

# LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

## ‘Dispatcher took me places I was not meant to go’ – Embodied Placemaking in Mark Gevisser’s *Lost and Found in Johannesburg: A Memoir*

Lena Englund

Åbo Akademi University

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### Abstract:

This paper examines the connection between place and body in Mark Gevisser’s memoir *Lost and Found in Johannesburg: A Memoir* (2014) in order to inspire new ways of seeing the African city and its literary representations. The paper draws on embodied placemaking (Csordas 1999; Jones 2005; Kiverstein 2012; Sen and Silverman 2014), which focuses on the connection between body and place. The city’s apartheid past emerges particularly through the various transgressive acts described in the memoir which relate to the question of who belongs in a place. Gevisser’s attempts to map Johannesburg first in a childhood game and later in the memoir reveal the city’s many barriers and boundaries, both physical, social and psychological. The memoir negotiates anxieties of place in relation to personal and political history. A central event in the memoir is the home robbery of which Gevisser and his friends became victims, bringing together notions of emotional and normative geographies in one brutal act. The embodied emotional geographies of Johannesburg as presented by Gevisser suggest that its inhabitants make and remake its spatial futures while the city also retains an agency of its own.

**Keywords:** Mark Gevisser; *Lost and Found in Johannesburg: A Memoir*; embodied placemaking; emotional geographies; transgression; Johannesburg; memoir.

**Author contact:** [lenglund@abo.fi](mailto:lenglund@abo.fi)

The memoir *Lost and Found in Johannesburg: A Memoir* by Mark Gevisser (2014) offers a nonfictional account of Johannesburg largely focused on mapping the city both geographically and emotionally. A deep personal trauma, being victim of an armed robbery in his friends' home, provides a framework for the story and the city as presented by Gevisser. Location and the city itself are thus central to the memoir. The present paper takes issue with Gevisser's attempts to map the city and reconnect with it after the robbery and draws on embodied placemaking (Csordas 1999; Jones 2005; Kiverstein 2012; Sen and Silverman 2014) in order to examine the connection between place and body as well as to negotiate between political history and personal experiences. Sen and Silverman (2014: 3) outline embodied placemaking as follows: 'a physical environment cannot exist without the human inhabitants who experience it in their everyday lives.' This emphasizes the inevitable link between place and the humans that inhabit it. Placemaking has a political dimension too, as 'placemaking in the city is always a process fraught with ideological, economic, and symbolic conflicts – but only because of the people who are engaged in it' (5). This highlights the human factor and the importance of looking at individual stories, experiences, and transformations such as Gevisser's and examining how they represent the city. Gevisser's personal narrative provides unique insights about the unequal geographies of Johannesburg both past and present. Jones and Evans (2012: 2327) for their part also call for place being 'fundamentally an embodied phenomenon and thus benefits from examination through affective/emotional geographies.' This further justifies examining memoir as a textual representation of such geographies.

Place in literature and particularly in urban fiction is a much debated and theorized field and has been studied in detail in an African context as well, most notably by Garth A. Myers (2011) who has critically examined the African city. More recent studies include Dustin Crowley's (2015) work on narrative geographies in African writing. However, despite an abundance of perspectives by notable researchers such as Jeff Malpas (2018), Yi-Fu Tuan (1979; 1989) and Doreen Massey (1994; 2005), place still remains 'a slippery concept' (Sen and Silverman 2014: 2). Tim Cresswell (2015: 6) goes even further when stating the following: '[N]o one quite knows what they are talking about when they are talking about place.' This calls for fresh perspectives on place and placemaking, and as Sen and Silverman (2014: 5) state, placemaking can have both 'emancipatory and [...] oppressive possibilities.' Their focus is on embodied placemaking, which for its part can offer new ground on which to investigate and negotiate urbanism and its many complexities. As such, the concept is also relatively unexplored in literary contexts and as Sen and Silverman conclude, such an approach is interdisciplinary in its very nature.

