imagining the Diaspora: Narrative, Identity and Place**

Regardless of one's approach to or application of the term, certain issues remain central to the discourse.<sup>44</sup> In this regard, Nnaemeka asserts that "place, memory and identity are inextricably linked" and this connection should be used as a point of departure to re-imagine the diaspora.<sup>45</sup> In his article "The South African Experience of Home and Homecoming," Paul Gready also accentuates this link. He opens his essay as follows: "Home for the exile is an imagined country created through layers of memory, nostalgia, and desire."<sup>46</sup> Further on in the essay, he maintains the following<sup>47</sup>:

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<sup>38</sup> Cohen, 2008:141; and Du Toit, 2003:18.

<sup>39</sup> Palmer, 2000:28-9. Also see Du Toit (2003:18).

<sup>40</sup> Bakewell, 2008:8.

<sup>41</sup> Cohen, 2008:15-6.

<sup>42</sup> Cohen, 2008:17, 161 & 1996:513. Also see Brubaker (2005:5-7), Butler (2001:191-2) and Safran (1991). Also refer to Bakewell's (2008:11-2) attempt to condense the list to four features: (i) "Movement from an original homeland to more than one country, either through dispersal (forced) or expansion (voluntary) in search of improved livelihoods"; (ii) "A collective myth of an ideal ancestral home"; (iii) "A strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time, based on a shared history, culture and religion"; (iv) "A sustained network of social relationships with members of the group living in different countries of settlement." These strongly correspond to Brubaker's three core features. (Cohen [2008:162] emphasises that it is often difficult to separate voluntary and involuntary migration.)

<sup>43</sup> Morcillo-Espina et al., 2014:13; and Brubaker, 2005:5-7.

<sup>44</sup> See Nnaemeka (2007:129).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 131-133. See Breytenbach (2009a:7-8 & 2009c:81).

<sup>46</sup> Gready, 1994:509.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 510.

Home is perhaps most importantly a function of place. There's no place like home: there's no home like place. But it is also a function of time. Home is fixed in time, defined in terms of time, a place set in time and a time set in place. And yet it dissolves and evolves, acquires the accretions of other times and other places.

Not only does Gready place emphasis on the synergy between identities, the places called home, and the stories we tell about ourselves; he also underlines the unstable and mutating nature of these ideas. (Per implication, the diasporic condition is one of instability, adjustment, and change.) As Wamuwi Mbaio shows in his article "Inscribing Whiteness and Staging Belonging in Contemporary Autobiographies and Life-Writing Forms," narratives – the personal and the grand historical – are reconstructions of memory. About Shaun Johnson's novel *The Native Commissioner*, a work in which the author aims to retell his father's story based on the latter's diary entries, Mbaio writes: "...he [the protagonist Sam Jameson] must enact a process of memory-making, picking and choosing from among the keys, a large percentage of which precede his existence, to unlock the processes of memory."<sup>48</sup> He then quotes Johnson: "He [Sam] feels something 'ghoulish and abnormal' about what he is doing, wondering if he ought to 'be fiddling with bones in this way,' and 'whether this fitting together of fragments was recreating real people, or a fiction of (his) own!'" Mbaio and Johnson focus our attention on the capricious and ambiguous nature of memory: narratives are never true accounts of events; they remain second-hand representations.<sup>49</sup> In Naudé's story 'War, Blossoms,' for example, the main character sits in his dying mother's garden, attempting to write about his travels with his Japanese friend Hisashi: "His travel journal is progressing. What he has forgotten, he makes up. It is coming to him, faster and faster. His pen takes them to places they have never been".<sup>50</sup> Regarding the diaspora, Salman Rushdie compares these reassembled narratives to a broken mirror. He maintains that the displaced are "obliged to deal in broken mirrors, some of whose fragments have been irretrievably lost".<sup>51</sup> In their attempts to somehow apprehend or reclaim their losses, the dislocated "create fictions, not actual cities and villages, invisible ones, imaginary homelands".<sup>52</sup> The past, writes Rushdie, cannot "reappear as it actually had been, unaffected by the distortions of memory".<sup>53</sup> However, the fractured nature of our stories should not prevent us from seeking to reconstruct them; "we are nothing if we cannot tell ourselves".<sup>54</sup> Here, Rushdie and Breytenbach draw attention to the connection between narrative, past and present, and identity. In this regard, Brazier and Mannur write the following<sup>55</sup>:

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<sup>48</sup> Mbaio, 2010:67. Also see Johnson (2007:51).

<sup>49</sup> See Lourens (2006:177).

<sup>50</sup> Naudé, 2014:131.

<sup>51</sup> Rushdie, 1992:10-1.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Breytenbach, 2009b:63.

<sup>55</sup> Brazier & Mannur, 2003:3.

Theorizations of diaspora need not, and should not, be divorced from historical and cultural specificity. Diasporic traversals question the rigidities of identity itself – religious, ethnic, gendered, national; yet this diasporic movement marks not a postmodern turn from history, but a nomadic turn in which the very parameters of specific historical moments are embodied and – as diaspora itself suggests – are scattered and regrouped into new points of becoming.

Not only do they foreground the fluidity of identity; Braziel and Mannur also accentuate that identities cannot be disjointed from history. In connection with this, Radhakrishnan notes “when people move, identities, perspectives, and definitions change”.<sup>56</sup> “If the category ‘Indian’ seemed secure, positive, and affirmative within India,” he writes, “the same term takes on a reactive, strategic character when it is pried loose from its nativity. The issue then is not just ‘being Indian’ in some natural and self-evident way...but ‘cultivating Indianness’ self-consciously for certain reasons”.<sup>57</sup> These arguments reaffirm the link between identity, place and narrative, and show that identities are fluid and vulnerable, continually being re-adjusted in response to internal and external stimuli.<sup>58</sup> Beytenbach suggests that identity is “a vector of interaction” and Jacobs that it is “a process, not an essence, a changing position and not a permanent frame of reference”.<sup>59</sup> Hall maintains the following<sup>60</sup>:

Practices of representation always implicate the positions from which we speak or write – the positions of *enunciation*. What recent theories of enunciation suggest is that, though we speak, so to say ‘in our own name,’ of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of, are never identical, never exactly in the same place. Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.

Ewing writes that “people can be observed to project multiple, inconsistent self-representations that are context-dependent and may shift rapidly”. He thinks of these representations as “reifications of experience, reflexive efforts to articulate and objectify the fluidity of subjective experience.”<sup>61</sup> Ewing also reminds us that “individuals take up multiple, crosscutting identities,” and that this notion is of particular importance to the displaced and the marginalised.<sup>62</sup> In light of this, she encourages us to focus on the fluidity of identity and to consider in what ways, in what circumstances and to what extent individuals inhabit and negotiate these expressed and manifold identities.<sup>63</sup> In Rosenau’s view, we now “acquire more and more Selves and relate to more and more Others”.<sup>64</sup> “It can even be argued,” he writes, “that increasingly people have little choice but to think of themselves in terms of a multiplicity of identities”. For

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<sup>56</sup> Radhakrishnan, 2003:123-4.

<sup>57</sup> Ewing (2004:122) postulates that a shift in identity positions may happen consciously or unconsciously; it becomes an identity once the individual attaches a label to his/her newly obtained position. Also see Rosenau (2004:24).

<sup>58</sup> See Esman (2009:6-7), Visser (2007:15) and Ewing (2004:118-9, 122-3).

<sup>59</sup> Beytenbach, 2009:6; and Jacobs, 2006:129.

<sup>60</sup> Hall, 2003:234.

<sup>61</sup> Ewing, 2004:121.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 118-9.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Tölölyan, 2011:10-1; and Braziel & Mannur, 2003:5.

<sup>64</sup> Rosenau, 2004:48-9.

Breytenbach too, identity is not discernible, and he refers to it as the "ultimate intimate stranger".<sup>65</sup>

Lourens, in reference to a South African national character, notes that narrative plays a crucial role in the construction and maintenance of identity.<sup>66</sup> In connection with this, Breytenbach writes: "We are only animals, as far as we know, who imagine and invent ourselves. We seem to need this projected dimension, this *dépassement de soi*, in order to survive; also, to remember ourselves and thus to commemorate the ancestors and to talk to them."<sup>67</sup> Ewing, Lourens and Breytenbach underpin the connection between narrative, identity and place. These arguments are in line with Hall's statement that<sup>68</sup>:

...questions of identity are always questions about representation. They are always questions about the invention, not simply the discovery of tradition. They are *always exercises in selective memory* and they almost always involve the silencing of something in order to allow something else to speak...identity is always a question of *producing in the future an account of the past*, that is to say it is *always about narrative, the stories which cultures tell themselves about who they are and where they came from*.

Perhaps, he suggests, identities are not rediscovered but produced, formed through history and culture, not "grounded in the archaeology, but in the *retelling* of the past," and "constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative and myth".<sup>69</sup> Walder writes "the sense is of how far personal and cultural identities are not simply given, but are contingent and must be constructed, as often as not through picking up the baggage of memory, rather than history".<sup>70</sup> Hall's argument echoes Nnaemeka's view and shows why he (Nnaemeka) places such emphasis on questions of memory (or narrative), and why he urges us to ask ourselves: "What is remembered? What is forgotten? Who remembers? Who forgets? Who is made to forget and for what reason? What are the consequences of forgetting?"<sup>71</sup>

Hall cautions against dismissing history as constitutive of identity, which is "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'".<sup>72</sup> He maintains that although identities are not "fixed in some essentialized past" and undergo continuous change, they are still subject to historical and cultural changes: "Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past."<sup>73</sup> Breytenbach reiterates this. In his view, the Afrikaner, for example, is a product of history, of evolution in perceptions, and of choice.<sup>74</sup>

The above discussion indicates how narrative and identity are linked to past and present. Regarding place, the fourth phase of diasporic studies seeks to re-establish the concept of home as inherent to diasporas.<sup>75</sup> As mentioned earlier, Brubaker, for example, argues that three elements remain

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<sup>65</sup> Breytenbach, 2009a:7.

<sup>66</sup> Lourens, 2006:179.

<sup>67</sup> Breytenbach, 2009a:8.

<sup>68</sup> Hall, 2001:26-6. Italics my own.

<sup>69</sup> Hall, 2003:235-7. Also see Ewing (2004:117).

<sup>70</sup> Walder, 2011:15.

<sup>71</sup> Nnaemeka, 2007:132.

<sup>72</sup> Hall, 2003:236-7, 244-5.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. Rosenau, 2004:39-40.

<sup>74</sup> Breytenbach, 2009c:73.

<sup>75</sup> Cohen, 2008:xv, 159. Also see Brubaker (2005:2).

fundamental to diaspora: dispersion in space, homeland orientation, and boundary maintenance.<sup>76</sup> All three imply place/space, suggesting that these remain intrinsic to the discourse.

Despite the fact that some members of the diaspora (e.g. victim diasporas) do not have a homeland to return to, a notion of a home remains in their collective memories.<sup>77</sup> Rosenau notes that a territorial space remains significant “even as it seems more and more obscure and less and less capable of stitching us in place”.<sup>78</sup> Very few people, he argues, see themselves as citizens of the world; most identify with a geographical place: a country, city, region. In the introduction to his memoir *My Traitor's Heart*, Rian Malan foregrounds the synergy between place and identity.<sup>79</sup> He writes: “I am a white man born in Africa, and all else flows from there.” Malan comes to realise that, despite his attempts, he cannot alienate himself from South Africa, its history and the Afrikaner people – he identifies as a “resident alien”.<sup>80</sup> Malan embodies Svetlana Boym’s remark that “The imperative of a contemporary nostalgic is to be homesick and sick of home – occasionally at the same time”.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the many contentions around diaspora and to whom the term applies (or should apply), it remains, at its heart, a dislocation from one space and a relocation to another – a movement that requires the reconstruction of a new life in an unfamiliar place while still longing for the familiar.<sup>82</sup> The rest of the diasporic condition plays out in the reasons for this relocation, and in the subjects’ responses to the resulting changes and new environments.<sup>83</sup>

#### **Reflective Nostalgia and Imagination as ‘Transformative Agent’<sup>84</sup>**

For the displaced, memory, imagination and nostalgia create a mental space that links them to their homeland. Critics argue that nostalgia is closely connected to place, memory and desire, to our sense of belonging.<sup>85</sup> Homeland (or motherland, fatherland, native land, *Heimat*) as Gready points out, “is imbued with an expressive charge and a sentimental pathos”.<sup>86</sup> Nostalgia not only connects individuals to their imagined homes and pasts; it also joins people across historical, personal and national boundaries.<sup>87</sup> On this subject, Boym notes that nostalgia isn’t necessarily retrospective; it can be prospective too: “The consideration for the future makes us take responsibility for our nostalgic tales. Unlike melancholia, which confines itself to the planes of individual consciousness, nostalgia is about the relationship between individual biography and the biography of groups and nations, between personal and collective memory.”<sup>88</sup> It is “far from limited to the individual,” writes Walder – referring to groups or societies of

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<sup>76</sup> Brubaker, 2005:5-7. Also see Bakewell (2008:10, 23), Cohen (2008:11-2), Du Toit (2003:15); and Butler (2001:192). Butler (2001:192-3) makes the argument for a fourth key characteristic, namely that diasporas are multi-generational.

<sup>77</sup> Esman, 2009:102. Also see Cohen (2008:4).

<sup>78</sup> Rosenau, 2004:49.

<sup>79</sup> Malan, 2009:29.

<sup>80</sup> *Resident Alien* is the title of Malan’s collection of journalistic writings. See Gready (1994:509-10).

<sup>81</sup> Boym, 2007:18.

<sup>82</sup> See Brazziel & Mannur (2003:1).

<sup>83</sup> Esman (2009:3) states simply that “diasporas are the consequence of transnational migration”.

<sup>84</sup> Breytenbach, 2009b:62.

<sup>85</sup> Gready, 1994:509.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>87</sup> Walder, 2011:1, 4-5, 18.

<sup>88</sup> Boym, 2007:8-9.

nostalgia – yet it is also subjective and deeply personal, a part of our sense of self.<sup>89</sup>

The word “nostalgia,” coined by Swiss physician Johannes Hofer late in the 17th century to describe a condition of extreme homesickness, has Greek origins: *nostos* for “home” or “homecoming” and *algia* for “pain,” “grief” or “longing”.<sup>90</sup> Moonsamy describes it as “the dis-ease of dis-placement”.<sup>91</sup> It is, therefore, an acute awareness of not being where one belongs. Boym refers to nostalgia as “a longing for home that no longer exists or has never existed,” “a sentiment of loss and displacement, but [it is] also a romance with one’s own fantasy”.<sup>92</sup> About the complexities of nostalgia, Boym writes: “Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship. A cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images – of home and abroad, of past and present, of dream and everyday life. The moment we try to force it into a single image, it breaks the frame or burns the surface.”<sup>93</sup> While the term still evades a clear definition, it is widely accepted that an intense longing for a lost time, place or experience remains fundamental to the discourse.<sup>94</sup> Some critics query this, including Boym who writes that nostalgia only “appears” to be a desire to return to a place; rather, it is a longing for a different time, “the time of our childhood, the slower rhythms of our dreams”.<sup>95</sup> “Nostalgia is a rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress,” she writes.<sup>96</sup> When approached from this angle, nostalgia is not directed to a place, but rather to *a place in time*. Perhaps it is for this reason that restorative nostalgics postpone homecoming: They are aware that time does not adequately preserve a place. Just as it is impossible to return in time, returning to a home *as it had been*, is undoable.<sup>97</sup>

At this point, we should take note of Boym’s typology of nostalgia.<sup>98</sup> She differentiates between reflective and restorative nostalgic perspectives: The first perspective concentrates on *nostos*, and “realise[s] the partial, fragmentary nature of history and histories, and linger on ruins and loss,” writes Walder.<sup>99</sup> Boym argues that this kind of nostalgia “thrives” on longing and often delays homecoming.<sup>100</sup> Restorative nostalgics, on the other hand, attempt to restore the past, “turning history into tradition and myth and monument”.<sup>101</sup> Boym writes<sup>102</sup>:

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<sup>89</sup> Walder, 2011:4-5.

<sup>90</sup> Walder, 2011:8; Sedikides et al., 2008:304; and Boym, 2007:7 & 1996:511.

<sup>91</sup> Moonsamy, 2014:3.

<sup>92</sup> Boym, 2007:7.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.

<sup>94</sup> Walder, 2011:9.

<sup>95</sup> Boym, 2007:8. Also see Sedikides et al. (2008:304).

<sup>96</sup> Boym, 2007:8. Also see Moonsamy (2014:22-3).

<sup>97</sup> On the traumatic experience of homecoming, Gready (1994:512) writes that “homecoming generates new diasporas”. Also see Sedikides et al. (2008:304) and Hutcheon & Valdés (1998-2000:19).

<sup>98</sup> Boym, 2007:13-7 & 1996:512.

<sup>99</sup> Walder, 2011:11.

<sup>100</sup> Boym, 2007:13-6.

<sup>101</sup> Walder, 2011:11.

<sup>102</sup> Boym, 2007:13-4.

Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. Reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt. Restorative nostalgia is at the core of recent national and religious revivals. It knows two main plots – the return to origins and the conspiracy. Reflective nostalgia does not follow a single plot but explores ways of inhabiting many places at once and imagining different time zones. It loves details, not symbols... The rhetoric of restorative nostalgia is not about 'the past,' but rather about universal values, family, nature, homeland, truth. The rhetoric of reflective nostalgia is about taking time out of time and about grasping the fleeing present.

