

Fictions of Home and (Un)belonging: Diasporan Frameworks in Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* and Zoë Wicomb's 'Journey to the Gifberge'

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She was at that point at which some children find themselves, when to move forward would mean moving away (Cliff 1984:76).

Perhaps it's a dream, wishing to belong
(Wicomb in Hunter 1993:87).

The prologue and epilogue framing Rosemary George's *The Politics of Home* (1996), claim provocatively that 'All fiction is homesickness', and 'All homesickness is fiction'. This highlights the notion that home is not a real place as much as it is an imagined one; moreover, it is the desire for that always deferred location that shapes and is shaped by fiction: as George puts it, 'fictionality is an intrinsic aspect of home' (1996:11)¹. While fictions of exile—whether exile is chosen or enforced—have traditionally focused on the cultural alienation and personal isolation resulting from such displacements, a powerful counter-trend has emerged which balances this sense of unbelonging against a kind of 'newness' that is made possible through such translocations.

This notion is succinctly expressed by two recently published works by writers who, while both born in Africa, are very differently situated in terms of their relationship to Africa as 'home'. Speaking of his first novel, *Abyssinian Chronicles* (2000) Moses Isegawa who grew up in Uganda in the 1970s, says that his move to Holland where he has been living (by choice) for the past fourteen years enabled him to recognise that, 'It marked a break and a new beginning. It was my road to Damascus experience. A writer needs the shock of newness to wake him up' (*Mail &*

¹ A similar point is made by Salman Rushdie in his *Imaginary Homelands* (1991).

Guardian July 7 2000:9). Closer to home, Rob Nixon, who left South Africa for the United States to escape conscription into the Apartheid army, claims in his marvellous memoir, *Dreambirds* (1999), 'Every migration is an opportunity and a kind of death. The new world may be rich and strange, but you're somehow weightless in it' (1999:102). Both comments point to the 'opportunities' resulting from leaving home. However, a more complex relationship between home, (un)homeliness and fiction than that expressed by Isegawa and Nixon is explored in coming of age narratives by women writers from South Africa and the African diaspora who confront a conflicted situatedness within broader race/class discourses. For instance, representations of 'leaving home' offer an enabling 'deterritorializing' of given female subjectivities for writers like Zoë Wicomb who left South Africa for the United Kingdom in 1971 (though returning for a period between 1991-1993) and Jamaican-born Michelle Cliff who currently lives in the United States. By teasing out the intertextual relationships between Cliff's *Abeng* and Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*², I hope to show how such a comparative reading offers scope for a reassessment of selected South African texts such as Wicomb's within a diasporan framework, especially in relation to the construction of subjectivity. In other words, Wicomb's work should be more broadly contextualised than has generally been the case in much criticism of her work.

Michelle Cliff and Zoë Wicomb have commented similarly on their genesis as writers. Cliff draws on experiences not unlike those that Wicomb attributes to Frieda Shenton's development from childhood to young womanhood in the context of apartheid racial dichotomies in *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. Indeed, Cliff claimed kin with Wicomb during a symposium held in Seattle in 1990 on the critical relationship between imaginative writing and the political and social institutions that shape the writer's daily experience. Cliff (1999:66) began her presentation by quoting Wicomb:

Her words move me; they are connected at base with how I have felt about language and writing. She (Wicomb) says:

When I think about my own process of writing, the fact that I did not write for years and years, though I wanted to, it has to do with a sense

² Wicomb's new novel *David's Story* (2000) has just been published locally by Kwela Books. Other stories published in anthologies include 'In the Botanic Gardens' (in *The End of a Regime. An Anthology of Scottish-South African Writing Against Apartheid* 1991), and a story which 're-visions' Sarah Gertrude Millin's *God's Stepchildren*; 'Another Story' (in *Colours of a New Day: Writing For South Africa* 1990). Her latest story, 'N2', appeared in *At the Rendezvous of Victory and Other Stories* (1999).

of confidence. Unless your daily transaction with words is successful, unless words work for you, unless when you speak there are results, you're not going to have the confidence to use language.

She speaks for me, another 'coloured', from another end of the Empire (1991:66).

At the same symposium, Wicomb (1991:16) said:

What I consider to be of importance is to find one's voice and to value writing as a process of discovery, rather than focusing on the product.

As suggested in the epigraphs above, one important aspect of 'finding one's voice' concerns the function (and fiction?) of home and the sense of (un)belonging or unease, and the way these contribute to the experience of coming of age in different geo-political contexts.

This raises a number of questions: first, in view of the current preoccupation with the performativity of identities, how does the representation of this experience provide scope for exploring 'strategies of selfhood'; secondly, to what extent are these strategies determined by a problematic relationship to 'blackness', and finally, how do place and travel serve as ways in which to engage with 'newness'—both in terms of individual identity and broader socio-political transformation? While accepting that development is a relative concept and that theories of development generally have a specific class, history and gender emphasis, Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch and Elizabeth Langland argue that literature, and especially the novel of development, 'offers the complexity of form necessary to represent the interrelationships informing individual growth' (1983:4). Of interest here will be the way these fictions of development by Cliff and Wicomb encompass representations of both individual psycho-social development as well as an awareness of broader political processes.

Karla Holloway claims that textual practices, particularly figures of language, are expressive of both cultural and gendered ways of knowing as well as of framing that knowledge in language (1992:1). Her argument for a discrete (essential) tradition of 'blackwomen's' writing which privileges African descent is problematic in relation to South African writers who might claim a mixed cultural and linguistic heritage, including indigenous Khoi/San, African, Asian, and European heritages. Nevertheless, the textual strategies Holloway identifies, namely 'revision', '(re)membrance' and 'recursion' can provide a useful framework for analysis. For instance, by revision, she refers to the way Western literary traditions are 're-organised' in ways that undermine cultural hegemony, and this is a significant aspect of the fictional strategies used by Cliff and Wicomb.

Common to these strategies is the significance of voice which, according to Holloway, reveals an 'inner speech' which is at the same time expressive of a communal voice. This she associates with African oral, mythic, as well as call and response traditions, referring to these as 'speakerly' rather than the more typical 'writerly' texts associated with a predominantly male Western literary tradition (1992:75)³. The function of narrative voice in both texts will thus be of special interest. A question remains: are the textual strategies involving 'voice' and 'revision' here indicative of what Holloway sees as a discrete 'blackwoman's' literary tradition, or does this point to a more broadly based intertextuality involving, for instance, minorities, displacements, and even aspects of youth culture, which go beyond, but do not diminish, the boundaries of a discrete African heritage? I do not intend taking issue with Holloway's cogent argument that echoes of original cultures persist in syntactic (grammatical) and cultural (metaphoric) dimensions and that there are areas of linguistic and cultural interaction. My focus, however, is on aspects of what will be described as a diasporic literacy that is not confined to these legacies⁴.

Common to both Cliff's and Wicomb's texts are descriptions of literal and figurative journeys which provide scope for exploring the strategies of belonging or, as Wicomb suggests in the epigraph above, a dream of belonging. Both texts describe the development of the young female protagonist in relation to her developing awareness of her dual position 'both outside the dominant values and inside the society that lives by them' (Gardiner 1989:112)⁵. The inside/outside dialectic established in these texts serves as a variation of the 'privileged vantage point' inhabited by diasporic subjects referred to by Paul Gilroy (1993:111) where the negative meanings of unbelonging are reconstructed—in this case the sense of unbelonging being intertwined with the protagonist's feelings about her 'mixed' and (en)gendered heritage. In turn, Wicomb's and Cliff's texts problematise the homogenising effect of the category 'black' when used to refer to women whose geopolitical, cultural and class affiliations, as well as their personal experience of blackness, differ widely. The terms black, coloured, creole and even white should

³ Using Henry Louis Gates's discussion of the characteristics of 'speakerly texts' in which there is an attempt to produce the illusion of oral narrative, Ashraf Rushdy (1992:567-597) draws attention to the dialogical relationship between teller and listener established in the 'speakerly text'.

⁴ For further discussion of such oral and literary legacies see also, Gay Wilentz (1992), and Barbara Christian (1980). For a discussion on recursive strategies, see Carol Boyce Davies (1996).

⁵ Judith Kegan Gardiner draws on Rachel Blau DuPlessis's (1987) discussion of women's '(ambiguously) non hegemonic status'.

thus not be read as referring to stable categories here—hence the omission of capitals and inverted commas.