A reflective nostalgia assumes many possible connections between memory, distance and psychologies, thereby demonstrating the flexibility of the present.<sup>103</sup> Medalie supports the idea of a "sophisticated and trenchant form of nostalgia" – a nostalgia that allows us to understand the complex dynamics between past and present: "This curiously stubborn nostalgia should not be construed solely as a resistance to the present or as a conservative clinging to the past, implying an inevitable failure of the transformative power of the imagination... For just as the past may be interpreted in many ways and assume many guises, so too are there many forms of nostalgia with vastly discrepant purposes".<sup>104</sup> He refers to such a nuanced, sophisticated approach as an evolved nostalgia, one opposed to a nostalgia that views the past and the present in terms of utopia vs. dystopia, innocence vs. hostility, simplicity vs. complication, because such a nostalgia constructs the past as simple, ordered, harmonious, and beautiful as opposed to a complicated, anarchic and contaminated present. A nostalgia that mourns lost time is "static," "primitive" and "unreflecting".<sup>105</sup> This might be the unreflective nostalgia that Hutcheon describes and resists<sup>106</sup>:

[Nostalgia] is rarely the past as actually experienced, of course; it is the past as imagined, as idealized through memory and desire. In this sense, however, nostalgia is less about the past than about the present...the ideal that is *not* being lived now is projected into the past. It is 'memorialized' as past, crystallized into precious moments selected by memory, but also by forgetting, and by desire's distortions and reorganizations. Simultaneously distancing and proximating, nostalgia exiles us from the present as it brings the imagined past near.

In line with this, Radstone reflects on the possibility that nostalgia might "not just be a symptom of all that has been lost," but that it can come "to condense the hopes and fears that accumulate around them".<sup>107</sup> On this subject, Walder writes: "The point is that it is not enough simply to recall the past, and turn it into a personal narrative of anger or guilt; recalling involves coming to terms with the past in an ethical as well as heuristic sense; it is to connect what you remember with the memories of others, colonisers and colonised and in-between."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Moonsamy, 2014:8.

<sup>104</sup> Medalie, 2010:36-9.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>106</sup> Hutcheon & Valdés, 1998-2000:20. (In this essay, Hutcheon, who is partial to irony, argues that nostalgia, irony and parody pervade postmodern aesthetics and in some texts they seem to collapse into another.)

<sup>107</sup> Radstone, 2010:187.

<sup>108</sup> Walder, 2011:14. In reference to South Africa, Breytenbach (2009d:153) considers the complexities of memory in



The past is a continuing force that upsets the present. Moreover, Walder suggests that our memories of the past are transformed and adjusted according to the identities we inhabit at a particular point in time, in a specific place. In his book *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation, and Memory* he explores how contemporary displaced subjects reconstruct and consider their memories. He draws on the historian E.J. Hobsbawm's idea of a twilight zone to illustrate what he calls a "no-man's land of time". Hobsbawm's twilight zone is a space between history and memory, between the generalised recorded past, and the intimate remembered pasts of individual lives. Walder gives thought to the idea that writers and artists, unlike historians, might allow us to access this space. They might be able to create "the only remaining, half-remembered trace of the point at which the past of an individual connects with the wider, collective pasts of family, society, and history".<sup>109</sup> Like Boym, he does not dismiss factual accounts or grand historical narratives, but he does consider the ways in which nostalgia allows artists to "express their relationship with the recalled or remembered pasts they identify with" or, as Boym articulates it, to meditate on history and the passage of time, rather than recovering an absolute truth.<sup>110</sup> Breytenbach observes that "The unattainable elsewhere may be at the root of our sense of incompleteness and therefore of much existential suffering, and we need art to make that sense tangible and, thus, bearable".<sup>111</sup>

On this subject, Boym refers to Benedict Anderson's suggestion that history and biography are connected in the sense that "both are seen as narratives of identity and personhood that sprang from oblivion, estrangement, and a loss of the memory of home".<sup>112</sup> Anderson proposes that biography and collective myth (as opposed to history and fact) are essential to the national imagination.<sup>113</sup> In her article "Estrangement as a Lifestyle: Shklovsky and Brodsky," Boym argues that instead of resisting or "curing" alienation, modernist autobiographers use estrangement to resist collective myths and reimagine concepts of home and belonging. Lourens argues that "memory sets itself up as the alternative to official discourses of history" and that "the flexible arrangement of memory allows it to work outside the dominant discourse and use the discourse of imagination, of stories, of memories and of the possible".<sup>114</sup> In the same vein, Breytenbach admits that he is curious how imagination – or non-power, as he refers to it – "can be used as a transformative agent".<sup>115</sup> In his affecting fictional memoir, *Huilboek*, former South African journalist and now shoemaker Ryk Hattingh warns his reader: "This is my narrative. My story.

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his essay "Notes from the Middle World": "If past and present are one seamless hole (the white hole of becoming), if you live in the possible tense, if you think of the past as destroyed time – what happens to memory? (And you know that time, which inexorably becomes the 'past,' can never be destroyed, and exactly for that very reason; it is alive and ever-elusive, moving in and out of the light...) Should anything *happen* to memory? If you keep on inventing and multiplying yourself – whose memory do you ultimately mix with the soil?"

<sup>109</sup> Walder, 2011:2.

<sup>110</sup> Walder, 2011:3, 6; and Boym, 2007:15.

<sup>111</sup> Breytenbach, 2007a:8.

<sup>112</sup> Boym, 1996:512-13.

<sup>113</sup> Boym (1996:12-3) points out, however, that Anderson doesn't include the narratives of "exiles, misfits and mixed blood who offer digressions and detours from the mythical biography of a nation" whose stories of "their consciousness does not begin at home, but rather with their departure from home".

<sup>114</sup> Lourens, 2006:177.

<sup>115</sup> Breytenbach, 2009b:62. Moonsamy (2014:1) remarks that literature is "a deeply reflexive mechanism that can simultaneously employ and react to discursive structures". In her view, literature – through imagination – creates space to explore identities.

Nothing is true. Everything is real."<sup>116</sup> He knows his memory is failing him, "But memory and imagination calcify as the years go by. Memory and dream dance past another."<sup>117</sup> Hattingh is unapologetically nostalgic but also ruthless in his reflections on the past and present. His narrative is prompted by an inscription in the baby book his mother kept for him, as well as a few photographs of him as a boy – fragments from his past that he uses as a point of departure. Hattingh's attempt to use his imagination to augment the limited information he has at his disposal is remarkable. He combines fact and fiction to reflect on and recreate his childhood. In turn, these altered memories transform him: they allow him to come to terms with living abroad, his new identity, and his longing for South Africa and his childhood home.

According to Boym, nostalgia "feels stifled within the conventional confines of time and space," and within the tradition of off-modernism it "makes us explore side shadows and back alleys, rather than the straight road of progress; it allows us to take a detour from the deterministic narratives of history".<sup>118</sup> Reflective nostalgic narratives are fragmented and inconclusive in their attempts to link the past, present and future; reflective nostalgics do not aim to reconstruct absolute truths, but rather "cherish(es) shattered fragments of memory".<sup>119</sup> A nuanced nostalgia "recognises the extent to which the present invests in narratives of the past, as well as the constructedness of memory," states Medalie.<sup>120</sup> In his view, evolved nostalgia should "engage critically with the past and [to] draw attention to the power but also the partiality of memory". We should be open to listening and reading "against the grain" – "acknowledging that memory resides outside as well as within the library or museum," states Walder.<sup>121</sup> He suggests that in South Africa contradictory voices should be given the opportunity to tell their stories, not necessarily to make whole or repair, but to reconstitute "turbulence and fragmentation".<sup>122</sup> Moonsamy and Boym also underpin that although nostalgia expresses itself in heterogeneous pasts, it "finds its homogeneity in the present".<sup>123</sup> Walder draws our attention to John Su's book *Ethics and Nostalgia in the Contemporary Novel* in which he highlights the necessity of storytelling<sup>124</sup>:

Narratives can provide 'an opportunity to identify with potentially unfamiliar descriptions of the world', thereby encouraging readers to 'empathize with the values and needs of others'; they 'challenge the truth claims of existing histories and beliefs by redescribing reality from alternative perspectives'; and they may 'expose ambiguities and aporias of any ethical project'.

Walder and Su both place strong emphasis on the connection between narrative and memory, on its ability to help construct "a thread of meaning that enables us to know...who and what we are in the

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<sup>116</sup> Hattingh, 2016:8. Original Afrikaans: "Dit is my verhaal. My storie. Niks is waar nie. Alles is werklik" (own translation).

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 20. Original Afrikaans: "Maar herinneringe en verbeelding verkalk met die jare, onthou en droom dans by mekaar verby" (own translation) (Naudé, 2011).

<sup>118</sup> Boym, 2007:8-9. Off-modernism refers to the tradition of critical reflection on modernity. Boym highlights that nostalgia is not resistant to modernism; modernity and nostalgia are contemporaries, "like Jekyll and Hyde: doubles and mirror images of one another."

<sup>119</sup> Boym, 2007:15-6.

<sup>120</sup> Medalie, 2010:40.

<sup>121</sup> Walder, 2011:6.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>123</sup> Moonsamy, 2014:8; and Boym, 2007:13.

<sup>124</sup> Walder, 2011:19; and Su, 2005:57.

present".<sup>125</sup> "Our consciousness," Walder writes, "is held together by a narrative of memory," and "Memory and fictional creation appear to be inextricably entwined; and somewhere in there lies nostalgia, with all the ambiguities and contradictions it brings in its wake".<sup>126</sup>

Walder argues that "the rosy, sentimental glow most commonly associated with nostalgia is only a part of the story, and that pursuing its manifestations with a proper sense of the complex of feelings and attitudes it engages, and the contexts upon which it draws, reveals its potential as a source of understanding and creativity".<sup>127</sup> "Nostalgia," he writes, "begins in desire, and may well end in truth". He further argues that "succumbing to it [nostalgia] can and indeed should be a first step upon the path of knowledge". In her article "Home-comings and departures," Radstone also posits the idea of employing nostalgia as a point of departure ("not as an end-point or theoretical home-coming") to explore the "interweaving of the psychical with the social, the historical and the political".<sup>128</sup> She writes: "But whether we begin our travels in literature, film or media studies, politics or philosophy, nostalgia will, if we allow it, lead us far from home." In Medalie's reading of Anne Landsman's novel *The Rowing Lesson*, he suggests that nostalgia is neither a point of departure nor an ending, but a *process* – "a mode of being and thinking that is not reducible to pathology or disease".<sup>129</sup> With reference to a South African imaginary, Moonsamy writes that nostalgia is "both produced and experienced in the present through an awareness of and longing for its lost potential".<sup>130</sup> She states: "It creates an open and unpredictable present in which all possibilities proliferate, inadvertently leaving one open to nostalgic feeling as one is left to lament all of the failed possibilities of the present that have not come to pass."<sup>131</sup>

"Exploring nostalgia can and should open up a negotiation of the past and how it has shaped the present, for good and bad, and how it has shaped the self in connection with others, a task that may bring pain as well as please," writes Walder.<sup>132</sup> Radstone refers to nostalgia as an "intermediate and transitional phenomenon" that "troubles the boundary between 'inside' and 'outside,'" one that "muddles the borders between subject and object," and "melds time with space".<sup>133</sup> Cautioning that a negotiation with the past and present should include introspection "about or within nostalgia," Walder writes<sup>134</sup>:

It is potentially the source of a double perspective: towards the past in its relation to the present, through the memories of the self as both actor and spectator... The more conscious we are of our own nostalgias, the more we reflect upon it, the more aware we may become of our history.

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<sup>125</sup> Walder, 2011:6.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

<sup>127</sup> Walder, 2011:3.

<sup>128</sup> Radstone, 2010:188-9.

<sup>129</sup> Medalie, 2010:40-3.

<sup>130</sup> Moonsamy, 2010:7.

<sup>131</sup> See Bradbury (2012:343). In terms of South African literature's former preoccupation with the future instead of the past, Moonsamy (2014:197-8) writes that we have been "unable to delve into the wonder of the past – so heavily tainted by the political oppression of apartheid". Our "nostalgic intent was displaced into the ideals of the post-apartheid future that never existed"; "There was never anything prestigious about our nostalgia. It presented a complex and exaggerated denigration of the present and a melancholic, and at times desperate, desire to return to illusive promises of the utopian future."

<sup>132</sup> Walder, 2011:9.

<sup>133</sup> Radstone, 2010:187, 9.

<sup>134</sup> Walder, 2011:9, 16.

Naudé claims that “cheap nostalgia” doesn't lure him and he dismisses the “few false nostalgic notes” in the South African literature of the past 20 years.<sup>135</sup> Instead, he imagines a space beyond the boundaries of language and place (maybe something similar to Breytenbach's Middle World) that can be reached by an approach between what he calls conditional nostalgia and anti-nostalgia.

Naudé's concern is valid; memory and nostalgia are intertwined, yet memory has become a focus of literary and cultural studies and nostalgia has been dismissed as “sentimental kitsch”.<sup>136</sup> Nostalgia nevertheless permeates contemporary culture, including literature.<sup>137</sup> Walder argues that certain conditions allow nostalgia to develop.<sup>138</sup> Uncertainty about the present, sudden major changes in power structures, and a sense that the present is defective in some way, for example, promote nostalgia.<sup>139</sup> During significant transitional periods, he writes, “there is an inclination to look at the present with dismay, the future with trepidation and the past with nostalgia”.<sup>140</sup>

### **The Afrikaner and the Diaspora**

Some scholars maintain that the contemporary Afrikaner is undergoing a second diaspora in post-apartheid South Africa, an existential crossroads characterised by a growing sense of loss, estrangement, displacement and disillusionment.<sup>141</sup> Morcillo-Espina, King and Louw, for example, argue that “the diaspora has become a core feature of white South African culture both inside or outside the country”.<sup>142</sup> Taking into consideration the contentions around the application of the concept of diaspora, I consider the idea that the white, Afrikaans-speaking South African – or Afrikaner – occupies a double diasporic position. My intention is not to prove that the Afrikaner is a diasporic community, as this is beyond the scope of this essay. Rather, I intend to show in what ways the Afrikaners exhibit the core features of a diasporic community, and that, indeed, Naudé and Van Schalkwyk's work display an engagement with concepts that are central to the discourse.

#### *(a) Spreading Through Africa: The First Afrikaner Migrations*

The Afrikaners are dispersed people with roots in Germany, Netherlands, France and other European countries, and they have firmly rooted themselves in Africa since the Dutch East India Company (VOC) and the French Huguenots settled in the Cape in 1652 and 1688.<sup>143</sup> They were mostly immigrants from Western Europe – soldiers, sailors and later farmers in the Company's service – and were the first to cut ties with their families and homelands, thereby creating a sense of self-consciousness in Africa.<sup>144</sup> L'Ange

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<sup>135</sup> Naudé, 2016.

<sup>136</sup> Walder, 2011:4.

<sup>137</sup> Radstone, 2010:187. Also see Hutcheon and Valdés (1998-2000:18, 23).

<sup>138</sup> Walder, 2011:9-12. Also see Boym (2007:10-2).

<sup>139</sup> See Radstone (2010:188).

<sup>140</sup> Walder, 2011:9-12. Unsurprisingly, since 1994 there has been a surge in literature that concerns itself with the past – a “preoccupation,” in Medalie's (2010:36) view, one that he thinks we might even call a “literature of nostalgia”.

<sup>141</sup> See Visser (2007:1,7), Walder (2011:14) and Griffiths & Prozesky (2010:25). I also rely on Du Toit's 2003 article “Boers, Afrikaners, and Diaspora” in which he places the Afrikaners' early and contemporary migrations within the theoretical framework of diaspora, showing that both movements display the core characteristics of a diaspora.

<sup>142</sup> Morcillo-Espina et al. (2014).

<sup>143</sup> Thompson, 2014:33; Griffiths & Prozesky, 2010:25-7; L'Ange, 2005:xi, 22-6; Du Preez, 2004:24; and Giliomee, 2003:xiii.

<sup>144</sup> Giliomee, 2003:xiii-xiv.

remarks that the Afrikaners, as opposed to whites of British descent “whose ties with Europe were tighter,” “had long accepted their Africanisation, embracing it in their very name”.<sup>145</sup> It is believed that the word “Afrikaner” derived from the need to differentiate between the European settlers and their offspring, and the indigenous people they encountered in the Cape.<sup>146</sup> Some, however, argue that the term was coined by Hendrik Bibault (Biebouw) who in 1707 when charged in a court for refusing to submit to the law of the VOC, cried out: “Ik ben een Africaander!” Breytenbach observes the following<sup>147</sup>:

Bibault’s defiant cry (I am an Afrikaner!) of secession from Dutch law and company sovereignty must have been a leap toward defining another identity. He says: I am beyond your possession. But he also says: You cannot tax me or govern over me since I’m no longer a Dutchman or a Frenchman; I’m of *this* continent. The general conditions of his environment and his situation now narrow down to a specific attempt at re-definition.

The terms Christian, Dutchman and burgher were still used to refer to Europeans who spoke Dutch or Afrikaans, but the word Afrikaner began to surface in the early eighteenth century.<sup>148</sup> At the end of the 18th century, the burgher community had a strong sense of being Afrikaner rather than Dutch.<sup>149</sup> In fact, many burghers claimed Afrikaans – and not Dutch – as their language.<sup>150</sup>

Although they had developed a sense of self-consciousness and claimed a new identity, the burgher community was still subject to the authority of the VOC. Their troubled relationship with the ruling government continued when Britain colonised the Cape in 1795 and again in 1806. Under British rule, the burgher community felt increasingly disempowered, marginalised and inferior, certain that their religion and language were being threatened. Also, there was a shortage of labour in the Colony due to restrictions on land expansion, and those exposed on the frontier feared for their safety.<sup>151</sup> For these reasons, two streams of burgher emigrants left the Cape Colony early in the 19th century: the trekboers departed in search of better pastures, and, in smaller parties, the burghers (later known as the Voortrekkers) left for political reasons.<sup>152</sup> According to Giliomee, they “no longer felt at home in their own country”.<sup>153</sup> Visagie agrees that everything culminated in a sense of alienation.<sup>154</sup> Ultimately, the trekboers’ journeys and the Groot Trek, which resulted in the dispersal of the Afrikaner throughout Africa (from Natal to the Limpopo Valley and beyond the Orange), was a revolt against British authority

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<sup>145</sup> L’Ange, 2005:xxvi-vii.