The diaspora or the dispersal of peoples is commonly associated with slavery, forced resettlement, exile and migration. However, rather than focusing on the familiar crises of alienation and globalisation, my concern is with what diasporan theorists have termed the 'in-between spaces' opened up as a result of the diasporic experience which can provide in Homi Bhabha's terms 'the terrain for elaborating strategies for selfhood—singular and communal' (1994:1). Although concerns have been expressed about the 'masculinist' aspect of such diasporan frameworks (De Loughrey, 1998)⁶, I will argue that the 'strategies of [gendered] selfhood' explored in these texts can be useful to the current preoccupation with identity politics and discourses of 'new' South African nationhood. This is particularly so in view of debates on the relationships between diversity and democracy, the difference between nation as unifying metaphor, and nationalism as exclusive ideology (see Mattes, 1997). At the same time there are often stark differences in the way a diasporic sensibility is experienced by differently situated people. For instance, Dorothy Driver (1993) notes that through being disenfranchised and forcibly dislocated from their homes, black South Africans have long been in a state of internal exile, situated almost in a diasporic relationship to 'home' within the homeland. Moreover, as a result of apartheid's ideological obsession with 'pure belonging', the waves of forced removals, illicit border crossings, military invasions and migrant labour have, according to Rob Nixon, resulted in a 'sprawling diaspora of guerrillas, refugees, and exiles, who had to piece together the most ironically hybrid identities on foreign shores' (1994:5).

Abeng draws on Cliff's own childhood in Jamaica and traces the coming of age of Clare Savage—the name suggestive of her mixed (Amerindian, Caribbean, African, European) parentage. In turn, this provides scope for exploring the complex history of Clare and her family, which is also the history of Jamaica. The dialogic, 'speakerly' narrative employed by Cliff enables her to describe Clare's development against the broader socio-political context. Sections of narrative, focalized through

⁶ This diasporic consciousness has been explored extensively by Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Gilroy. However, referring to masculinist aspects of diasporan frameworks such as Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey (1998:206) says that while these are 'crucial for their dismantling of (often colonial and pedagogical) nationalisms the focus on the movement of peoples across the Atlantic can be prematurely celebratory considering how gender and class inform and define transoceanic travel'. While mindful of this, I will show how the two texts under discussion point to an emancipatory discourse in spite of the engendered constraints referred to.

the experiences of the pre-pubescent Clare, are contextualised by snatches of traditional songs, historical narrative and the life stories of individual family members. We are told repeatedly that Clare becomes 'a visualiser rather than an analyzer' (76) of what is happening to her and around her; for instance, she observes the traces of past histories such as the burnt hut of Mma Alli who aborted the mixed-up foetus 'conceived in buckra [white] rape' (35), though at this stage Clare does not recognise that it was her own paternal colonising ancestor Justice Savage who was responsible for both the rape and the burning. This focus on visualising rather than analysing can be seen as an integral aspect of Cliff's revisionist strategy. The novel ends when Clare is twelve and entering womanhood, which in her case also involves separation from motherland when she is sent to school in the United States.

Commenting on her fictional Clare Savage during a conference on Caribbean Women Writers in 1988, Cliff describes her as a colonised child who also represents 'a crossroads character': 'She is a light-skinned female who has been removed from her homeland in a variety of ways and whose life is a movement back, ragged, interrupted, uncertain, to that homeland' (1990:265). The novel plots Clare's development, how it is shaped by her relationships with Boy Savage, her bigoted *buckra* father, and Kitty Freeman, her 'black and white' mother, who 'came alive only in the bush' (49). In addition, there is her rural grandmother, Mattie, and also her country friend Zoe (sic) whose development to some extent mirrors and contrasts her own. The life of the colonised child is bound, we are told, by the personalities, needs and desires of their parents, 'which is of course nothing new—only something which makes resistance very difficult, and may even make a child believe that resistance is impossible or unnecessary' (49). Apart from familial relationships, there are also the constraining institutions of church and school which act as agents of colonial control: 'For that is what she had been taught. She was a colonized child, and she lived within certain parameters—which clouded her judgment' (76).

Similar constraints binding the parameters of colonised childhood are explored in Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town*. In the first story, Frieda Shenton, growing up as coloured South African in rural Namaqualand, hides under the kitchen table during times of family tensions—such as the arrival of the English-speaking white man for regular inspection of the gypsum mine: 'At an early age I discovered the advantage of curling up motionless in moments of confusion, a position which in further education I found to be foetal' (1). However, her vantage point is not as safe as she had assumed for her mother's surveillant eye is fully aware of her child's position, as she whispers her suspicions about the 'play-white' coloured driver from Cape Town to her motionless child under the table. To her captive daughter she utters injunctions about the need to speak English, the language of civilisation, and cautions against speaking Afrikaans, not because it is the language of the oppressor, but because it is associated with 'uncouth Boers' and lower class

coloureds like the Dirkses. Her final admonishment: 'And don't think you'll get away with it, sitting under the table like a tame Griqua' (9) is interesting in view of the way her husband's people—we discover in a later story—initially looked down on her because of her own Griqua heritage⁷.

Apart from a common concern with the processes of colonised girlhood and the strategies of selfhood which are informed by internal journeys within the motherland and across the Atlantic, both Wicomb's and Cliff's works manifest a self-conscious network of intertextual cross-references with other writers. This intertextual cross-referencing strengthens the argument for a re-contextualisation of Wicomb's writing within a diasporan framework. Commenting on the diversity of cultural influences she has been exposed to through her experience of exile from South Africa in the UK, Wicomb says that deracination or hybridity need not be pathologised: 'indeed they are conditions that are essentially me and must be accepted and embraced as such' (1994:575)⁸. In terms of literary influences she refers to Toni Morrison in particular, but also to Bessie Head, and the epigraphs to Wicomb's collection are from the South African poet Arthur Nortje, who died in exile, and George Eliot. Another literary presence that can be traced in the book is Hardy, whose fictional landscape evokes the England Frieda longs to escape to at certain moments, while at the same time forewarning of the insidious discrimination she will be exposed to there. In *Abeng* these cross references are more direct, and as I shall show, there are deliberate echoes of scenes from Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* which also establish a dialogue with Rhys's text and its exploration of the trauma of 'un-belonging'.

For Cliff's fictional Clare Savage, separation from home is prompted by several parallel incidents. During her childhood she undertakes a number of internal travels when in her school vacation she is sent to live with her maternal grandmother,

⁷ The Griqua who have recently achieved First Nation status at the United Nations, are descendants of interrelationships between the indigenous Khoisan, ex-slaves and settlers. There have been several land claim cases involving the Griquas in post-election South Africa. In July 1998 the Griquas became South Africa's newest First Nation, having been awarded this status by the United Nations. 'First Nation status has so far been awarded to the San, Khoi and Griquas in South Africa, and to the Australian Aborigines, the natives of Greenland and several indigenous American peoples' (Heidi Clark *Mail & Guardian* 31 July 1998:40).

⁸ A similar point is made by Desiree Lewis in her discussion of hybridity and identity in relation to South African writers, Wicomb and Richard Rive. Lewis (1999:5) discusses the need to rescue the concept of hybridity from notions of contamination, noting that identity is always a process of negotiating available fictions rather than 'discovering a final fullness within them. See also Wicomb (1998).

Mattie, who lives in St Elizabeth, 'a parish in the deep country' (12). During this visit, she experiences the pain of exclusion for what appears to be the first time. This happens when her cousin Joseph suddenly abandons her when his half brother Ben arrives and the boys go off together on a secret mission to fry and eat the testicles of the freshly killed hog; a slaughter in which they participated, but which she was excluded from, being a girl. Like the episode in Wicomb's story where Frieda hides under the kitchen table, the boys are aware of Clare's presence, but carry on with their task as if she were invisible. When she keeps begging them to tell her what they are doing, feeling the 'so important need' to be able to 'join in', she hears in patois the prohibition she had heard many times before, but recognises now for what it signifies:

Dis sint'ing no fe gal dem.

Why not?

Is jus no fe gal pickney, dat's all.' She had heard this before—spoken in different ways (57).

What Clare understands here—and this epiphany is experienced somatically as a physical pain—is not only her gendered exclusion from the boys' activity, but also her racialised and class-based in-betweenness which affects her relationships with the country women. Later that same day, 'Lying in her bedroom watching the women at this remove, Clare felt separated from them' (61). Aware of her dual heritage, she feels the tension of shifting alliances expressed in shades of colour, kinds of English as well as physical markers of race and class. 'The Black or the white? A choice would be expected of her, she thought' (37). Her father insists that as she is his daughter she is white, and must therefore have the blackness bred out of her, but at the same time Clare has moments when she experiences a pre-oedipal longing for merging with her coloured mother—interestingly this is projected as a 'dream' and is associated with her trips to the country with her mother who sings a traditional lament as they cut through the bush (54).

Paralleling the exclusion from the hog-feast is the incident that marks Clare's literal expulsion, first from the country area and later Jamaica itself, when she secretly takes the gun and ammunition from her grandmother's home and goes out with the intention of killing Massa Cudjoe, the rogue pig haunting the countryside. Accompanying her somewhat reluctantly is her friend Zoe who later says that the only reason she came along was because she wanted to protect the foolish town girl buckra from herself. This event is another milestone in Clare's coming to consciousness, as she is forced by Zoe to recognise the differences between them. After Zoe manages to talk Clare out of her hog-slaughtering, the two bathe in the stream, and lie together naked on the rock in a moment of what Clare assumes is