<sup>146</sup> Breytenbach, 2009c:74-5; and Giliomee, 2003:xix, 22-3.

<sup>147</sup> See Morcillo-Espina et al. (2014:23-4), Breytenbach (2009c:74-5), Malan (2009:159) and Giliomee (2003:22).

<sup>148</sup> See Van Wyk (1991:83).

<sup>149</sup> Giliomee, 2003:50-1.

<sup>150</sup> Van Wyk, 1991:80. In his article “Afrikaans Language, Literature and Identity,” Van Wyk further maintains that there has always been an interrelationship between the Afrikaans language, Afrikaans identity, and Afrikaans literature. Afrikaans is the result of a mixture between Dutch and the languages of the local slaves and servants owned and employed by the burgher community (Giliomee, 2003:xiv-xv).

<sup>151</sup> Thompson, 2014:67-9; Visagie, 2012b:118-9, 121-2; L’Ange, 2005:51-2; Giliomee, 2003:149-50; and Van Rooyen, 2000:15-6. Visagie (2012a:105-7) points out that farmers left the Colony as early as the 1700s in search of pasture. The resulting colonisation was spontaneous and did not form part of the VOC’s strategy. In isolation, these farmers developed a distinct identity.

<sup>152</sup> Giliomee, 2003:144-5.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid*, 149.

<sup>154</sup> Visagie, 2012b:119.

and an attempt by the burghers to claim their identity and culture.<sup>155</sup> The objectives of the Groot Trek were independence and freedom. Giliomee emphasises that it was not an impulsive decision, but one taken “with careful consideration” of future prospects.<sup>156</sup> Visagie agrees that it was an organised movement: the burghers did not plan to return to the Colony.<sup>157</sup> By 1830, many trekboers were beyond the border, and by 1840, a significant number of burgher parties had joined them. Approximately 6 000 people (about 10% of whites in the Colony) left the Colony during the first phase of the migration. By 1845, the number had increased to 15 000 burghers (2 308 families) accompanied by slaves and servants.<sup>158</sup> L’ange refers to this as a “migration surge,” and notes that these movements “spread out like a tree”.<sup>159</sup> Two centuries after Van Riebeeck had set foot in South Africa, the trekkers had settled in the country’s interior, and their descendants had spread throughout the country and the continent.<sup>160</sup> There are, for example, numerous accounts of Afrikaner treks into Angola and Namibia, across the Zambezi and beyond.<sup>161</sup> Decades later, during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), many Afrikaners again “saw a threat to the continuity of their language and culture,” and consequently fled South Africa to settle in other parts of the world, including New Mexico, Texas and Argentina.<sup>162</sup> Referring to the numerous Afrikaner migrations, Du Toit writes that the Afrikaner seems to “avoid pressure situations,” and “though they fought numerous battles, they would rather trek than fight, and certainly rather migrate than negotiate”.<sup>163</sup> Du Toit’s observation brings to mind Breytenbach’s remark that the Afrikaners are “instinctive nomads,” either “restless or runaways” who want to “conquer and [to] tame,” explore, pioneer and “be different”.<sup>164</sup>

In reference to Cohen’s common features of a diaspora, the first Afrikaner migrations exhibit dispersal from the Cape Colony throughout Africa, and a strong group consciousness “based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history, the transmission of a common cultural and religious heritage and the belief in a common fate”.<sup>165</sup> Over centuries, the group has also created a distinct and prosperous life in Africa and South Africa. More importantly, these movements display Brubaker’s three core elements of a diaspora: dispersal (albeit voluntary) from a homeland to more than two destinations; orientation towards a place of origin; and maintaining a distinct identity, group unity and collective memory.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Thompson, 2014:67-9; and Giliomee, 2003:xiv-v; 58-9. Also see Du Toit (2003:32).

<sup>156</sup> Giliomee, 2003:153, 173.

<sup>157</sup> Visagie, 2012b:117, 131. According to Giliomee (2003:52-3), the boers’ characteristic preference for isolation, their tenacity and their suspicion of foreigners were formed during this period.

<sup>158</sup> Giliomee, 2003:161. Also see L’Ange (2005:xiv, 51-2).

<sup>159</sup> L’Ange, 2005:49.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid*, 25, 33-4. The Mfecane refers to the dramatic transformation processes among the black people in Southern Africa in the period between 1750 and 1835. Many groups fled violence and conflict and ultimately settled in new groups and areas. This migration process resulted in the formation of new power strongholds and communities (see Visagie, 2012a:109). Visagie (2012a:97-8) also highlights that the Southern African migrations (the Groot Trek and the Mfecane) are very small in comparison to the relocation of the Jews, Russians, Polish and Germans in the 20th Century. Their impact, however, was dramatic.

<sup>161</sup> Du Toit, 2003:27-8.

<sup>162</sup> See Du Toit’s (2003:27-33) full discussion on burgher emigration from South Africa.

<sup>163</sup> Du Toit, 2003:27-8.

<sup>164</sup> Breytenbach, 2009c:78.

<sup>165</sup> Cohen, 2008:17, 161-2. Also see Morcillo-Espina et al. (2014:12-3, 15), Esman (2009:13-4) and Palmer (2000:29).

<sup>166</sup> Brubaker, 2005:5-7.

(b) *Present-day Afrikaner Migrations*<sup>167</sup>

Despite the increase in diasporic studies and the fact that one sixth of South Africa's white, educated demographic currently reside outside its borders (and make up approximately 80% of the country's emigrants), current emigration patterns receive little attention from researchers.<sup>168</sup> The "slow exit of whites" started in 1976 after the Soweto uprising, increased rapidly before and after the country's first democratic elections in 1994, and has since seen steady growth.<sup>169</sup> Not all emigrants resettle in former European colonies; some migrate into independent African countries, including Mozambique and The Republic of Congo.<sup>170</sup> Marchetti-Mercer and Roos argue that more than half a million Afrikaners have left the country since 1994.<sup>171</sup>

In their paper "White, African and Diaspora? The Case of South African Expats and Returnees," Morcillo-Espina et al. make the argument that, although Cohen does not consider a category of post-colonial diasporas, the white South African meets the requirements to be labelled a diaspora: White Afrikaans-speaking South Africans are scattered in more than two countries across the globe; they maintain strong ties with South Africa; and they are conscious of their singular identity.<sup>172</sup> Also, some research indicates that many emigrants foster the dream of returning to South Africa.<sup>173</sup> Afrikaner expats, therefore, display the core elements of a diasporic community: dispersion, homeland orientation, and boundary maintenance.<sup>174</sup> In agreement with Morcillo-Espina et al., Visser maintains that this second and "present-day Afrikaner diaspora" originated during South Africa's transition from an apartheid to a democratic society.<sup>175</sup> Visser describes this transition and the subsequent dispersal as a "nothing less than traumatic" experience that had a "profound influence on the ethnic psyche of the Afrikaners and on the discourse about the place of an Afrikaner identity".<sup>176</sup> In his view, this movement manifests itself in three ways: internal migration (moving to areas such as Orania); metaphysical (or psychological) migration (moving to security estates); and emigration.<sup>177</sup> A remarkable number of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans who claim to be disillusioned, and perceive themselves as "victims of decolonisations and poor governance" and "misunderstandings in their new host countries," leave the country in search of opportunities abroad.<sup>178</sup> Referring to the push and pull factors of immigration, Morcillo-Espina et al.'s

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<sup>167</sup> Van Rooyen (2000), rather controversially, refers to the second Afrikaner diaspora as the "New Great Trek" and a "white exodus". In this regard, see Schönfeldt-Aultman's 2009 scathing review of Van Rooyen's book on white emigration. Also see Du Toit (2003:33).

<sup>168</sup> Morcillo-Espina et al. 2014:4, 9, 28. (Unlike most research on white South African emigrants, Marchetti-Mercer and Roos's (2013) research on Afrikaans-speaking emigrants diverts the focus from the socio-political push and pull factors towards the subjects' experiences of alienation and loss in South Africa and in their new host countries.)

<sup>169</sup> See Du Toit (2003:34-5, 38).

<sup>170</sup> Du Toit, 2003:35.

<sup>171</sup> Marchetti-Mercer & Roos, 2013.

<sup>172</sup> Morcillo-Espina et al., 2014:11, 14, 19. Also see Marchetti-Mercer and Roos (2013) and Butler (2001:192).

<sup>173</sup> Morcillo-Espina et al., 2014:29-31.

<sup>174</sup> See Morcillo-Espina et al. (2014:12). Also see Du Toit (2003:27, 52) and Van Rooyen (2000:xii-iii).

<sup>175</sup> Visser, 2007:1.

<sup>176</sup> Visser, 2007:1, 7. Also see L'Ange (2005:xxvii) and Marchetti-Mercer and Roos (2013).

<sup>177</sup> Visser, 2007:3-5. Also see Van Rooyen (2000:19). Approaching the 1994 elections, Constand Viljoen negotiated a separate volkstaat for the Afrikaner people in the new South Africa. This never materialised, but the town Orania, the "home of the Afrikaner" in the Northern Cape, strongly resembles such an area (see Lief-Orania, 2016; L'Ange, 2005:441, 501; Du Preez, 2004:223-32; Vestergaard, 2001:31-2; and Van Rooyen, 2000:15-6).

<sup>178</sup> Morcillo-Espina et al., 2014:5, 32. See L'Ange (2005:xxvii-viii, 484-5). Schönfeldt-Aultman (2009:120-1) is sceptic about applying the term "victim diaspora" to white South Africans, but, as he points out, it is worth thoroughly researching the issue if some South Africans describe themselves as victims. In the same article, Schönfeldt-Aultman

research suggests that a sense of discrimination against white South Africans, political insecurity, an unstable economy, as well as a rise in crime rates and a lack of safety, “push” large numbers of white South Africans to emigrate and form “a new diasporic group,” while they are “pulled” by the prospects of raising their children in safer environments, and building more successful careers.<sup>179</sup> Many still display a strong sense of culture – the large (and successful) movements among expatriates in notably the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand to maintain cultural practices and to recreate communities, testify to this, and strengthen the community’s collective memory, “foster[ing] a sense of shared origin and identity”.<sup>180</sup>

While globalisation enables thousands of Afrikaans-speaking South Africans to leave the country in search of a new home in first-world countries, some argue that those who remain in South Africa migrate psychologically by either distancing themselves from or siding with the Afrikaner people and culture.<sup>181</sup> To an increasing extent, some Afrikaners find themselves in a similar position as they did at the beginning of the 19th century: estranged, and not only as a minority group in a post-apartheid South Africa; many also experience a growing sense of alienation from their history, culture, and language.<sup>182</sup> In this regard, Steyn draws attention to the white South African’s “dramatically different” and “ambivalent relationship” to the current government. “More acutely than ever before, then,” she writes, “they confront the diasporic dimension in their positionality: a small minority in the country, separated from their cultural heartlands, their whiteness seems genuinely at risk.”<sup>183</sup>

### **Negotiating Identities, Becoming African**

The above discussion suggests that contemporary Afrikaners are undergoing a phase of questioning their place and identities in a post-apartheid South Africa and global society. Furthermore, they are, as Morcillo-Espina et al. articulate it, “an identifiable group of people that is dispersed across the globe whose political, economic and cultural impacts are all interconnected”.<sup>184</sup> What distinguishes a diaspora such as the Afrikaner’s from the ideal types (e.g. the Jewish and the black African diasporas) is its voluntary characteristic.<sup>185</sup> Steyn underscores this: “As a dispersed, but privileged, grouping, this diasporic experience is qualitatively different from that of diasporic peoples who are oppressed by colonial imperial and neocolonial dynamics. One main difference lies in the degree of choice available to white South Africans.”<sup>186</sup> Steyn argues that white South Africans have a choice in terms of “just how much ‘Africanness’ or ‘Europeanness’ they wish to take on”: “This is hybridity very much on their own terms:

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(2009:121) warns that “just because people see themselves in such a way does not mean a critical scholar must describe them in such a way”. For exactly this reason it is crucial to place the Afrikaner emigration and their experiences of trauma, loss and alienation within the theoretical frameworks provided by the major diaspora studies scholars, including Cohen and Tölölyan.

<sup>179</sup> Morcillo-Espina et al., 2014:8-9, 29; Marchetti-Mercer & Roos, 2013; and Van Rooyen, 2000:ix-x. Also see Visagie’s (2012a:87-8) discussion on causes of migration.

<sup>180</sup> See Morcillo-Espina et al. (2014:15-6, 18-9).

<sup>181</sup> See Vestergaard (2001:34-7).

<sup>182</sup> See *Ibid*, 22, 28.

<sup>183</sup> Steyn, 2005:126.

<sup>184</sup> Morcillo-Espina et al., 2014:27. Recently, Coetzer points out, writers started to explore these experiences (Coetzer, 2010:177 & Venstergaard, 2001:19).

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 20-1.

<sup>186</sup> Steyn, 2005:126.



white South Africans can invoke, or deny, the tensions of living at the intersections at will."<sup>187</sup> "Positioned at the intersections of the African and the European," Steyn further writes, "South African whiteness has the quality of shifting layeredness that is so characteristic of diaspora."<sup>188</sup> About the Afrikaner, Breytenbach writes about a "sort of proto-European," and L'ange refers to "Africanised European descendants".<sup>189</sup> With regards to Steyn's observations, Breytenbach asserts the following<sup>190</sup>:

The bastard, I think, has a heightened sense of identity-awareness as pathology and as passport, perhaps of the furtiveness thereof: the past is more complex and entangled than that which meets the eye, the future less certain. Identity accrues from the wells and the pastures and the stars along the lines of the journey. It has the smell of blood. *The Afrikaner is only an identity in becoming another.*

Steyn agrees that after three hundred years in South Africa, "there is no doubt that whiteness in South Africa *has* produced a complex, hybrid identity position": "Whites in South Africa have lost some aspects of mainstream Euro-American whiteness. They have moved in a different direction. They have acquired other characteristics through living shoulder to shoulder with Africans. Undoubtedly, white South Africans *do* live in a cultural *mest-iche*, as many find when they travel to Europe and feel alien."<sup>191</sup> Snyman refers to the Afrikaner's position as a "double alienation" from Europe and Africa.<sup>192</sup> Naudé reiterates this idea.<sup>193</sup>

Du Toit points out that members of a diasporic community always occupy a marginal position in both their native and host countries.<sup>194</sup> In his song 'Bloekomboom' (from the album *Alien Inboorling*), the Afrikaans journalist and singer-songwriter Rian Malan expresses his awareness of his diasporic psyche.<sup>195</sup> Malan laments the loss of the non-indigenous blue gum tree (or *Saligna*) that is now being eradicated throughout the country. He finds the tree beautiful and imagines lying in its shadow, dreaming. He sings: "He's an alien/ He's a horrid foreign thing/ Rip him out from Harare to Table Bay/ But I say alien/ a native too/ He's like me, my blue gum tree/ He doesn't belong here/ but he puts down roots/ Deep down in the country's dark veins".<sup>196</sup> Malan is highly aware of his position as an alien, but he nevertheless claims Africa as his home, the place in which he is rooted, the continent to which he belongs.

Regarding the Afrikaner and his/her identity, Jacobs argues the following: "What diaspora does is make

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid. In this regard, L'Ange (2005:xxvii) notes the following: "The Afrikaners of course had long accepted their Africanisation, embracing it in their very name, but with a fundamental reservation: white Africans they may be, but whites above all else."

<sup>188</sup> Steyn, 2005:126.

<sup>189</sup> Breytenbach, 2009c:76; and L'Ange, 2005:xxvi.

<sup>190</sup> Breytenbach, 2009c:78.

<sup>191</sup> Steyn, 2005:132. Also see L'Ange (2005:xxvi.)

<sup>192</sup> Snyman, 1999:288.

<sup>193</sup> Naudé, 2016.

<sup>194</sup> Du Toit, 2003:18. Also see L'Ange (2005:xxvi).

<sup>195</sup> "Alien Native".

<sup>196</sup> Original Afrikaans: "Hy's 'n alien/ Hy's 'n nare uitheemse ding/ Kap hom af van Harare tot Tafelbaai/ Maar ek sê alien/ ook inboorling/ Hy's nes ek, my bloekomboom/ Hy hoort nie hier/ maar hy sit wortels neer/ Doer onder in die land se donker are," (own translation) (Malan, 2008). In this regard, Steyn (2005:125) highlights the white South African's "uneven positionality": "Those who have a leg in two different continents can be privileged in one context, and marginalized in another... While decentered in the local context, their whiteness links them to the centres of international power..."

possible ways of thinking about identity across once demarcated categories."<sup>197</sup> It makes it possible for white South Africans to resist the idea of a homogeneous racial group by "renegotiating [his] position in a new South Africa and abroad by reshaping whiteness ideology".<sup>198</sup> In this regard, Steyn asserts that white people "need to find new narratives to explain who they are, what they are doing in Africa, and what their relationship is to the indigenous people and the continent".<sup>199</sup> Akyeampong too argues that "the diaspora is [also] an important space to remake one's self," while Okoye "imagine(s) the diaspora as the overarching condition within which displaced subjects engage with the project of self-writing, involving disparate inflections of identity against shifting (dis)locations of 'home' in two spaces: the homeland and the host nation".<sup>200</sup> In this regard, Matthews draws attention to the problematics of negotiating white South African identity in a post-apartheid South Africa: "Whites cannot continue to insist that they are not African, but insisting that they are African seems fraught with difficulties too... Perhaps the kind of identity that is required is one that accepts the 'inbetweenness' of white South Africans and involves a commitment by white South Africans to strive to find an appropriate way to belong in Africa and thus to aim to *becoming* African."<sup>201</sup> As Snyman (in reference to the Afrikaans novels by Elsa Joubert, Karel Schoeman and Marlene van Niekerk) articulates it: "When the world has become that much unsettled, politically, and as far as fiction is concerned, the stage is set for the reappearance of the Afrikaner as marginalised inhabitant of the world."<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Jacobs, 2006:121. Also see Morcillo-Espina et al. (2014:23-4).