girlhood intimacy—both potentially erotic and emotional. But this is shattered by the arrival of a cane cutter who stares at the naked girls; Clare's fear of the male intruder is expressed by adopting her most imperious buckra English voice and pointing the gun at him, and then accidentally firing a shot which kills Miss Mattie's prized bull. While proving that she can 'join in' and do things a boy can, Clare's impetuous action results not just in exclusion, but in her expulsion when her grandmother says she never wants to see her again: 'A beautiful pickney who was mean inside', scolds Miss Mattie, linking Clare's embodiment of perceived gender and race transgressions as causes of her shameful wickedness: 'No good a-tall, a-tall. A girl who seemed to think she was a boy. Or white. She would surely end up at the Alms house in Black River or worse in her ways' (134). In fact, a choice is made for Clare when she is sent to spend the rest of the vacation with the white lady, Miss Philip, pending her parents' decision about her future—which in effect entails her departure from Jamaica to go to school in the US.

As mentioned earlier, there is network of intertextual cross-referencing in both Wicomb's and Cliff's works, and this invites a framework for reading certain incidents. For instance, in Cliff's second novel *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987) which is a sequel to *Abeng*, Clare returns to Jamaica where her political involvement results in her violent death when she is finally burned into the Jamaican landscape in a hail of bullets. This is described as a liberatory death that is reminiscent of the death of that other white creole, Antoinette Cosway, in Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*: there are a number of deliberate revisionings of scenes from Rhys in *Abeng* as well⁹. Apart from the textual references to Rhys in her novels, we saw that Cliff also relates her own situation as writer to Wicomb's, and like Wicomb, she also dedicates *Abeng* to the memory of Bessie Head. Also, Clare identifies with the diary of Anne Frank, sensing, or 'vizualising', rather than articulating the connection between the Holocaust and Middle Passage. Like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *Abeng* ends with a dream: in this case it is a dream in which Clare throws a stone at her black friend Zoe in a scene reminiscent of Tia's throwing a stone at Antoinette Cosway during the riot at Coulibri in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. From this revisionary dream, we are told, the older Clare comes to understand more clearly the nature of the relationship between white creole and black Jamaican, and this enables her to undertake the act of 'healing' Zoe whom she had damaged. However, this knowledge has not yet been fully realised at a conscious level for the novel ends: 'She was not ready to understand her dream. She

⁹ Cliff says that Bertha Rochester of *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the ancestor of Clare Savage. Of the ending of Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* she says that 'while essentially tragic', the ending completed the triangle of her life, from island to the States, back to the island: 'In her death she has achieved complete identification with her homeland. Soon she will be indistinguishable from the ground' (Cliff 1990:265).

had no idea that everyone we dream about we are' (166)¹⁰. We are reminded that, 'In her love for Zoe, Clare knew there was something of her need for her mother. But it felt intangible and impossible to grasp hold of' (131); at the same time, this 'need' is of course also linked to Clare's sense of un-belonging as Jamaican white creole, of being, as Cliff puts it elsewhere, a 'crossroads character' (1990:265).

Wicomb's *You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town* has been described as a short story cycle which not only exposes the master narrative of apartheid, but also meditates self-reflexively on its own fictionality (Marais 1995:32). More commonly, it has been read as another revisionary *bildungsroman*, or, more specifically, a *künstlerroman* (see 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Coloured Girl', Viola 1989). The first six stories/chapters deal with Frieda Shenton's childhood and young adulthood in South Africa as she moves between her home in rural Namaqualand and Cape Town; the last of these, 'Home Sweet Home', is set shortly before her departure for England. The next three deal with return visits to South Africa, while the last story ruptures the apparently realist text and its chronology by resurrecting the dead mother in what Wicomb describes as a 'metaphor for returning: it's a homecoming, in both the physical and another sense' (in Hunter, 1993:91). This, in turn, results in a reassessment of Frieda's relationship with mother and with motherland.