<sup>198</sup> Morcillo-Espina et al., 2014:20-3. Also see Steyn (2005:122).

<sup>199</sup> Steyn, 2005:122. Also see Matthews (2011:1).

<sup>200</sup> Okoye, 2008:81; and Akyeampong, 2000:187.

<sup>201</sup> Matthews, 2011:11-2. Also see L'Ange (2005:501) and Vestergaard (2001:28).

<sup>202</sup> Snyman, 1999:288.

## PART II Analysis

Meaning does not, after all, lie in the end. It's just a moment like any other.

– S.J. Naudé<sup>203</sup>

Amidst the distorting powers, one keeps clinging to the idea that making art – whether by writing or using other modes – is the last way of refusing all that is severe and brutal and inhumane. That it represents the only form of labour that remains specific to the individual, the only way to say no.

– S.J. Naudé<sup>204</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

The stories in *The Alphabet of Birds* provide glimpses into the lives of transnational Afrikaans-speaking subjects who return from abroad to attend to a family crisis.<sup>205</sup> In 'A Master from Germany,' the narrator abandons his high-paying job and his lover to care for his dying mother; while on sabbatical in Cape Town, the New York-based narrator in 'Loose' is summoned to Pretoria to address a family dispute; in 'War, Blossoms,' a seasoned world-traveller hurriedly leaves London to care for his mother who suffers from aggressive cancer; a fall-out with her friends forces Ondien, the main character in 'Mother's Quartet' and 'VNLS,' to leave Paris and return to South Africa. Van Schalkwyk's novel, on the other hand, follows the lives of immigrants trapped in inopportune circumstances, trying to create and sustain lives in America. The 18-year-old narrator describes the ten years he spends working in The Alibi Club, a bar in the less affluent Fort Greene in New York. Although told from his perspective, the story does not revolve around the protagonist but focuses chiefly on the assortment of people he encounters, and how gentrification transforms the neighbourhood and the lives of those who call it home.

In this section, my aim is twofold. Firstly, I establish that *The Alphabet of Birds* and *The Alibi Club* provide strong textual evidence that the authors address the diasporic condition. I then explore how Naudé and Van Schalkwyk draw on the literary form and techniques to embody the lived experiences of their characters. As a result, Part II is divided into two sections. In the first, I consider the various expressions of home and belonging, identity, and memory and nostalgia – issues that are central to the discourse. I then consider how the authors use juxtaposition, narrative structure and narrative style to represent the diasporic condition. I analyse both works in tandem, and my discussions are integrated to draw attention to similarities and distinctions. In addition to the primary texts, I also rely on Naudé's 2016 Marjorie Wallace Memorial Lecture address, "Leë wit ruimtes en die politiek van nostalgie".<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Naudé, 2014:84. (In order to increase readability, from here on page numbers only will be used in-text to refer to passages from *The Alphabet of Birds* or *The Alibi Club*. Where confusion might occur [for instance, whether I'm referring to Naudé's 2014 collection or his 2016 essay], footnotes are used to clarify the source. All other sources are footnoted.

<sup>204</sup> Naudé, 2016. Original Afrikaans: "Waaraan mens bly vashou, te midde van al die verwingende kragte, is die idee dat kuns maak – hetsy skryf of ander modusse – 'n laaste manier van weiering is van alles wat kras en brutaal en onmenslik is, dat dit die laaste soort arbeid verteenwoordig wat onverminderbaar spesifiek is aan die individu. Die enigste manier om nog nee te sê" (own translation).

<sup>205</sup> Naudé writes that for him, the term diasporic literature is problematic as it "suggests a state of limbo from which the author may never escape. He nevertheless admits that it might be of some use, and his own work, as I will show in Part II, does address issues that are central to the discourse (Naudé & Vladislavíc, 2014).

<sup>206</sup> "Empty White Spaces and the Politics of Nostalgia" (own translation).

## ENGAGING WITH ISSUES OF DIASPORA

In the following discussion, I engage with the primary texts to show how the authors address notions that are central to the discourse: (i) home and belonging; (ii) loss and grief; (iii) and nostalgia and memory.

### Home and Belonging

In this subsection, I focus on the event of homecoming, the mother-child/homeland-expat connection, and how characters compensate for the loss of a home.

#### (a) Homecoming and Estrangement

In Part I, I established that diaspora is a discourse of home and belonging.<sup>207</sup> In terms of Brubaker's key features of diaspora, such communities are marked by their departure from home, their memories of and a longing for (a) home, and their desire to maintain ties to their place of birth by sustaining a distinct identity and group unity.<sup>208</sup> As I show in the following discussion, issues of home and belonging, although treated dissimilarly, are central themes in *The Alphabet of Birds* and *The Alibi Club*. While Naudé's stories revolve around protagonists who return to South Africa (thereby focusing on the event and aftermath of homecoming), Van Schalkwyk considers the intricacies of constructing new homes and communities in host countries.

In his article "The South African Experience of Home and Homecoming," Gready points out that homecoming is a significant and often traumatic event. He notes that "just as exile provides different perspectives and fresh insight on home, so does homecoming," and "that which was previously subconsciously absorbed, transparent, and taken for granted as home, then yearned and re-created from a distance, is made strange and unfamiliar, consciously seen and felt as if for the first time".<sup>209</sup> As X (in 'A Master from Germany') concludes, "It is the outside realm that gives the forest meaning, not the other way around" (77).<sup>210</sup> Homecoming "creates a diaspora of its own," Gready continues.<sup>211</sup> Not only is the returnee now a stranger to his/her home country; the transformed subject is now also a stranger to the person he/she had been – "To return home is to be reborn".<sup>212</sup> In *Every Day is for the Thief*, for example, Teju Cole writes that after a long absence from Nigeria "things, less visible, have changed," and he has "returned a stranger".<sup>213</sup> Rian Malan and T.S. Eliot share similar experiences of homecoming, and respectively wrote the following: "When I came home from exile, I was overwhelmed by the feeling that I was seeing South Africa for the first time," and "...the end of all our exploring/ Will be to arrive where we started/ And know the place for the first time".<sup>214</sup> These impressions pertain to Naudé's stories; his characters return to South Africa after prolonged periods abroad, marked by little or no contact with family or friends at home. Having functioned in different worlds for extended periods, they were not part

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<sup>207</sup> Cohen, 2008:1-2. Also see Butler (2001:189-90).

<sup>208</sup> Brubaker, 2005:5-7.

<sup>209</sup> Gready, 1994:513.

<sup>210</sup> Since the majority of Naudé's protagonists are nameless, from here on I refer to them as X (in 'A Master from Germany'), Y (in 'Loose') and Z (in 'War, Blossoms').

<sup>211</sup> See Boym (1996:529).

<sup>212</sup> Boym, 1996:512.

<sup>213</sup> Cole, 2008:19.

<sup>214</sup> Gready, 1994:513. The quoted lines are from Eliot's "Little Giddings," Part IV in *The Four Quartets*. Malan's quote is taken from his book *My Traitor's Heart* (Malan, 1991).

of the gradual transformations the country and its people had undergone. Surely, their homecomings must resemble the disconcerting, defamiliarising and disorientating experiences described by Eliot, Malan and Cole. From the texts, we can ascertain that a homecoming is indeed a watershed event for Naudé's protagonists: For some (like X in 'A Master from Germany' and Y in 'Loose') it is a rebirth; for others (like Ondien and Z in 'War, Blossoms') homecoming marks the beginning of their downfall. For all these characters, however, returning home demarcates the before from the after, as this passage, in which X accidentally catches a glimpse of his naked mother, illustrates (81):

It is during this time that he gets such an unprotected view of his mother in the bathroom. The retina will not let go of the image, he realises after a while. It stays with him. He wonders what it means, the lingering. Yet, it does carry something of *then* and *now*, the man before and after the event. How he will construe the respective selves, however, he will never know. But he knows it is a dividing line, a flash of light in the blindness of which all protection is torn away. And it superimposes her body indelibly over his German trip, a defenceless landscape on the edge of collapse.

The scene encapsulates the impressions of returnees as described by Gready. Prior to his return, X was aware of his position as a stranger, but the changes in his mother surprise and unsettle him. He realises that "something has changed...something has become raw" and "The breach between now and then, the time of innocence, has been brought into sharper focus" (80). Here, Naudé reiterates questions about belonging and identity negotiation – or return and rebirth, in Gready's words. How does one make sense of this schizophrenia, this double perspective (as Rushdie describes it) that defamiliarises home and forces one to see it – from a stranger's perspective – in its rawness?<sup>215</sup> In this scene, in which X's mother comes to represent home, the protagonist is compelled to reconsider and renegotiate his relationship with a transformed, unfamiliar landscape that is "defenceless" against his scrutiny. At the same time, he is confronted by the realisation that home, as he once knew and preserved it in his memory, is "on the edge of collapse" (81). It is a pivotal moment in which he registers that return is impossible: his home has changed shape, and the person that inhabited that time and place has undergone a transformation. Returning will require an ongoing process of negotiation and translation between himself and his home.

In these stories, the event of homecoming marks the beginning of a challenging journey in which characters are confronted by their pasts, their notions of home, and their feelings of loss, loneliness and unbelonging. Ondien silently mourns the disintegration of her family and her friendships with Nungi and Beauty. Her parents are deceased; her successful, but depressed brother Cornelius is on the verge of collapse in London; her older sister Vera is caught in an illegal relationship in Abu Dhabi and risks losing her children; and her younger sibling Zelda hides in Arizona from her psychopathic, estranged husband, terrified of her own child who displays similar tendencies. Ondien also experiences a deep sense of abandonment when her close friends Nungi and Beauty desert her and return to their families in KwaZulu-Natal. Losing *them* has an even more profound effect on Ondien. Indeed, at one point she tells them, "You are now my family," and later, "They are like sisters to me" (150, 176). For Ondien, homecoming does not bring relief; it accentuates her losses, loneliness, and eccentricities. In the story's

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<sup>215</sup> Rushdie, 1992:19.

unnerving final scene, for example, she invites an intruder to listen to the funeral march she has been composing. In him, she recognises herself as an outcast destined to remain on the periphery, unrooted (215). Being home also exacerbates Z's loneliness in 'War, Blossoms'. It is briefly relieved by his Japanese friend Hisashi's visits, but when Hisashi unexpectedly announces his departure "the blind fear entering his [the protagonist's] heart catches him off guard" (141). Soon, his mother too will leave him, and he will be left alone in a place that he finds strange and hostile.

*(b) The Mother-child/Homeland-expat Connection*

In 'War, Blossoms,' Z's distress becomes evident when he decides to put on his dying mother's nightgown, and then "lie down next to her, there under the white sheets, and curl up like a monkey," waiting until Hisashi returns "to come and care for them" (141):

And if Hisashi doesn't come? Then no one would have to refuse, or threaten to refuse, ever again. He will see to it that his desiccation and departure coincide with his mother's. The leaves will blow in through the doors. The garden birds will fly in and whirl around their heads, will write an ending on them. Sharing a boat, they will row through to the secret lake. With a white flag at the bow."

If we read the mother figure as the embodiment of home in Naudé's stories, this passage draws attention to the complexities of the mother-child/expat-homeland connection that permeates the collection. On returning to South Africa, the majority of Naudé's characters are impelled to reconsider their identities and renegotiate their relationships with their mothers. This process implies a rethinking of their understanding of the world. In 'War, Blossoms,' the mother's pain drives her to a point where "she is now travelling freely between sleep and wakefulness; the border fence has been removed". The protagonist notes that the "boundaries between his mother and himself are fading," that he "no longer knows which side he is on," that "he must now give up," because "her boundaries have shifted unimaginably" (138). He is keenly aware of this renegotiation, the reversal of roles, and the crossing of boundaries.

In this passage Z senses that his mother's death would mark a pivotal moment, that it might leave him unanchored and disoriented. Most of the protagonists eventually deal with the aftermath of a mother's death, but he is the only one to contemplate her absence beforehand. One morning, while outside, he "looks around him, tries to imagine how her absence will change every object," and "how a world without her will look" (121). The final scene in this story foregrounds this tension that marks the mother-child/expat-homeland relationship. Imagining their simultaneous deaths brings Z a sense of relief because it would spare them both the loss. Having given it much thought while taking care of her, he finds it impossible to imagine inhabiting a world in which she does not exist. Without a home, Z will be left unanchored and disorientated, unable to position and negotiate himself in the present.

These complex relationships are accentuated in other stories too. X in 'A Master from Germany' is annoyed when his mother phones from South Africa to inform him of her illness, yet he leaves Berlin hastily to return and care for her. He is annoyed when her sudden phone call to Germany forces him to momentarily transport himself to his home country, but he is shaken when her death

interrupts and alters his world, forcing him to address his manifold identities. Similarly, Ondien, who never attended her mother's funeral and had little contact with her parents, deeply mourns her loss. In 'Mother's Quartet' she goes back to her childhood farm in the Free State to plant a bed of nasturtiums (her mother's favourite flower) in memory of her. Without their mother, Ondien and her siblings feel adrift and misplaced. Cornelius, also devastated by his "years of dreamlessness" and his "refusal to acknowledge how deeply dream-fucked" he is, starts to explore London's underbelly of drugs and sex in which "Boundaries, whether cellar walls or human skin, become [became] permeable" (195). He tells Ondien that he suddenly "experienced the most intense regret – no, grief – over the years of self-denial, the methods of my [his] obsessive escape from rural South Africa". Although his lifestyle is "the greatest distance" he could manage to put between him and "that Free State Garden with its nasturtiums," he is heavily burdened by the past and the loss of his mother. He makes several attempts to "escape from rural South Africa," but he is ultimately unable to re-invent himself and shed his former life (195-7):

But wherever I found myself, with all those things in the blood creating images inside the skull, I only needed to think of that garden to cause nasturtiums to grow all around me: over the walls, ceilings and floors of the strange room I was in... And, when our mother's singing voice swept through like a wind, the flowers would tremble slightly...

In the final scene of the story, Ondien asks herself: "Is that all that's left of your mother, Ondien? These little flowers, a few notes in the afternoon?" These extracts suggest that although the siblings have very few memories of their childhoods and their mother, being unhomed (or "unmothered") has had a devastating impact on their lives. Ondien's sister Vera, for example, who established a new life in Abu Dhabi feels "lost", "disorientated" and "restless" – "She looks around as if she is searching for something, as if she has forgotten what it is that makes one important" (201). For her, "everything has collapsed". She confides in Ondien (205): "'I mean nothing to anyone,' she sobs. 'I want my mother... I just want my mother'."

Read within the discourse of diaspora, these passages suggest that notions of home – as depicted in Naudé's collection – are central to Afrikaans-speaking South Africans' lived experiences. X is confronted by an exceedingly altered home, and it impacts on his ideas of self, loss and belonging. Ondien and her siblings' grief for a lost home (and the security, direction and belonging it represents) renders them powerless to navigate the present. In 'War, Blossoms,' the final scene gives the impression that although the expat-homeland relationship is one of tension, and although a departure from home might provide a sense of freedom to explore and re-invent the self and the world, an existence outside the idea or memory of (a) home is unimaginable. No matter how convoluted the relationship, in these stories home becomes a point of reference, a dictionary with which new experiences and places are translated.

In this regard, Joschka's relationship with his mother is worth mentioning. Although Joschka and his mother ("basically a tramp, a *Landstreicherin*" [69]) in 'A Master from Germany' have been estranged since he was a young boy, they share similarities: Both are unsettled, inhabit (and feel at home in) the dark underbelly of society, and function on the periphery. His restless and heedless behaviour suggests that his mother's sudden and traumatic departure from his life has left a lifelong impression on him. Her

absence has become significant, directing his life and impacting on his actions and decisions. One could read their relationship as a metaphor for the Afrikaner's experience. Disillusioned by the realities of post-apartheid South Africa, some Afrikaners seem to feel marginalised – even abandoned – and their relationship with South Africa has become troubled and precarious. Some no longer feel at home and leave in search of new places to belong, some withdraw from mainstream discourses, and others stay and try to renegotiate their relationships with the country.<sup>216</sup>

Finally, it is apparent that when their worlds collapse, Naudé's characters yearn for comfort, stability and security. While X tends to his suffering mother with patience and kindness, his dependence on Joschka reveals his own need to be taken care of by someone. Ironically, the fragile Ondien takes responsibility for Beauty and Nungi, and for her siblings she becomes a feeble substitute for their lost mother. Z allows Hisashi to take over the household and care for his mother. Hisashi's departure devastates him precisely because he has no one left to take care of *him*.

In all instances, conflict and confusion arise when the question of "who is caring for whom" surfaces (114). When Z sees the "overflowing" freezer he soon realises that the silent war between him and his mother has nothing to do with her suffering and refusal to eat, but about their respective roles. Despite her illness, "he is after all, her child". Notwithstanding her immense pain, X's mother acts similarly. Some days she cleans, cooks and bakes for hours, or shops for new clothes for her son and her husband: "Everything will be clean, everyone will be warm and fed and cared for. So will it be. For ever and ever. (Amen.)" (80). Naudé seems to suggest that, in terms of the diaspora, returning expats expect to find a sense of security, stability and validation in the familiar, but are instead disillusioned by the fragility of their homes and identities.

Regarding home and belonging, Naudé then asks: How does one negotiate a relationship marked by need and friction, love and abhorrence? How does one manage a relationship that is suddenly complicated by uncertain boundaries and reversed roles? In Naudé's case, home becomes a conflict zone, a space in which his characters are confronted by past and present, their multiple identities and their understandings of the world. For his characters, homecoming is a traumatic event, marked by disillusionment, alienation, loneliness and disorientation. Furthermore, it impels the characters to reconsider their notions of home. Home becomes defenceless against the onslaught of transformed identities and new ideas that "render[s] the forest small and harmless, the force drained from everything, the claws filed blunt" (77). Homecoming is a silent war in which notions of identity, home and belonging are reshaped and renegotiated.

### *(c) Shrinking Worlds: Creating Substitute Homes*

In the above discussion, I have established that Naudé's characters experience a deep sense of loss and disorientation both at the prospect and the event of their mothers' deaths. Homecoming, coupled with the loss of their mothers, forces them to reconsider their place in the world. In the same way, isolation and dire circumstances impel Van Schalkwyk's array of foreigners to rethink their position, their ideas of home, and their connection to (a) home. In this short subsection, I consider how the characters in these texts attempt to compensate for the loss of a home, and the sense of security, direction and identity

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<sup>216</sup> Visser, 2007:1, 7. Also see L'Ange (2005:xxvii) and Marchetti-Mercer & Roos (2013).



implicit in the concept. In this regard, Naudé and Van Schalkwyk's attention to the quotidian (which I will discuss subsequently) reveals the protagonists' main strategy: fixating on the immediate environment and disengaging with the outside world.

In some form, all Naudé's characters retreat (or envisage retreating) into solitary spaces. 'A Master from Germany' has several references to "small place[s] within large place[s]" (68): the family's tiny house next to the uninhabitable castle; the single, beautiful restored room on the dilapidated middle floor of the castle; the boy Maximilian's room in which the couple sleeps; Joschka's room in London. These are "beautiful room[s], but when you open a door, you are in a ruin". Similarly, X and Joschka's lives are in ruin, irretrievably altered by grief, disillusionment, and memories of the past. Maximilian's room has a medieval theme and is "filled with children's things": books about knights and castles, a Lego set, a box with swords and lances. The two of them sleep on bunk beds, and their bedding has patterns of aeroplanes and red racing cars (74). The room evokes a sense of innocence, dream and imagination – all in stark contrast to the story's dark and funereal atmosphere. The two characters also frequently use "Alice's Magic key" to "escape to the room in *die Ruine*" – the castle's only restored space (66, 69). In these spaces, both characters attempt to escape the chaos and uncertainty of their present lives.

Ondien's sister Zelda, who hides from her psychopathic husband and is bullied by her six-year-old son, at one point yearns for the "grey silence of a cement grave," a "congealed nest," a "cool mother's womb," – "filled with peace" (187). The eccentric couple in 'The Noise Machine' seeks solace from the outside world in their 1920s villa in the industrial area of Milan. In 'War, Blossoms,' Z scarcely leaves his mother's suburban house. Like all Naudé's protagonists, his "world is shrinking": "His routes are contracting: from his mother's bedroom to the kitchen to the garden to his bedroom. Now and again to a shop. Only the order of the destinations varies" (120). The only indication that he is still aware of an outside world is his attempt to write a book about his travels with Hisashi. In 'Loose,' the protagonist Y "flee[s] to his flat in Cape Town to escape the emotional intensity of the renewed involvement with his family". And finally, Ondien exists seemingly oblivious to her surroundings. Retreating into a garden cottage in Johannesburg, she is indifferent to the world around her and fixated on completing her composition of a funeral march.

As strangers in a foreign country, disillusioned by the promise of the American dream, Van Schalkwyk's characters also yearn for a place of belonging, and, despite the off-putting interior of The Alibi Club and a general sense of decay, a strong sense of community exists among its staff and customers. The bar becomes a substitute for their lost homes. Here, the outcasts are accepted. During the decade he spends in New York, the protagonist never explores other parts of America. He has moved halfway around the world, but his life doesn't expand; his small world is simply transported to another setting, inhabited by a new set of characters. Like Naudé's characters, he too withdraws from the outside world.

The further these characters travel the more disenchanting they become. The world is larger, louder and more accessible, but their lives are inundated by silence and shrinking at tremendous speed. While Naudé and Van Schalkwyk's protagonists seem to survive in a global world, they certainly do not thrive. Experiencing an increasing sense of purposelessness and restlessness, they eventually withdraw from the world like frightened or injured animals – "small forest creature[s] in distress" (79). Regrettably, these carefully constructed private domains turn out to be fragile and susceptible to attack from the

outside world. For example, Z's friend Hisashi's sudden arrival in South Africa threatens to disturb the quiet routines he has managed to establish. Ondien is inevitably assaulted – probably raped – in her garden flat. In 'A Master from Germany,' their comforting relationship comes under threat when Joschka unexpectedly tells X that he "should get tested" (71). (It is suggested that he might have HIV/AIDS.) In *The Alibi Club*, the community and the bar's existence in their current forms are endangered by processes of gentrification. Naudé and Van Schalkwyk's protagonists are overwhelmed by the challenges presented by a borderless world – one in which opportunities abound, but also a world in which insecurities, longing, and displacement proliferate. Unable to gain a hold on their worlds – which are rapidly spinning out of their control – they withdraw into more intimate spaces, both psychologically and physically. This mirrors the Afrikaans-speaking community's reaction to change as described by Visser. Feeling threatened by the unfamiliar present, they remove themselves from the situation by either migrating physically or psychologically.<sup>217</sup>

### Memory and Nostalgia

As I have shown in Part I, nostalgia is commonly regarded as a yearning for a lost home – one that has either never or no longer exists, i.e. imagined or real. Moonsamy and Boym respectively refer to nostalgia as the "dis-ease of displacement" and a "sentiment of loss and displacement". As noted earlier, Boym further asserts that nostalgia is not merely a longing for a lost place; it is the desire to return to a specific time set in a certain place. However strong the connection between these ideas, Naudé, in particular, explores how re-imaginings of or reflections on the past can take form without necessarily relying on or diverting to modes of nostalgia. Indeed, on the surface, neither Naudé nor Van Schalkwyk seems to default to either reflective or restorative nostalgia.

If we argue along the line that nostalgia is not about the past, but about the present, and that memories are often adjusted according to the identities we inhabit at a specific point in time and in a specific place, then we should consider what the handful of childhood memories recalled in *The Alibi Club* and *The Alphabet of Birds* evince about the characters' present experiences.<sup>218</sup> In addition to establishing how the characters engage with the past and present through memory, it is imperative – in the case of these two works of fiction – that we also give thought to the ways in which the protagonists engage with the act of memory itself.

#### (a) Remembering and Reflecting on the Past

There are very few childhood recollections in these narratives. Naudé's characters do not contemplate the past, but on rare occasions an event or a person would jolt a memory. For example, when he unexpectedly runs into a childhood friend, Chris in 'The Noise Machine' recognises Tom when, unexpectedly, he slips a hand under Chris's shirt. Tom's touch stirs a vivid memory of the last time he had seen the young Tommie, and touched him intimately. Firstly, the scene suggests that Chris does not reflect on his memories. They are detailed, but we gain no insight into his experiences at that time, or into his current impressions about those incidents. The narration is impersonal, stripped from impressions or emotion. In addition, the events are retold in the present tense. Both techniques work to disrupt the

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<sup>217</sup> Visser, 2007:1.

<sup>218</sup> Walder, 2011:14; and Boym, 2007:8-9.

linearity of time, conflating past and present. In this way, the memory is displaced, no longer belonging in the past (or to any moment in time).

One of the few childhood memories in *The Alphabet of Birds* appears in 'VNLS'. Ondien has just been arrested on charges of having kidnapped a dog. In the police vehicle, she thinks of her unfortunate siblings. She calls to mind her younger sister Zelda – “not [of] her exhaustion or her Satan’s child, but [of] a time when they were children,” riding their bicycles on their Free State farm: “The landscape is empty, as if there is no one else on earth. The sun is shining brightly, their feet hanging free beside pedals. To one side of the road, neatly dug, is her mother’s bed of nasturtiums” (175). Like Chris, Ondien doesn’t dwell on the memory – neither in a reflective or a restorative nostalgic way. It is a pleasant memory, but there is no indication that she nurtures it or confabulates (as restorative nostalgics tend to do) in order to cast it in a more reassuring light. It is a fleeting memory (narrated in only five short sentences), yet telling. Ondien’s observation that “the landscape is empty” and her sense that “there is no one else on earth” denotes that she associates innocence, freedom and security with a place/space that is removed and protected from an outside world marked by mobility, insecurity, and rapid change.

Also worthy of consideration is an almost indifferent reference to her mother’s nasturtium garden – one of many in ‘Mother’s Quartet’. These references are significant. For her brother, Cornelius, the garden symbolises a past from which he desperately wanted to escape. She and her siblings have spent years – maybe decades – attempting to distance themselves from everything associated with their past, only to realise, too late, that it was the one thing that rooted them. In my view, Ondien’s eventual return to the farm to plant a few nasturtiums in her mother’s old garden indicates a yearning to reclaim her past. Through this act she not only acknowledges the past and her mother’s existence, but also accepts that she is linked to the past.

Here, we should also take note of X’s recollections of his family’s old farm for which “his mother harbours a deep nostalgia” and which, despite it no longer being safe, “draws her back” (70). An unexpected call from her reminds him of the crabapple tree. His mother “remembers it [the tree] well” and “has often told him how she played underneath it as a child”. Instead of telling him about her fatal illness, she says: “The tree is dying” (70). She says she’s having it grafted, “using the trunk of a hardened European apple tree” (71). By saving this singular tree (“Nowhere else has he ever encountered exactly such apples”) from dying, his mother wants to ensure that the memory of her lasts. Furthermore, the European tree not only references the foreign roots of the Afrikaners, but also points to X’s new life in Germany. In this way, the tree becomes Rian Malan’s “*Bloekomboom*” which represents the Afrikaners, their rootedness in Africa, and their current sense of disorientation. If so, then Naudé might be suggesting that the Afrikaners’ future depends on their ability to adapt and/or their willingness to take root elsewhere.

The childhood memories in *The Alphabet of Birds* are few – and brief – but they are significant in terms of the larger themes Naudé addresses in the collection: displacement, home and belonging. Furthermore, they show that despite Naudé’s deliberate attempts to avoid nostalgic recollections, his memories contain elements that typically induce homesickness: a rural farm, childhood activities such as riding a bicycle, mothers tending to the house or garden, and home-cooked meals.

In contrast, 'War, Blossoms' is, as Naudé points out in the title in the Afrikaans-version, a travel narrative, devoid of childhood memories.<sup>219</sup> Prompted by Hisashi's sudden arrival in South Africa, Z spends days in his mother's garden to diarise his and Hisashi's travels to Vietnam and Japan. It is the only story in which Naudé devotes as much narrative to the present as to the past. In great detail, Z relives the nights they spent in hotels, evenings in karaoke bars and café's, adventures to the Perfuma Pagoda temple and the Aokigahara forest. Remembering these events, writing them down and elaborating upon them allows Z to understand the present. His quest points to a reflective nostalgia, which is not a yearning for the past, but a realisation that the past, present and future are intertwined. Whereas Naudé's other characters make deliberate efforts to disengage from the past (thereby resisting any form of nostalgia), Z senses that unravelling his travels could give him insight into "the textures around him": the conflict between him and his dying mother; his fear of losing her and his uncertainty about the future; his inability to understand her pain; the perplexing relationship between him and Hisashi; and his sense of loss (140). He remembers his past adventures in their complexities, giving thought to the pleasurable moments and those marked by tension, awkwardness and conflict. From his memories, we also learn that Z regards truth and history as flexible. He amalgamates fact and fiction: "It is coming to him, faster and faster. His pen takes them to places they have never been" (131). All of these point to a more reflective nostalgia.

While Naudé's characters – except for Z – feel mostly indifferent towards their memories, Van Schalkwyk's characters enjoy reflecting on bygone days. It is perhaps most evident in the final part of the novel when Van Schalkwyk's narrator succumbs to rose-tinted nostalgia (166):

Now it is 2005. I'm standing outside The Alibi. People greet me. They tell each other, in front of me, that I'm from the old neighbourhood. They say it must've been fucking rough here. Was it? I remember days of milky white and golden brown, with me on my cheap blue bicycle in a pair of Moschino linen slacks, wearing a hat, before irony came and took it away.

Other examples permeate the novel but are less noticeable at first. Mark, for example, not only keeps everyone up to date with the comings and going of "our pool buddies in jail"; he loves to tell stories about "the old neighbourhood" too (46). Kenny also "tells stories about the good old days" (47). Joseph, the narrator's landlord, "often speaks about New Orleans and "says he wants to return to where he was born" (56). VJ, originally from North Carolina, yearns to return. In another scene, the narrator uses all his cash to treat his lover to South African produce: "I wanted her to taste the Boland, the stone and the sediment of Helshoogte" (58).

Van Schalkwyk not only uses memories to establish the diversity of his characters; these also draw attention to similarities across race, culture and nationality. For example, on arriving in the US and taking a shuttle to Brooklyn, the narrator in *The Alibi Club* inspects all the streets, buildings and people they pass. He has never seen any of them before, yet he can recognise a "wife-beater with a fur hat," who is "fixing a car stored in a wooden shed" (12). Although he is overwhelmed by the novelty and strangeness of New York, to him, the city and its inhabitants are not entirely unfamiliar. He uses memory to interpret his surroundings and to connect past and present. Similarly, Joschka's grandmother serve him and X freshly baked apple tart: this reminds X of his mother's crabapple tree and stewed fruit. In another

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<sup>219</sup> 'Oorlog, bloeisels: ('n reisverhaal').

example, the narrator in *The Alibi Club* and his friend Sangho share childhood stories (74). Sangho remembers his school days in South Korea in the 1960s while the narrator relates his school experiences in South Africa in the 1980s. Their memories are remarkably similar (74): “He speaks about drill practice and hoisting the flag; I speak about drill practice and hoisting the flag. He speaks about night marches; I speak about night marches and an exercise called ‘stalk the lantern’. The protagonist and the Frenchman John-Baptiste also share similar stories of childhood family meals. These scenes bring to mind Boym’s notion that nostalgia is not only a process that connects the individual with his or her past; it also links individual biography with collective memory.<sup>220</sup> In this regard, Walder notes that nostalgia joins people across personal, historical and national boundaries.<sup>221</sup> By sharing childhood stories and discovering both similarities and dissimilarities, the characters create a space in which they can connect their personal stories with those of others.

These scenes also bring to mind the notion that nostalgia becomes a coping strategy for the displaced. While it has been suggested that feelings of loneliness exacerbate nostalgia, some argue that it also counters negative emotions associated with isolation. Nostalgia can provide a sense of social support and aid the displaced in constructing new lives in foreign countries.<sup>222</sup> Certainly, it is the case with Van Schalkwyk’s characters: their memories of the past bring comfort and a sense of belonging.

While Naudé uses memory to foreground the connection between past and present, and narrative and identity, Van Schalkwyk alludes to the idea that memory connects people, reaffirms identity and validates our existence. For example, on his way back to Ireland, Owen phones the narrator in *The Alibi Club* (175):

“Say, remember when I had that megaphone? The one those guys Jimmy and Dan brought to the bar?”  
“I do.”  
“Remember what I said? Remember I was screaming through it onto the street?”  
...  
“You were screaming, ‘Scorchio! Mega-tsunami!’”  
“I was. That was funny, right? Right? Say, you remember that time...”

There is an urgency to Owen’s questions; he needs assurance that the event had actually occurred.<sup>223</sup> The memory and affirmation of a probably often-told incident comfort him as he leaves his familiar environment and enters a new life. In this sense, the scene also reaffirms the idea that memory acts as a coping strategy: When confronted with the unfamiliar, Owen relies on memories to sustain him psychologically.

Van Schalkwyk’s casual nostalgic references might seem similar to some of the childhood references in Naudé’s stories, but they are significantly different. In one example, Ondien does not give heed to the warning signs that Hendrik (who later rapes Beauty), might be dangerous, because “Hendrik

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<sup>220</sup> Boym, 2007:8-9.

<sup>221</sup> Walder, 2011:1, 18.

<sup>222</sup> Radstone, 2010:187; and Sedikides et al., 2008:306.

<sup>223</sup> The extract also alludes to the notion that memory is often unreliable, and suggests that the further we move away from a memory – whether in time or space – the more distorted it becomes and the less we trust ourselves to remember accurately. See Mba0 (2010:67), Johnson (2007:5) and Rushdie (1992:10-1).

smells of engines and grass” and “It puts Ondien at ease: smells from her childhood days on the Free State farm” (164). Although Ondien is comforted by the familiar, she does not, like Van Schalkwyk’s characters, yearn to return to another place or time. Also, she does not reveal whether she ever liked/disliked the smells of grass and engines, or whether these evoke fond or unpleasant memories. They merely remind her of the past, and their familiarity brings comfort. In contrast, members of *The Alibi Club* indulgently reminisce about the past and display a strong desire to relive certain events and to return to specific places. They retell their stories in attempts to preserve them; their aim is not to reflect on the past or to contemplate its connection with the present. Because Naudé’s protagonists – again with the exception of Z – make deliberate attempts to erase memories, the recollections they *do* have, are telling. It is not the case with *The Alibi Club* in which the memories themselves are not as significant as their function to draw attention to the heterogeneity of the cast of characters and to the temporality of experiences, identities and places. Naudé (wary of nostalgia) and the less cautious Van Schalkwyk both use memory to draw attention to the diasporic condition.