In this final story of Wicomb's collection, 'A Trip to the Gifberge', Frieda undergoes a journey within a journey as it were, from Britain back to Cape Town, and from Cape Town to her mother's home in Namaqualand, and then deeper inland to the Gifberge, the place of her mother's Griqua ancestors. The mother's comment on the Gifberge: "'So close to home'", she sighs, "and it is quite another world, a darker, greener world'" (176) seems to mirror, inversely, Frieda's longing for the 'idyll of an English landscape of painted greens' (74) during the trauma of her abortion before Frieda's first departure for England, described in the title story. The contrast between a 'greener world' and the present environment is developed further when the mother says, 'We know who lived in these mountains when the Europeans were still shivering in their country. What they [the Europeans] think of the veld and its flowers is of no interest to me' (181). According to Wicomb, the last story breaks the silence that has existed between mother and daughter, and by implication between Frieda and her motherland. Separation is still there, represented by the fenced off section of the mountain that prevents Frieda and her mother from having a free view of their home from the top of the Gifberge. However, referring to Frieda's return, Wicomb says that there is 'also somehow a space that has been created *through her absence*' (e.i.o.; Hunter 1993:91), and it is this 'space created through absence' that

¹⁰ According to Belinda Edmonson (1993:180-191), it is only through this dream that Clare can uncover the brutal power relationship between Clare and Zoe's close friendship.

can be seen as offering scope to contemplate 'newness' when Frieda is forced to recognise the position from which her mother speaks, even if she cannot agree with what she says.

Frieda's mother situates herself carefully in anticipation of her daughter's visit. She carries her heavy chair some distance from the house which is located on the very edge of the coloured township—just as the mother distances herself from her coloured in-laws—so when Frieda first sees her, she is seated in such a way that her head appears to be framed by the mountains. The mother is firmly located in her world, and in control. However, the mother as she appears in this story is very different from the mother of the earlier stories of Frieda's childhood, who prepares Frieda so diligently and relentlessly for her perceived duties in society, just as her father conditions her for assimilation into the coloured middle class. Here the mother distinguishes herself as English-speaking Griqua in contrast to the Shentons whom she describes as 'Boerjongens' (Afrikaner country bumpkins) (165). The conversation is tense, dominated by the mother's anger at the 'terrible stories' the daughter has been writing from England, most especially the title story of the collection which deals with abortion. The mother accuses her of writing about a world she 'knows nothing about', and insists on their taking a journey up the Gifberge the following day. In the course of this journey, an uneasy truce is achieved as the verbal battles revolve around knowledge and identity.

The physical markers of identity that feature so strongly throughout both *Abeng* and Wicomb's collection—hair, nose, eyes, skin and language—surface again but are curiously displaced by the landscape. On her arrival Frieda gives her mother the bunch of proteas she herself was given on her arrival at the airport by Aunt Cissie. Her mother rejects the gift, standing the bunch upside down like a broom, preferring a living protea bush which she intends collecting from the mountain to plant in her garden. When Frieda sneers at this apparent veneration for the despised South African national symbol, the mother retorts:

Don't be silly; it's not the same thing at all. You who're so clever ought to know that proteas belong to the veld. Only fools and cowards would hand them over to the Boers. Those who put their stamp on things may see in it their own histories and hopes. But a bush is a bush; it doesn't become what people think they inject into it. (181)

Paradoxically, the mother does not extend this to the daughter's 'bush' of hair which has throughout the collection served as one of the most tortuous markers of both racial and gender identity. When Frieda expresses Black Consciousness-informed views about her hair that approximate to the mother's views on the protea, the mother still questions, 'And you say you're happy with your hair? Always? Are you really?'

(178). This shifting perspective is a crucial aspect of Wicomb's fictional strategy, where meaning is a process of 'discovery', represented through an interplay of voices which offer multiple perspectives and refuse an authoritative account of identity.

The apolitical mother has a perspective that is not available to the educated Frieda. There are interesting parallels between these generational battles over knowledge—where the apolitical mother/grandmother's knowledge calls into question the younger woman's experience of the world—and the relationship between Clare and her rural grandmother, Miss Mattie, who is also so firmly located in her world. In Wicomb's story, it is the fiction itself which achieves an acknowledgement and balance between opposing views. In constructing a position from which the mother can speak, Wicomb has to kill off the father—just as previously she had killed off the stern mother, who in her childhood, appeared to represent colonised subjecthood in her admiration for things English. After her trip to the Gifberge Frieda appears to 'visualise' herself in relation to this newly discovered world of her mother, and traces a line from the stars, 'down to the tip of the Gifberge, down on to the lights of the Soeterus Winery. Due South' (181); linking the bitterness of 'gif' (poison), and the sweetness of 'soet'. At the suggestion of a homecoming the mother equates Frieda's 'terrible stories' with her unhomeliness: 'But with something to do here at home perhaps you won't need to make up those terrible stories, hey?' (182).

Wicomb has generally been acclaimed as offering a new, 'post-protest' voice articulating the formation of South African coloured identity (see Sicherman 1993; Gaylard, 1996), while according to Driver (1993:11), 'Wicomb's recognition of the politics of representation and the intersubjectivity of representation, places her work firmly at the vanguard of new South African writing'. This is significant in view of the fact that while Wicomb has clearly drawn on her own experiences, she insists that the text should not be read as autobiography. Driver makes the point that Wicomb's emphasis is not on the affirmation of identity, whether coloured or Griqua, but rather on the subversion and interrogation of identities. In a piece titled, 'Tracing the Path from National to Official Culture', Wicomb draws on some of the concepts of minority literature outlined by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari¹¹. Deleuze's theory of deterritorialization, which is based on his analysis of Kafka's texts, has been appropriated by a number of critics, not only in relation to the deterritorialization of dominant languages, but also the displacement of peoples,

¹¹ As summarised by Abdul JanMohamed (1984:298), the features of minority literature include the articulation and bringing to consciousness of 'those elements ... that oppose, subvert, or negate the power of hegemonic culture', as well as the celebration 'of marginality in its specific manifestations without fetishizing or reifying it'.

identities and meanings. According to Wicomb: 'the concept of deterritorialisation seems to me a useful one to apply, not only to literary but to all cultural practices in the new emerging South Africa' (1991:249). Wicomb's awareness that 'affirmative statements about our undervalued culture require thoughtful negotiation with negative stereotypes' (1991:246) points to a negotiated rather than authoritative or essential meaning. It can be argued that the 'newness' of the approach critics have ascribed to her work is located in the way the narrative voice incorporates diverse perspectives and this too involves a 'negotiation with negative stereotypes'.

Here Wicomb's text operates differently from others along the Caribbean creole continuum which make use of code-switching and dialect as markers of difference which, as W.D. Ashcroft points out, function not only at a linguistic but also at a political level (1987:117). Wicomb herself has noted the difficulty of not having access to the kind of dialect speech community that Afro-Caribbean writers can draw on. The problem runs deeper though, as suggested in the title story of the collection when, in response to the apparently 'absurd' question, 'You're not Coloured are you', Frieda answers, 'No' (78)—and recognises that the abortionist's 'blindness' to her racial identity was caused by her 'educated voice'. She contrasts herself to her white lover Michael: 'I have drunk deeply of Michael, swallowed his voice as I drank from his tongue. Has he swallowed mine? I do not think so' (78). Comparing her technique to that used by Morrison, Wicomb comments that she attempts in her use of language to give commonly held associations 'a new slant, a new accent' (in Hunter, 1993:88). Driver comments perceptively on this aspect of Wicomb's achievement when she notes how an 'arch' tone is constructed as a distancing device that keeps the anger and grief that permeate the collection at bay. Driver describes this strategy as follows—and it is interesting to note the way she links this with Wicomb's extension of literary realism:

Although Frieda Shenton herself can be arch, archness is a quality of the writing rather than simply of the narrator's consciousness. . . . Archness is a tone constructed in the writing, then, representing itself through a variety of means, the most important of which are, first, the incorporation of multiple perspectives in the text which are hereby given more weight than they would be if they were simply reproduced in dialogue, and second, the use of wit and wordplay. (1993:7)

This is an important distinction for, as Driver suggests, the voices heard in dialogue are then returned to the narrator's consciousness, and thereby construct a complex perspective, offering scope for a negotiation of meanings rather than final judgement. This is similar to the dialogic strategy used by Cliff in *Abeng*, where Clare 'visualises', rather than analyses. While in some of Wicomb's earlier stories the distancing effect of the 'arch tone' was used indirectly and 'returned to the narrator's consciousness', or was used to distinguish between a younger experiencing and older narrating self, in this final story the arch tone is matched by the mother's own and

functions more overtly in a dialogic context.

I suggest that it is precisely that 'space' that is created at the intersection of contesting ideas such as expressed in the discussion between mother and daughter in 'A Trip to the Gifberge', that draws attention to the potentially emancipatory discourse that is made possible through the displacement and 're-territorialization' of 'given' identities. These displacements resulting from travel provide the 'opportunities' referred to earlier, for possible re-definitions of self in relation to mother/land, while at the same time refusing the fixing of familiar binaries. The killing off of the father and the resurrection of the mother in Wicomb's anthology can then also be seen as providing such 'opportunities'. But one needs to ask at this point how this is related to 'finding one's voice'? In apparent confirmation of the resurrected mother's injunction about home and the 'terrible stories' Frieda has been writing about her life, Wicomb claimed in 1990 that: 'The book came out of intense homesickness. I couldn't write about Britain. It is a problem not having lived in South Africa for so long and yet not being able to write about anything else' (in Hunter, 1993:87). This relationship to fiction and homesickness and the need to 'leave home' is also alluded to by Caribbean writer Caryl Philips who comments on his constant travelling between St Kitts and Britain: 'Out of the tension between these two places is spun this thing called literature' (1989:49), while South African writer and political activist, Lauretta Ngcobo says that initially when she went to Britain from South Africa, she was struck by 'a beautiful feeling of release. For the first time I was just me. I wrote what I liked' (1985:81). Interestingly, lamenting her absence from South Africa during the 1994 elections, Wicomb commented that her intense longing to be home and to be participating in that nation-building moment temporarily displaced all her theorising about home and nation in terms of Benedict Anderson's 'imagined community' (1994:575), where the concept of nation is a unifying metaphor that shapes and is shaped by a community's shared sense of belonging. This in turn seems to bear out Rosemary George's claim that 'All homesickness is fiction; and, conversely, all fiction is homesickness', which introduced this discussion.