(b) *Dealing in Broken Mirrors*

In Part II, I have established that stories told about the past are reconstructions of memories. In Rushdie’s view, these reassembled narratives resemble a broken mirror in which the past does not appear as it had been, but as it is retold.<sup>224</sup> Nevertheless, these impressions play a crucial role in helping the displaced to reclaim their pasts and to confront their losses.

Naudé and Van Schalkwyk address the problematic of trying to piece together the fragmented past. Like Rushdie and Jacob Dlamini in his book *Native Nostalgia*, the characters in *The Alphabet of Birds* are all in the process of restoring a narrative by assembling “shards of glass” and “shattered fragments of memory,” as the below extract from ‘A Master from Germany’ illustrates.<sup>225</sup> While trying to process the news that his mother is dying, X attempts to conjure up memories of her (77):

A miniature scene is all he is capable of: He can only put together small pictures, in a chaotic fashion: he and Joschka, fragments of the castle, the house with the room full of plastic swords, the fragments of forest around him, his own worry and sorrow. His mother: she stays on the edge of the photographs, too over-exposed to recognise, the continent where she finds herself too cut off from everything northern.

There are many similar examples of distorted and fragmented recollections in Naudé’s work. In contrast, however, his characters also have lucid and detailed flashbacks to particular moments, “other clear fragments” (62), “chunks of time he remembers clearly, jutting out like shards of glass” (60). His main characters recall some events in astonishing detail; others remain out of focus. This suggests that their memories are unreliable, held together only by a few references to the past.

The majority of Naudé’s characters deal in broken mirrors, as Ondien’s attempts to string together a few melodies illustrate. She compares her laborious efforts to capture these “shred[s] of music that vanishes before [they] can be caught” to memory and to her quest to reclaim her narrative: “Thus

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<sup>224</sup> Rushdie, 1992:10-1. Also see Johnson (2007:51) and (2010:67).

<sup>225</sup> Dlamini, 2014:18; and Rushdie, 1992:11-2.

one remembers, she thinks. And thus one forgets, is forgotten. Even by your own music" (214).<sup>226</sup> She seems to reiterate Breytenbach's idea that "we are nothing if we cannot tell ourselves," and these shreds of "vanishing" melodies represent the shards of memories that she is trying to reconstruct into a complete life narrative.<sup>227</sup> As shown in the previous discussion, Z in 'War, Blossoms' busies himself with the same task of sifting through fact and fiction. His occupation with diarising his travels with Hisashi points to his need to make sense of his present by delving into a reimagined past.

Related to the issue of the distorted nature of memory, are Naudé and Van Schalkwyk's reflections on the act of memory making. While some characters try to reimagine the past, others, like Van Schalkwyk's cast and Joschka in 'A Master from Germany,' deliberately attempt to disconnect from the present and reach oblivion by remaining in states of inebriation. Others detach themselves from the present by keeping to mind-numbing and strict routines. These temporary, self-induced "absences" from the present render characters unable to recall events. As a result, their memories become fractured and confused. For example, during their night-time adventures in Berlin – filled with drugs and alcohol – X and Joschka lose all sense of time, place or sequence: "There are times when they linger – sometimes it feels like an eternity, sometimes like seconds – in apartments all over town" (60); and "Later he will be unable to recall large parts of that night. In reality it was probably two or three nights, people and events having since merged. Like shadows observed through a smoke-blackened pane" (60). The people and the places they encounter fuse. There is also a reference to Joschka's unaccountable disappearances, his two-day sleep marathons, and his "surrender to lost time" or "the vanished days" (68).

Similarly, Van Schalkwyk's characters surrender to debauchery, going about their daily activities in a continuous state of oblivion, keeping to stringent routines. They seem to simultaneously despise and prefer the predictability and familiarity of their days. At one point, the narrator says (83): "I know exactly how my day will play out. I know what will happen... I know how my day will evolve. I know how my night will turn out. I know I'll end up sleeping the morning away. I know what I'll have to do in the afternoon just to wake up". Towards the end, he admits, "We are lost" (141). Elsewhere, he writes the following (84):

Today is another day; tomorrow too...and we'll stare out the window, finding companionship in the autumn. Or in winter's love of bright sunshine. Spring: outside, a dense blue sky rolls in, flops over, feints into rusty leaves, imploding. The outside world is a leafy pyre of asbestos, smokestack touching space. Inside, where things are pale, we drink ourselves into drunkenness, convinced that where we are now is still the best place in the world. We sit back comfortably, reclining above the fray. We peer down into a faraway world, where barren lands drown in their own dreams. Down there, humanity is dry. Here, there is booze. Here, we have booze and more. The booze is ours.

Here, "the best place in the world" does not refer to the present, but to their state of oblivion. For the narrator, "everything falls into place" when he is high on Vicodin, and he tries to "dilute America with an alkaline numbness" (73-4, 21, 36, 42-3). Like Joschka, Van Schalkwyk's characters "surrender to lost time".

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<sup>226</sup> Breytenbach, 2009a:8.

<sup>227</sup> Breytenbach, 2009b:63.

Their actions indicate a desire to desensitise themselves to the present. Similarly, Joschka makes deliberate attempts to forget his past, and to suppress thoughts of his potentially fatal illness by surrendering to the unpredictable nightlife of Berlin (67):

There were, admittedly, many other forms of self-surrender; this he understood early on – ways in which Joschka sought sweet oblivion. *Vergessenheit*. The signs were there: the ways in which Joschka instinctively knew the underbelly of the city, could read it immediately, the snippets he divulged about his life in Berlin. There were fiery and unknowable impulses just below the smooth skin. A frail bravado, an unsettling unpredictability. Above all, he possessed a hungry kind of beauty. Simultaneously vulnerable and careless. Glowing and chiselled. The eyes of a stag.

From this passage, however, we get the impression that Joschka – unlike Van Schalkwyk's characters – has a desire to be present in the moment. He abandons himself in debauchery, precisely because it allows him to experience the present more intensely. Later, however, he too is unable to remember much.

Ondien and her siblings also try to distance themselves from their situations. Ondien's sister Zelda has stripped herself of all memories and links to the past: She lives in a bare house with no pictures, no signs that anyone lives there (190). Her brother with "his aura of a life beyond national identity" seems to have shed himself of the past (192). Being a part of the "diaspora of fearful, grim, white children from South Africa," the protagonist in 'War, Blossoms' wants to be liberated from the past (114). During their states of numbness, the characters in both works feel disconnected from their immediate surroundings, and the outside world seems "faraway" and "barren".<sup>228</sup>

These examples show that Naudé and Van Schalkwyk both address the fractured and unreliable nature of memory associated with the diasporic experience. They also indicate that Naudé and Van Schalkwyk's characters are troubled by their pasts and struggle to negotiate their present circumstances.

### **The Private Language of Loss and Grief**

Part I shows that loss, grief, nostalgia and home are integral to the diasporic experience. Indeed, the Greek term *algia*, as pointed out earlier, refers to pain, grief and longing.<sup>229</sup> Unsurprisingly, both works display reflections on grief and longing. Naudé's characters, in particular, seem to be haunted by the losses incurred by extended periods spent abroad. Furthermore, the event of homecoming and the task of caring for a dying parent exacerbate their grief and sense of loss. At one point, Ondien suggests to her sister Zelda that it would be better to erase the past than to remember because memories remind one of these losses. Having volunteered at a rehabilitation centre, Ondien has observed first-hand how children who suffer from aphasia interpret experiences and cope with loss. "The happiest ones are those who don't know what they've lost or forgotten," she says (185). Van Schalkwyk also alludes to this idea in a scene where VJ explains to the narrator how to win a game of pool: "You miss a ball when you allow doubt to enter your mind, when you stop believing, when you think of the things you've lost before. If you want to play pool, you need to control your thoughts first" (51-2).

Van Schalkwyk's characters do not dwell on loss, but in *The Alphabet of Birds* Naudé considers

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<sup>228</sup> See Van Schalkwyk (2014:84).

<sup>229</sup> Moonsamy, 2014:3; Walder, 2011:8; Sedikides et al., 2008:304; and Boym, 2007:7 & 1996:511.



its complexities. He asks: Can one understand the grief of another? How does one give voice to loss? Is it possible to enter into a meaningful universal conversation about these? At one point, Ondien considers these questions (214): "Another question you would want to ask is: 'Can one grieve alone?' 'Grief' you would frown and shake your head, 'as private language, Ondien? Here in your little room, in a barren garden, hands flitting over a stunted organ?'" In 'A Master from Germany' and 'War, Blossoms' the main characters also deliberate these questions. While caring for his dying mother, X "tries to understand the nature of pain" (81):

The pain renders his mother speechless. It is a blade cutting them from each other, a presence in the car that dominates them in different ways, makes them absent from each other. In himself there is an echo of her pain, black and shiny and enormous and soundless. But it is not pain itself – The pain inside her is a strange impenetrable language. Not a Germanic language barked in a menacing voice, but a set of soundless signs. Like aleph, the unvoiced Hebrew consonant. Or what one hears when the birds fall silent" (81).

This passage also brings to mind the scene in which Ondien "tries to feel Beauty's pain in her own body" (170). These examples suggest that grief "makes us absent from each other," and what is considered to be an understanding of another's pain is nothing but an "echo" of their despair (81). In a letter, X writes that Joschka has taught him "to live with open endings," and that "even though we want to weigh them down with meanings...our painful little stories...just remain what they are: our own stories". "Pain," he concludes, "is a soundless language" (83).

In both works, the characters are very dissimilar: they come from different countries, their past experiences are disparate, they speak different languages and so on. As expatriates, they do, however, share experiences of displacement, a longing for home, and a sense of loss. These themes permeate the smaller narratives in *The Alphabet of Birds* and *The Alibi Club*, suggesting that individual stories have the potential to connect people across national, racial and cultural boundaries. The above examples show, however, that Naudé's characters find it impossible to express or share their sense of profound loss. In fact, both authors reflect on the thought that our experiences of loss and grief create a divide.

#### LITERARY DEVICES: REPRESENTING THE LIVED DIASPORIC EXPERIENCE

In Part I, I have established that the diasporic experience is associated with feelings of disorientation, displacement and estrangement. The literature study also confirms that diasporic subjects often function on the periphery of society, existing on a border between "here" and "there". Importantly, the discussions in this section show that Naudé and Van Schalkwyk address these issues in their stories. Vladislavíc confirms this when he writes that Naudé's characters are "restless" and "drifting between cultures and languages, the farm and the city, the difficult present and the vanished past". He also draws attention to their attempts to create new identities ("which do not quite hold") and "transient communities of the dislocated and the mismatched".<sup>230</sup> Having established that both authors engage with issues that are central to the diasporic experience, I now consider how Naudé and Van Schalkwyk use

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<sup>230</sup> Vladislavíc, 2014.

literary devices to reflect on the diasporic experience. I focus on juxtaposition, narrative structure and narrative style.

### **Juxtaposition**

By juxtaposing the worlds in which their characters function, the authors manage to accentuate their inner conflict, unease in the global world, position as outsiders, and confusion as they try to reconcile their opposing worlds and identities. Regarding space, Naudé not only juxtaposes South Africa and Germany in 'A Master from Germany' (the two countries in which he sets the story); he also creates worlds *within* worlds. The protagonist X and his lover Joschka's night-time excursions to Berlin's underground clubs are, for example, in sharp contrast to the intimate moments they experience making love in the castle, taking solitary walks in the forest, or the disquieting stillness in X's mother's suburban home in South Africa. By juxtaposing the worlds in which the protagonist functions, Naudé emphasises his double estrangement. For instance, when X returns to South Africa to take care of his dying mother, he feels increasingly detached from his life in Europe (82):

During the first week or three he and Joschka occasionally exchanged emails. But Joschka and the entire modern world – London, Berlin, Nuremberg, the castle above the valley – feel so utterly removed from this strange continent. From this place of his childhood that has nothing to do with him, that never really left traces on his consciousness. Their electronic epistles are devoid of substance, impart no concrete news. They are stiff and unnatural – nothing feels the same from here. The menace of his mother's illness dominates his thoughts, so that the events around Joschka in the previous months look increasingly distant and implausible, like something remembered from a story.

Being in South Africa aggravates X's emotional detachment from "this place of his childhood" and simultaneously distances him from his "increasingly distant" life in Europe. By placing these worlds side by side, Naudé draws attention to X's sense of displacement, his unease at being at the intersection of two lives, and his inability to negotiate a life and an identity that accommodate both worlds.

Naudé uses the same technique to foreground Ondien's dilemma. The emotional distance between the members of the Victorian Native Ladies Society is palpable during their stay on the border between South Africa and Lesotho. As they get closer to Lesotho, however, Ondien "is suddenly feeling lighter" and "Nungi laughs brightly": "Here, on the other side of the border, a greater sense of freedom is washing over them than they have felt since returning to the country. An old familiarity between them is returning" (154). Away from South Africa – whether in Lesotho or Europe – the three friends feel like sisters; back home, they are made aware of their differences, and they find it impossible to negotiate these contradictory identities. In one scene, for example, Nungi draws a line in the snow, separating her and Beauty from Ondien. "You're there, we're here. So it's always been," she says (170). Later, Ondien remarks that close relationships "in unpolluted form are impossible in this country" (180).

In the same way, being in South Africa reminds X of the different lives, worlds and identities he inhabits in South Africa and Germany that are "light years apart" (66, 70-1):

A call for him late afternoon on his cellphone. It is his mother from South Africa. He shifts from one corner of his mind to another through all the rooms in between... The jump in his mind to South Africa is too great, too fast. He returns to Bavaria, to the Oberpfalz. To Joschka, of whom his mother had never heard and never will.

X does not allow the boundaries between the two worlds to overlap; they are established, clearly demarcated. Through juxtaposition, however, Naudé disrupts the boundaries and order his characters try to maintain by placing them in absurd and dream-like milieux and confronting them with their antitheses. X and Joschka, for example, spend time in a fairy-tale like, dilapidated castle in Bavaria. Frederike and Tita's enormous 1920s villa in the middle of industrial Milan is almost fantastical. Here, Frederike and Tita – a concert pianist writing a PhD thesis on “the hellishly noisy future” provisionally titled “Noise, War and Loss” – proudly present an Intonarumori, an acoustic noise machine, to their guests as entertainment (228). It is perplexing, but Tita, an accomplished musician, is intrigued by cacophony and Russolo's six noise families: roars, whistling sounds, whispers, screeches, voices of animals and people, and sounds of percussion (227-8).

Such curious contradictions and surprising details pervade the collection. In ‘VNLS,’ the atmosphere on Hendrik's farm is ominous, the setup reminiscent of the French folktale *Bluebeard*. ‘Loose’ opens with a scene in which the protagonist dreams he is “doing ballet with a Japanese man at the Voortrekker Monument” (86). In Joschka's family's castle with its “pointed Gothic windows with lead glass as murky as silt,” the boy Maximillian “climbs on a sofa in his Nike sneakers and points out Alexander the Great in an oil painting” (66). In ‘Mother's Quartet’ the gradual collapse of Ondien and her siblings' worlds is contrasted with the modern world and its rapid progress. These examples not only foreground the contradictory nature of a borderless world; they also highlight the characters' confusion in trying to negotiate their place in it. Naudé, therefore, uses juxtaposition to draw attention to his characters' sense of unease and estrangement.

Van Schalkwyk uses the same technique. In *The Alibi Club*, the reader is aware of the divide between rich and poor, which accentuates the characters' abysmal lives in Fort Greene. On arriving in America, his narrator is aware of the vastly different worlds that exist in New York. En route to Fort Greene in Brooklyn, for example, he notices the “sparkly” Plaza Hotel in the affluent Manhattan: “People here wear fur and leather gloves. I'm wearing my dad's navy coat. A rolled-up duvet my mother gave me spills from under my arm. I hope nobody cares” (13). A few years later, “the richest people on the planet, blown out of Manhattan before noon” invade Fort Greene with “their Ferrari strollers,” and demand soya milk and organic vegetables as opposed to diluted beer, cheap coffee and takeaways (93). Throughout the novel, the reader is acutely aware of the unique spaces and places inhabited by the wealthy, the poor, and the criminal, and how these are adjusted in response to social-, political and economic changes.

Juxtaposition also draws attention to the losses that burden transnationals. At the laundromat, the narrator imagines the life the Korean couple must have left behind and how different their current lives as owners of a Wascomat must be (17): “Perhaps her [the wife's] finery was made out of real gold when they were still in Korea. He looks like a scientist or an architect... Now they survive here, childless, between nine-millimetre pistols and stacks of unwashed du-rags.” (This brings to mind Ondien's sister Vera's predicament: She and her family fled a violent South Africa only to find themselves in more

precarious circumstances in Abu Dhabi.) Here, as in other passages, Van Schalkwyk uses juxtaposition to highlight the disillusionment with which immigrants are confronted. Even his narrator is reduced to begging for food and eating scraps from a restaurant, collecting trash from the streets, and mopping floors and cleaning “puke and muck” in the urinals and toilets (39).

In terms of identity, both authors juxtapose their protagonists with their antitheses: X, a wealthy and successful corporate worker in London, falls in love with Joschka, an adventurous pâtissier who doesn't own a cent; an indifferent older Y awakens from his slumber when he meets a young dancer; Z is undeniably attracted to his friend Hisashi's “strangeness” (115). Significantly, these unexpected and unusual relationships allow the main characters to gain insight into their situations. X, for instance, is displeased with the predictable corporate life he leads in London. He “has had enough of the game” and “it bores him to death” (66). Joschka's simple life is sketched in stark contrast to X's seemingly secure and prosperous life. Joschka owns almost nothing, but “throws himself into his work with utter surrender, the creation of things that are sweet and full of visual drama” (67). The protagonist finds solace in Joschka's presence: “Joschka was the antidote to the whole lot. Joschka awoke him from his slumber, where he was lying on the bottom like a fish with gills hardly stirring” (67). Joschka's shadow – “soft and cool and intimate” – offers “instant consolation,” and his presence is described as “soothing and intimate as moss” (73, 75). He is also drawn to Joschka's ability to live seemingly unhindered by the past and unmoved by the world. Joschka is described as moving “with purpose, as if heading somewhere, as if his feet are lifting off the street” (59-61). Elsewhere, X withdraws from a party, but “Joschka is behind him unexpectedly, his fingertips resting lightly on his head”: “It is when he draws back, he knows, or now recalls, when he stops following, that Joschka comes and finds him” (62). This description is reminiscent of the parable of the shepherd and his lost sheep, suggesting that Joschka, who wears a “slender silver Jesus” around his neck, saves the protagonist from a doomed existence. In another scene the two of them “do not move, they just look at each other,” and “within a split second the entire world falls into place” (62-64). For Naudé's characters, home is not a place. It is, as Gready suggests, “a nation and it is a house, a room, a place within a room; it is in something as intangible as the timbre of a voice, a few bars of music, a fragrance or a taste”.<sup>231</sup> For X, Joschka is home.

In ‘Loose,’ the main character – a worldly, sceptical older man – meets a young and talented dancer to whom he is instantly attracted. In Sam's presence, he unburdens his mind and detaches himself from his present, unbearable situation in Pretoria (101):

He cannot let Sam go, he realises, he can only be in this place if it is with Sam. Sam who has nothing to do with his past here. He can only bear being in this city for so long as the strangeness that Sam is enabling him to feel endures. Sam makes it a different place, a nowhere place. While he is at Sam's side (Sam with his restless limbs!), he can remove himself in his mind. He is both here and not here.

Sam enables Y to disengage from the present and the past and to enter a space in-between. Without Nungi and Beauty, Ondien is unable to enter this third space, i.e. “to slip through boundaries” (176). In fact, when they abandon her to return to their families, Ondien cannot imagine a life without them and

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<sup>231</sup> Gready, 1994:510.

stops writing any music (178). After being arrested in Lesotho, Ondien tries to explain her predicament to the policemen (176):

'They are like sisters to me,' she says.

She wants to explain how they are the fuel for her metamorphoses, that they enable her to slip through boundaries. And through herself.

'Without them, I am stuck in my own skull, like in a cage.'

Like Frederike and Tita, Ondien seems to thrive on the tension created by opposing worlds, the "exquisite chaos" that evolves when unlikely elements meet (147). As a student in ethnomusicology, she welcomes variation: "...new influences made the VNLS sound even more complex, more chaotic" (145). She experiments with odd combinations of Western club music, instruments from North and West Africa, kwaito, Nigerian soul music, London electro-pop, lyrics in Cape Afrikaans and so on (145). She embodies Breytenbach's observation that "To be creative, we must be freed from attachments". He writes: "We have to unshackle the mind and keep it liberated if we want to stay it from reverting to the darkness of despair and self-interest only."<sup>232</sup> In one scene, Ondien "remind[ed] herself that she was unable to endure anything other than skimming the surface of this country; that this was the reason for her original departure. To make the music move forward, she has to avoid origins" (146). She realises that her position at the intersection – "here, on the edge of everything" – allows her to renegotiate her narrative (145). These characters' attraction to chaos, the other and the exotic could also be translated to the issue of identity, drawing attention to the complexity – and often contradictory – nature of a diasporic Self. Perhaps Naudé's characters must first accept their fractured and complicated identities – and accommodate the Other – in order to rewrite their narratives and identities.

Both Naudé and Van Schalkwyk use juxtaposition to foreground the tension that marks the experiences of transnationals who are destined to remain on the periphery, navigating lives and identities on the border between home and host country, the familiar and the strange. Importantly, this literary device also emphasises the confusing and disorientating effect of these negotiations. Through contrast, Naudé and Van Schalkwyk test the boundaries of their characters' identities and their worlds, drawing attention to the paradoxical and variegated nature of the lives of the displaced.

### **Narrative Structure**

In this section, I aim to show how Naudé and Van Schalkwyk use narrative structure to mirror the disorder, strangeness and displacement associated with the diasporic experience.

Firstly, none of the stories in either work is plot-driven. The narratives all seem like a collection of insignificant and disarranged memories. There is no strategy or structure to how the characters try to make sense of their memories and experiences, and their confusion is reflected in the narrative structure. For example, Van Schalkwyk's narrator's account of his time in New York is structured chronologically and in sections devoted to each year of his time spent there, starting at 1998 and ending at 2006-2007. So, we meet him as he arrives at the JFK Airport, and the novel ends with his departure and return to

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<sup>232</sup> Breytenbach, 2009b:61.

South Africa. The body of the novel is structured roughly around him settling into his new neighbourhood, starting his job at The Alibi, and the gradual gentrification of Fort Greene.

Despite resembling the structure of a diary, Van Schalkwyk's novel does not focus on the protagonist's experiences. Rather, the author strings together a series of smaller narratives that revolve around other characters, including the middle-aged Korean couple who manage the Laundromat, old Missus Dee with her sailor's tongue, the bar manager Owen (an illegal immigrant) who eventually returns to Ireland, and the neighbourhood handyman Kenny who still lives with his mother, among others. This collage of smaller narratives reflects the fractured nature of the diasporic experience. (Similarly, Naudé's stories are collections of partial memories and seemingly random events. Y's habit of "collect[ing] small narratives that one can construct from a fixed observation point" alludes to this idea [97].)

By foregrounding the narratives that unfold at the edge of the protagonist's experience, Van Schalkwyk draws attention to the stories of the marginalised. In this way, he allows alternative lived experiences to emerge and shows how globalisation "capture[s] and overwhelm[s] individual lives and communities".<sup>233</sup> By focusing on marginalised and contradictory voices, both authors write "against the grain" and acknowledge "that memory resides outside as well as within the library or museum," as Walder argues.<sup>234</sup> The authors choose to foreground individual reactions to global change, which is at the centre of contemporary diasporic enquiries.<sup>235</sup>

Regarding overall structure, Naudé's stories (unlike Van Schalkwyk's novel) are not told chronologically but are interrupted by flashbacks. This structure reflects Naudé's concern with things that are out of time and place. Furthermore, these analeptic references resemble the sense of disorientation and displacement linked to the diasporic condition. Importantly, they also highlight the tension between past, present and future, and draw attention to the fluidity of identities in response to change.<sup>236</sup>

Van Schalkwyk also disrupts the sense of time by alternating between longer (up to 11 pages) and very short chapters (about half a paragraph). Both techniques disorientate and unsettle the reader. In 'A Master from Germany,' Naudé accentuates the movement in time and place by indicating them at the start of each section: "Shortly before his mother's death" (58); "Let's first go back in time, a few months, to where he is standing halfway down the cellar stairs, looking at Joschka" (58); "Or let's go back a week further. Berlin" (59); "We are back in Bavaria now; a few days later. Saturday" (66); "Back at home" (71); "Sunday" (75); "We return to where we started, the nude scene in the bathroom" (80); "We move a few months ahead" (84). Furthermore, none of Naudé's stories start at the beginning, and all the endings are open. The narratives are structured in such a way that the reader – like the characters – loses a sense of time and place, and is made aware of their disorientation, and their dis-ease (as Moonsamy describes it) at functioning on the border between "here" and "there".<sup>237</sup> For example, Vera in 'Mother's Quartet,'

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<sup>233</sup> Walder, 2011:11.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>235</sup> Walder, 2011:11; and Rosenau, 2004:25.

<sup>236</sup> Naudé's concern with things that are out of time and place, and the idea of writing in-between languages, ties in with the question of locality in the work of both authors. As Hay (2017) notes in her review of *The Alphabet of Birds*, Naudé's stories are set "everywhere and nowhere". On this subject, Naudé writes: "I would argue for a different kind of serious African writing, which is neither necessarily predominantly concerned with South Africa, nor primarily set (t)here, but still driven by the urgency and deep necessity that fuel good writing. And which is not 'everywhere and nowhere' either... I certainly don't find the question of where to set my stories strange. For me, the strangest setting, the one that requires the greatest imaginative effort, is in fact South Africa" (Naudé & Vladislavíc, 2014).

<sup>237</sup> Moonsamy, 2014:3.

we are told, is “mercifully stripped of all context” in Abu Dhabi, and her brother Cornelius is in a board room in “any city, any time zone...eyes focused, but always on two points: here *and* there”. Their sister Zelda’s house in Phoenix in a “toy neighbourhood with neat lawns, white postboxes and paved driveways” is bare, white and impersonal (183). In Lesotho, Ondien is keenly aware of the “forlornness of the little village,” and that she is “stuck in this outpost,” “on the edge of everything” (145).

Naudé and Van Schalkwyk’s choice of narrative structure – i.e. open beginnings and endings, the absence of plot devices, narratives within narratives, disruptions in time – reflect the unsettling and transient nature of the diasporic experience.

### Narrative Style

In this section, I examine how the authors use narrative style to embody the nature of the lived diasporic experience. I then reflect on how their use of language supports the narrative structure and style.

Naudé’s style is expressive and eloquent, yet unembellished – Hay describes it as “clean,” “lean” and “athletic”.<sup>238</sup> It evokes a sense of otherworldliness while remaining unsentimental. Van Schalkwyk’s protagonist, on the other hand, narrates the details of his life in a fashion similar to that of the Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgård, emphasising the monotonous humdrum of daily living. As I have argued above, *The Alibi Club* is, in its entirety, a series of nugatory moments documented like diary entries: the pace is brisk, the sentences short, and the paragraphs brief. These two different worlds – created by narrative style – not only defamiliarise everyday life but also foreground the characters’ disengagement with their immediate environments. They emphasise the emotional disconnect the characters experience.

For instance, the succinct, matter-of-fact style in which Van Schalkwyk’s protagonist narrates his life suggests a deliberate effort to desensitise himself and suppress emotion. The narrative style also emphasises the protagonist’s fixation on the mundane, pointing to his inability to navigate his present. A typical example would be his entry about the Laundromat, which, he writes, is “next to Brothers Cleaners on Waverly and Lafayette” and has “sixteen silver Wascomat Junior W75 machines”. The laundry bags, marked with handwritten signs that say “Laundry Bag, \$7” (“the seven has been underlined twice”) are connected by safety pins, and a “bottle-green linen laundry bag with a nylon pull-cord hangs above a tower of plastic bags” (16). And so forth. In another example, the narrator devotes a paragraph-long chapter to a short visit to the Bronx Zoo with a girlfriend who wants to see a gorilla. Here, Van Schalkwyk’s succinct style underlines the absurdity of the situation (90): “She has a car that she drives. We’re going to the zoo. One gorilla falls out of a tree. The rest can’t keep their spit inside. She starts to cry. We are surrounded by screaming children. Gorillas are boring. They just sway.”

In the same way, the ethereal quality of Naudé’s scenes draws attention to his characters’ hesitation to acknowledge their present predicaments, while, at the same time, it adds a sense of gravity, creating the impression that every inconsequential moment is charged with meaning (61).

The authors’ choice of narrative style distances the characters from their surroundings and accentuates the unstable and estranging nature of the diasporic condition. In both cases, the narrative style supports the narrative structure. In the following section, I briefly discuss how the authors draw on language to further reinforce the narrative style.

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<sup>238</sup> Hay, 2017.

(a) *The Post-verbal (or The Language of Birds)*

As the title of his collection hints at, Naudé is concerned with language, i.e. the symbols with which we interpret, describe and remember our worlds. More than any other device or technique, Naudé's mastery of language allows him to create stories that exhibit an appreciation for the beauty of the unremarkable, and an underlying sense of purposelessness, forlornness *and* promise.

Naudé's precise language emphasises his characters' inability to interpret or express their experiences. In contrast to Sam's captivating and unrestrained dance performances or Ondien's impetuous shows, for example, the conversations between Naudé's characters are stilted and obscure. At one point, X says: "How slowly the dew is forming, Joschka: like lava hardening into a landscape, a continent breaking apart...like a pearl growing in an oyster" (62). The characters seem unable to connect through language. This idea is underlined in 'Mother's Quartet' when Ondien, while trying to have a discussion with her brother Cornelius, thinks that conversation is "at the best of times a joint game by the speaker and listener against the forces of confusion" (191).

Van Schalkwyk's characters too struggle to have meaningful conversations. Contrary to those in *The Alphabet of Birds*, however, they often resort to fatuous and obscure one-way conversations or joking and cursing. For example, Barry "mostly talks into thin air, waiting for someone to respond" (53). His monologues are nonsensical: "Fuck him, fucking old man. He's an old fucking man, just an old man on the floor now, stupid motherfucker" (55). Despite sharing the language, English becomes an obstacle for the characters in both works. The juxtaposition between the characters' inability to express themselves articulately and the authors' precise use of language draw attention to the limitations of language. In this regard, Breytenbach meditates on how we are "positioned to and in language," and he writes: "We seem forever incapable of grasping and expressing all the variations of our changes."<sup>239</sup> Naudé's concern with this question is evident in his 2016 essay. In light of his initial inability to think or write in his mother tongue after decades abroad, he reflects on "*táálloosheid*" ("languagelessness"). (On this subject, Snyman writes that "a yearning to be understood calls for a language beyond language".)<sup>240</sup>

Using the idea of the post-verbal as a point of departure, Naudé then explores alternative possibilities, such as performance art.<sup>241</sup> In *The Alphabet of Birds*, he gives thought to the idea that the languages of the unconscious can allow us to, as Breytenbach puts it, "grasp[ing] and express[ing] all the variations of our changes".<sup>242</sup> For example, the dancer Sam substitutes words with movement, and Ondien finds structure in a strange fusion of music, dance and theatre. (Notably, as part of her thesis, she is on a quest to ascertain where music ends and speech begins [170].) In 'The Noise Machine,' Tom considers the possibility that concert pianist Tita might be testing the boundaries of performance by keeping still behind the piano instead of playing. Tita and Frederike's interest in Russolo's six noise families points to an inclination towards cacophony (227-8). Z in 'War, Blossoms' vividly remembers the bizarre theatre performances he and Hisashi attended during their travels. Through these characters, Naudé explores the boundaries and limitations of language. His use of sparse dialogue, yet elaborate and precise descriptions of the dance, theatre and music performances, supports my argument. In the introduction to

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<sup>239</sup> Breytenbach, 2009d:142.

<sup>240</sup> Snyman, 1999:293.

<sup>241</sup> See Breytenbach (2009d:137).

<sup>242</sup> Breytenbach, 2009d:142.



Naudé's collection, Damon Galgut underlines this idea: "In this peeling away towards some essential core, language is one more veil to be shed. It's ironic that a writer like Naudé, who uses words with elegant exactness, should find them so obtrusive, but he does." And later: "...in order to understand, you would have to speak in impossible symbols. It is this missing resolution, cryptic letters written in bird-shit, that embodies the mystery at the heart of these narratives" (11).

(b) *Rejecting the Post-verbal*

To further explore Naudé's and Van Schalkwyk's thoughts on language and the post-verbal, I want to focus on three examples: Y and Sam's dancing, Ondien's fixation on finding patterns (melodies) in discord, and Z's attempt to journal his experiences with Hisashi.

Naudé and Van Schalkwyk both allude to the idea that transnationals share experiences of pain and loss, but the limitations of language keep them from connecting through these shared experiences. Having established this idea in *The Alphabet of Birds* and *The Alibi Club*, both Naudé and Van Schalkwyk consider performance art as an alternative to language but ultimately reject the post-verbal. As Naudé writes to Vladislavíc, "As regards the (sometimes fictional) music in my stories, perhaps it's a way of conjuring up something that, although inaudible to the reader, may compensate for one's inability as a writer to express certain things. Perhaps one could think of it as something akin to bird language. Of course, even though it's meant to speak of the *failure* of words, it's conjured up *using* words".<sup>243</sup> Performance is, in his view, never a substitute for, but rather a supplement to language.

Naudé nevertheless explores both options in this collection. Some of his characters rely solely on dance and music to make sense of the world; others find performance insufficient. The dancer Sam hints at the idea that one can apprehend another's pain only when you let go of the need to give voice to these experiences: "One shouldn't be too full of stuff, though; you must become a vessel, a basket into which audiences can load everything they want to. You sacrifice yourself when you perform. There has to be enough space" (92). This passage implies that connection with others occurs somewhere beyond language. It turns out to be partially true for the narrator. When Y watches Sam perform, he is made aware of "his own mute, non-writing body," "like wood" (91). Sam believes that one can gain insight only by rejecting the structures of language and narrative. Naudé further contemplates the idea that performance art not only gives a sense of freedom but also offers a more reliable way to remember the past, as it excavates memories from the subconscious (as opposed to language that tries to give structure to memories). On being asked what the source of his movement is, for example, Sam replies, "You search around, I guess," pointing at his chest: "You remember stuff." (91).