George notes how 'home' has been equated with nation but also with self. Yet home is also a fiction, a desirable space: 'Home is also the imagined location that can be more readily fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography' (1996:11). As mentioned previously, Deleuze and Guattari's suggestive concept of linguistic deterritorialisation has been appropriated by a number of critics, including Wicomb, who refers to its usefulness for cultural practice in post-election South Africa. Caren Kaplan states that when home is identified as a domestic, female space, the process of 'leaving home' has a gendered significance. Again drawing on Deleuze and Guattari, Kaplan refers to the way deterritorialisation (which includes the displacement of peoples, language and identities) and the process of defamiliari-

sation, can open up the possibility of imagining alternatives: 'This defamiliarisation enables imagination, even as it produces alienation, 'to express another potential community, to force the means for another consciousness and another sensibility' (1990:358). In travelling between centres and margins, says Kaplan, this kind of writing can be seen as an expression of 'both deterritorialization and reterritorialization' (1990:358).

It seems then that the condition of 'unhomeliness' (with the concomitant Freudian unease associated with the term), can be a pre-requisite for the processes of deterritorialisation. Wicomb's comment that 'home is an ambiguous site where you belong and feel comfortable but where you also encounter revulsion and horror—this horror being equated with the fact that it is comfortable at home' (1994:575)—is perhaps best illustrated in the story 'Home Sweet Home' which marks the end of the first phase of Frieda's life in South Africa. Here the comfort is suggested in the food her father lavishes on her, while the 'revulsion' is conveyed through the platitudes and homilies she is assailed by, expressing values that Frieda already feels utterly alienated from. Similarly, in *Abeng* Clare compares herself to Anne Frank, and experiences her 'crossroads' situation and the implications of her mixed heritage as a feeling of profound 'unease':

But she was a lucky girl—everyone said so—she was light-skinned. And she was alive. She lived in a world where the worst thing to be—especially if you were a girl—was to be dark. The only thing worse than that was to be dead. She knew the composition of her school and the constraints of color within. An unease seemed to live in a tiny space for her soul—for want of a better word—and she was struck by what she told herself was unfairness and cruelty while at the same time she was glad of how she looked and she profited by her hair and skin. (77)

Like Clare, Frieda has to leave home to experience the emancipatory 'space through absence'. As Kaplan puts it: 'What we gain [by leaving home] is reterritorialization; we inhabit a world of our own making' (1990:356)¹²; this emphasis on fictionality is significant in view of Wicomb's irritation with anthropological or sociological readings of South African fictional texts which place them in the category of 'life stories' which appear to be representative of various South African social realities.

¹² Kaplan's (1990:365) expression, a 'world of our own making', draws on Minnie Pratt's injunction to Western, middle-class women to embrace the concept of leaving home as a move towards establishing a 'coalition of identities' amongst differently situated women.

A comparative exploration of Cliff and Wicomb's texts shows how the contradictions resulting from intersecting systems of knowledge and values offer glimpses of the construction of 'possible' alternative subjectivities in a variety of ways. For instance, after her revelatory dream about hurting and healing her friend Zoe at the end of *Abeng*, Clare, in the absence of anyone to talk to about the dream, does not simply visualise or observe her own dream, instead, she translates the dream experience by writing about it to herself; and in the process constructs an alternative way of seeing herself in relation to others: 'Her diary was on her lap, and she was writing about what she had woken up to' (165). On the other hand, while Wicomb initially claimed that she writes because she did not have a voice with which to speak, she has since revised this by saying, 'you can write yourself out of or into anything' (1994:574), indicating that writing itself can be a self-affirming and even transformative act—even if this transformation has not yet been translated into social action.

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