Sam's dancing is not only a deliberate effort to forget his traumatic past; it is also his way of evading negative emotions. At one point he says, "But maybe...if my body keeps moving, I can avoid going on their [his parents'] kind of bad trips" (92). The idea is reinforced elsewhere when the main character's traumatised sister, a "withering" former ballerina, dances with Sam: "Tentatively. Shadows of old movements starting to unwind the body's memory" (99). When they finish the dance, "it looks as if something healing is flowing through her, as if she is starting to regain her original shape" (100). The same happens to the protagonist in this story when he dances with a Japanese ballerina in his dream and has a

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<sup>243</sup> Naudé & Vladislavíc, 2014.

sense of becoming lighter and more gracious: "Where did it come from, all that grief that had to be danced away in the dream?" (87). Here, Naudé explores the notion that grief, like memory, is inherited, and that it thrives in the subconscious.<sup>244</sup> Elsewhere, the mother in 'War, Blossoms' whispers that she has "terrible pain": "Deep. From underneath the foundations, from the soil" (121). And after being cooped up in his Cape Town flat, the main character in 'Loose' realises that he carries "sorrow in his bones" (97).

Ondien depends on music to elude her reality. Music is a fundamental part of her: she interprets her world and expresses herself through sound. It is the same for Sam in 'Loose'. While watching his young lover perform a dance routine onstage, the protagonist senses that the dance "is about the more difficult stuff behind emotions," or even "things that precede emotions...for which there are no words" (102). Sam is more accomplished at dancing than at describing his emotions (87). Unable to express himself, the narrator in *The Alibi Club* also resorts to music, and the piano in the bar's back room becomes his "most precious possession" (87, 88).

References to music and its ability to offer escape pervade both books. For example, when the protagonist in 'A Master from Germany' "gets bored of being lost" while wandering through the forest, "the bass line of music" guides him to the forest exit (78). In another scene, the protagonist in 'War, Blossoms' manages to get a few spoonfuls of food into his mother's mouth only when he puts on some relaxing music (119). In *The Alibi Club*, a whole chapter is devoted to describing the intricacies and politics of obtaining and retaining a jukebox in a bar.<sup>245</sup> Music also provides a soundtrack to Naudé's stories, in particular 'VNLS,' 'Mother's Quartet' and 'War, Blossoms'. Indeed, in their e-mail discussion on translation and writing, Vladislavíc draws attention to the presence of music in Naudé's work.<sup>246</sup> Z's days are, for example, described in terms of sound (119):

These days have a barely audible undertone, like the music she [his mother] listens to, an underlying note that is sustained and trance-inducing. A divine presence is thus made audible, say those who are knowledgeable about such music. He thinks it is the sound of breath forced through the vocal chords while the body is disintegrating. The sound of inconsolability.

In one scene, he hears the "chant of monks" and a "droning bass behind it" which "could be God's voice, or the voice of the deep sea" (130). Similarly, Ondien's funeral march reinforces the ominous tone and the imminent danger in 'VNLS' and 'Mother's Quartet'.

As pointed out earlier, Naudé, however, rejects the post-verbal, finding it difficult to imagine a world that exists outside the structure of language and narrative. Like Ondien and Sam, who interpret their lives in terms of sound and movement, Naudé argues that writing in Afrikaans is the only way for him to "give texture to the surface of such a strange planet".<sup>247</sup> His protagonist in 'Loose,' for example, ultimately rejects Sam's aversion to words, questioning his obsession with movement. He asks: "What are we loosening ourselves for? What is the main performance? What...if you let the muscles go and

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<sup>244</sup> In one scene, the protagonist in 'War, Blossoms' mentions his European friend Phillippe's "inherited memory" and the fact that he (the protagonist) is "often struck by the way his European friends remember places they have never known" (115).

<sup>245</sup> Dlamini (2014:81) hints at the role music played in the construction of identity and community in Katshehong; it was an important part of the Christianised black elite identity and a clear indicator of class.

<sup>246</sup> See Naudé and Vladislavíc (2014).

<sup>247</sup> Naudé, 2014:132.

then never regain a grip on them? What if they then have their own existence? A life of staggering, he thinks, of non-coordination and dissolution” (94). Sam and Ondien both operate in such worlds, in a no man’s land without explicit boundaries, rules or structure – “the opposite of narrative” (102). Their uncoordinated lives are reflected in the structure of Naudé’s stories, marked by open beginnings and endings, an absence of plot, and a non-chronological form. Unlike Sam and Ondien, however, Y “need(s) proper beginnings and endings, structure” (106). “A story without a plot, an unchoreographed dance routine, and unscripted play” do not appeal to him (102). He realises that he needs clear direction, and symbols and narrative imply logic, structure, familiarity and stability.

Similarly the protagonist in ‘War, Blossoms,’ gives thought to the process of writing while journaling his travels with Hisashi: “Perhaps this will enable him to start exploring the textures around him, the most mysterious of all surfaces” (140). He aims to write “a thorough report, day by day” of their trip to understand “what it has to do with what is happening here and now” (128). From his vantage point, the past and future are connected, and this link can be unravelled through the process of writing.<sup>248</sup>

I end this discussion by remarking on Naudé’s choice to write in Afrikaans (his mother tongue) because his concern with language permeates his work. As a point of departure, I refer to a scene in which Ondien explains to Cornelius how the American Louis Wolfson wrote in French in a deliberate attempt to forget his mother tongue (199):

He wanted to decapitate and disempower the language. The problem, she explains, was that the more he tried to forget, the more he forced himself to remember. The wounds that the mother tongue had carved on him were reopened by every attempt to displace them. And yet, and yet. His project, she explains, also opened a glimmer of possibility that, one day, he would be able to forge a new relationship with the mother tongue. That he would be able to return to it, as if to a lost land.

In his 2016 address, Naudé admits that English comes more naturally than Afrikaans – writing in Afrikaans is an intentional act of translation. Like Wolfson, he is still negotiating a new relationship with this language. In his correspondence with Vladislavíc, Naudé explains how he thinks in English, writes in Afrikaans (which requires a process of translation), and then translates his work back into English.<sup>249</sup> For him, writing in Afrikaans is a process of going back to the beginning, to his roots.<sup>250</sup>

Naudé’s process brings to mind Breytenbach’s remark that language is an indispensable component of the Afrikaner identity. He refers to it as “the very thread of consciousness,” “a tool of

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<sup>248</sup> Dlamini (2014:41) also hints at this in his memoir: “There is little storytelling being done in Katlehong nowadays. So let me move on to tell a story about Katlehong, a place of which I have such fond memories.”

<sup>249</sup> See Naudé and Vladislavíc (2014) for full correspondence.

<sup>250</sup> On this subject, he writes: “Is it Afrikaans clicking and rustling in your thoughts? When you begin to listen, you realise that you mostly murmur in English, here and there a fragment in German. The Afrikaans will only come later; some sort of translation. It now happens less often than five or six years ago when you suddenly discovered the language again, like an unearthed coin. When it felt more unfamiliar against the hard roof of your mouth than it does now. These days your way of thinking gravitates back, towards Afrikaans, but it is, alas, not yet wholly Afrikaans” (Naudé, 2016). Original Afrikaans: “Is dit Afrikaans wat in jou gedagtes kliek en ruis? Toe jy begin luister, besef jy jy prewel meestal in Engels, met fragmente Duits tussenin. Die Afrikaans sal eers later kom; ’n soort vertaling. Dit gebeur nou minder dikwels, weliswaar, as vyf of ses jaar gelede, toe jy die taal skielik weer gevind het, soos ’n munt wat ’n mens opgrawe. Toe dit nog vreemder gevoel het teen hierdie harde verhemelte as nou. Die denkstroom neig deesdae terug na Afrikaans; dit is, helaas, nog nie heeltemal Afrikaans nie” (own translation).

inventiveness and renewal, a voice of history” and “the living tissue from past to present”.<sup>251</sup> “Maybe,” Naudé writes in his 2016 essay, “the answer is that, for me, Afrikaans lies in the middle of familiarity and strangeness, and a disruptive energy sparks between these two poles”.<sup>252</sup> He continues: “A constant translation of the self for a new cultural environment, and from that environment to the self, is inherent to the condition of being an emigrant.” He argues that if the emigrant writer’s experiences are positioned at the intersection of various cultural translations, and if the condition of cultural hybridity entails a continuous process of translating one’s thoughts, then such a writer’s experiences could be seen as existing between languages, or, alternatively, existing in more than one language simultaneously. “Perhaps,” he writes, “it only looks like you’re writing in Afrikaans; reality might be far more complicated.” These remarks bring to mind Boym’s argument that some stories can only be articulated in a foreign language. In her view, they are not “lost in translation, but conceived by it”.<sup>253</sup>

In reference to Dlamini’s *Native Nostalgia*, Naudé reflects on how *he* makes sense of his pre-1994 past, which he describes as a vacuum, a white space. And how does one describe and understand the present South Africa, one in which one feels almost just as strange? he asks. In answer to this, he ends his address as follows:<sup>254</sup>

For now, at least, you relentlessly continue to try and approach The Big Secret *through* Afrikaans. Afrikaans sentences stubbornly hide in the cavities of your bones. They are forever changing shape, trying to escape. Your task is to gain a grip on them, to use old words to make new sonorities audible, new vibrations perceptible. What other option do you have? With effort you force the sentences through the lobes of your brain and filter it through your skull. Slowly a cloud, formed through language, rises above your head. In silence you wait for the storm.

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<sup>251</sup> Breytenbach, 2009c:77-9.

<sup>252</sup> Naudé, 2016. Original Afrikaans: “Miskien...is die antwoord dat Afrikaans vir jou presies ewe ver van bekendheid en vreemdheid lê, en dat 'n ontwrigtende energie tussen daardie pole vonk” (own translation.)

<sup>253</sup> Boym, 1996:529.

<sup>254</sup> Naudé, 2016. Original Afrikaans: “Voorlopig, ten minste, hou jy dus verbete aan om die Groot Geheime déúr Afrikaans te probeer benader. Afrikaanse sinne hou halsstarrig in die holtes van jou beendere skuil. Hulle verander pal van vorm, probeer jou ontglip. Jou taak is om 'n greep daarop te kry, om nuwe sonoriteite hoorbaar – of nuwe vibrasies voelbaar – te maak met ou woorde. Watter ander uitweg is daar? Jy pers die sinne moeisaam deur die breinlobbe, filtreer dit deur die skedel. Stadig styg die taalwolk bokant jou kroontjie. Dan wag jy in stilte vir die storm” (own translation). Elsewhere, in an essay on translating his own work, Naudé underscores this: “It [Afrikaans] was, it turned out, the language that demands to be written in: the language of one’s mother, embedded in the bones. It has proven impossible to escape (Naudé, 2017).

### PART III Conclusion

For his European friends, the dead are alive and the vanished places still exist. Loss is in their blood, the boundaries of time permeable. How different it is for him, a naïf from the remote Third World. For the recently dispersed with their encumbering passports. To them everything is new; everything has to be discovered and experienced and lost from scratch.

– S.J. Naudé<sup>255</sup>

#### INTRODUCTION

In this essay, I have set out to consider how Afrikaans authors S.J. Naudé and Jaco van Schalkwyk engage with the discourse on diaspora in their debut works of fiction. Prompted by Naudé's 2016 essay on literary fiction, nostalgia and South African literature, I explored how a contemporary generation of authors use literary devices and the mechanisms of nostalgia and memory to give voice to the lived diasporic experiences of their displaced characters – experiences that are distinct from the "official discourses of history," and marked by a growing sense of loss, estrangement, displacement and disillusionment.<sup>256</sup> To achieve this, I drew on contemporary debates and discourses on diaspora, which allowed me to discern and consider appropriate theoretical points of departure. Within this framework, I then reflected on the Afrikaner community as a diaspora and considered how its members navigate themselves in the global sphere. Against this background, I continued to analyse six of Naudé's short stories in *The Alphabet of Birds* and Van Schalkwyk's novel, *The Alibi Club*. In Part III I briefly summarise my impressions.

#### DISCUSSION

##### Part I: Context and Research Objectives

Part I of this essay highlights the complexity of the discourse on diaspora. Despite the many contentions, I have established that concepts of home, identity and longing remain inherent to the diasporic experience. Also, memory, nostalgia and narrative allow transnational subjects to negotiate their shifting identities, reconstruct their fragmented pasts and create new places (or spaces) of belonging. I further maintained that the Afrikaners exhibit the core features of a diaspora: dispersal across the globe; homeland orientation; and boundary maintenance.<sup>257</sup> Throughout, I have argued that the diaspora might allow Afrikaans-speaking South Africans to re-negotiate their pasts, reshape their identities, and re-imagine the present and the future. Ultimately, the discussion confirms that individuals inhabit multiple identities. Furthermore, the diaspora unlocks a space in which transnationals can reposition themselves in a world defined by continuous change, shifting identities and permeable boundaries.

##### Part II: Analysis

In Part II, my aim was twofold. Firstly, I set out to examine the various expressions of home, loss and grief, and memory and nostalgia in *The Alphabet of Birds* and *The Alibi Club*. I then explored how the authors draw on the literary form and its devices to represent the lived diasporic experiences of their characters. I

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<sup>255</sup> Naudé, 2014:115.

<sup>256</sup> Lourens, 2006:177; and Braziel & Mannur, 2003:5.

<sup>257</sup> Morcillo-Espina et al., 2014:13; and Brubaker, 2005:5-7.

divided Part II into two sections: the first focusing on the authors' engagement with concepts that are central to a diaspora; and in the second I concentrated on their use of juxtaposition, narrative structure and narrative style.

*(a) Engaging with Issues of Diaspora*

The analysis shows that Naudé and Van Schalkwyk address concepts of home, homeland and belonging. While Naudé focuses on the traumatic experience of homecoming, Van Schalkwyk explores the intricacies of creating new places of belonging in foreign countries. Reading the mother figure as the embodiment of home in Naudé's stories allowed me to explore further the complex mother-child/expat-homeland connection that pervades his collection. Also, it enabled me to consider how his characters renegotiate their relationships and their identities on returning to South Africa, and how their homecoming creates a diaspora of its own. My reading also shows that Naudé and Van Schalkwyk's characters respond to change and uncertainty by creating imagined homes or communities, which often involves a retraction from the outside world.

Using Rushdie's image of a broken mirror as a point of departure, I then reflected on the expressions of memory and nostalgia. The memories in Naudé's collection address the larger themes in his work: displacement, home and belonging. Furthermore, despite his aversion to nostalgia, some images – such as the rural farm, riding bicycles, home-cooked meals and mothers who garden – induce nostalgia. However, his characters (except Z) do not display any tendencies towards either reflective or restorative nostalgia. In contrast, Van Schalkwyk's characters succumb to nostalgia and frequently reminisce about the past to cope with their circumstances. Naudé uses memory to draw attention to the connection between past and present, and narrative and identity. Van Schalkwyk suggests that memory can connect strangers, reaffirm identity, and validate existence. Both authors use memory and nostalgia to foreground the sense of unbelonging, uncertainty and disorientation that marks the diasporic condition.

*(b) Representing the Lived Diasporic Experience*

Having established that Naudé and Van Schalkwyk address issues inherent to the discourse, I continued to illustrate how they use juxtaposition, narrative structure and narrative style to embody their characters' experiences. I argued that juxtaposition enables them to accentuate the inner conflict, unease and feelings of confusion and displacement their transnational subjects experience as they attempt to reconcile their opposing identities and worlds. Furthermore, the narratives suggest that their characters must embrace these conflicting identities, otherness, and their pasts if they are to position themselves within a global world. Their use of juxtaposition also accentuates the paradoxical, variegated nature of the lives of transnational subjects. Regarding narrative structure, I have argued that it functions to mirror the diasporic experience, marked by disorientation and displacement. The absence of plot, open endings and beginnings, interrupted narratives and analeptic references all represent the transient nature of a diaspora. The narrative structure mirrors the characters' experiences of being out of time and place.

Finally, I reflected on how Naudé and Van Schalkwyk use style and language to create fictional worlds that draw attention to the defamiliarising experience of displacement. Their choice of narrative style – one surreal, ethereal and the other matter-of-fact, resembling a diary – creates distance between the characters and their surroundings, and foregrounds their estrangement and loneliness. Furthermore,

the authors' precise use of language accentuates the characters' inability to express themselves and to make connections with others. Both authors draw attention to the ways in which language limits our understanding of the world. In this regard, Naudé considers – and ultimately rejects – a post-verbal approach. In the end, Naudé and Van Schalkwyk both embrace the limitations and test the boundaries of writing about their experiences, in Afrikaans.

## CONCLUSION

I initially set out to consider how S.J. Naudé and Jaco Van Schalkwyk use the literary form to explore the lived experiences of the Afrikaans-speaking transnational characters in their books *The Alphabet of Birds* and *The Alibi Club*. Having shown that both works grapple with issues that are central to the diaspora, I gave thought to how their characters re-imagine their pasts, come to terms with loss and grief, and renegotiate their identities in response to change. Both authors concern themselves with experiences on a micro-level: the stories of those that exist and function at the periphery, the narratives that are distinctly different from the grand historical.<sup>258</sup> Their characters are, as Nnaemeka articulates it, acting and acted upon in a global world that finds itself in flux.<sup>259</sup> Ultimately, the transnationals in *The Alphabet of Birds* and *The Alibi Club* face feelings of unbelonging, displacement, estrangement and uncertainty that are closely associated with the diasporic experience. Similar to members of a diasporic community, the characters in these novels function and exist at the intersection of opposing worlds and identities. Naudé and Van Schalkwyk suggest that fictional narratives can enable displaced Afrikaans-speaking South Africans to reflect on, re-imagine and renegotiate their past and present, identities and position in a borderless world.

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<sup>258</sup> See Rosenau, 2004:25.

<sup>259</sup> Nnaemeka, 2007:129.

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