*Lost and Found* has not been previously examined from this perspective, but the memoir has attracted scholarly attention in earlier studies such as Rebekah Cumpsty's (2017) article, where she investigates mobility in the memoir and other works related to Johannesburg. Her paper suggests that Gevisser's memoir is an attempt to understand his place in Johannesburg. Ed Charlton (2017) for his part focuses on 'melancholy mapping' the post-apartheid city through personal experiences, particularly in terms of loss. Boehmer and Davies (2015: 2) also state that Gevisser provides a 'blueprint' of Johannesburg through the memoir. All of these previous studies are concerned with the cartographic and profoundly spatial nature of the memoir, and that is an obvious starting place for the

present paper as well. However, this paper takes the analysis further by investigating the embodied dimension of Gevisser's relationship to his city and how this changes particularly due to the home invasion he experienced. The city itself is constructed through the connection between body and place and such an approach also enables investigating the connection between personal and political history.

### **Embodied Placemaking**

Embodiment as a concept has been developed particularly within philosophy and anthropology (Kiverstein 2012: 740). Thomas J. Csordas (1999: 143) writes that 'studies under the rubric of embodiment are not "about" the body per se'. Instead, he explains that they are about 'culture and experience' (143) and defines embodiment as 'an indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and by mode of presence and engagement in the world' (145). Investigating *Lost and Found* from a perspective of embodiment thus allows Gevisser's personal experiences to shed light on matters of culture, politics, and unequal geographies. As Csordas (147) concludes in his article, an embodiment perspective is not necessarily new, but enables novel views of 'familiar topics – healing, emotion, gender, or power.' These notions are important when analysing Gevisser's memoir, which certainly deals with issues relating to emotion and power. The emotional geographies present in his memoir will be examined in a separate section. The personal dimension is of course present here too. Csordas (148) asserts that embodiment is about 'experience and subjectivity', which is exactly what defines Gevisser's memoir as well.

At the beginning Gevisser writes, 'I have lived a life in Johannesburg. I have left the suburbs. I have put my body in those places I dreamed of' (2014: 19). However, he also states that the city remains full of barriers and boundaries, both physical and psychological, which are to some extent impossible to cross and overcome (19-20). From the outset of the memoir, the violent home invasion Gevisser and his friends were subject to in 2012 is alluded to, and the experience exemplifies these barriers and boundaries through the paradoxes of place emanating from it. In Gevisser's (2) own words, living next to the park from which the robbers emerged and entered the apartment 'was a disconnecting experience' (3). The park's 'reputation for crime' clashes with the positive childhood memories that Gevisser (2) associated with it. This exemplifies how separate emotional experiences can emerge from the same setting. The home invasion works as a culmination of not only embodied placemaking but also normative and emotional geographies. Growing up and exploring his sexuality also led him to new embodied encounters in the city. As Gevisser outgrew his dispatcher game with Holmden's map and the telephone directory, making imaginary trips throughout the city, 'I found another way to lose myself' (152). This suggests that, paradoxically enough, mapping the city is less about finding one's way and more about surrendering to the city in terms of the home invasion and sexual identities alike.

Here, the concepts of normative geographies as outlined by Tim Cresswell (1996) and spatial justice by Edward W. Soja become relevant. Soja (2010: 72) emphasizes 'uneven geographical development' as a critical source of spatial injustice and claims that 'human

activities not only are shaped by geographical inequalities but also play a role in producing and reproducing them.’ Gevisser remembers his childhood and the servants they employed who lived in a separate building on their lot. As an adult, he comes to understand more deeply what this separation of space meant for the people who worked for the family. ‘The laws of apartheid meant that the servants were not allowed any visitors, conjugal, familial or otherwise’ (Gevisser 2014: 82) and the way their living quarters were constructed also enabled the white employers to keep track of their servants’ movements. Gevisser’s mapping of Johannesburg, first in the childhood game and later through the memoir, emphasizes the importance of seeing spaces as embodied in order to address issues relating to inequality. The act of mapping also serves as a reminder to Gevisser (21) that he will never fully know the city. The city is made in the image of its inhabitants, and its past shapes their futures.

These notions are inherently important as the African city in particular has been seen as a ‘crisis narrative’ (Myers 2011: 191) and a place of ‘enduring failures’ (Myers and Murray 2007: 2). Locating aspects of the city that move away from dystopian predictions of the perpetual shortcomings of African cities emerges as crucial, without diminishing or overlooking the realities of people living in slums or informal settlements. Gevisser’s representation of Johannesburg recognises this reality. The city remains a site of struggle on a personal and collective level and Gevisser’s memoir is no exception. As Charlton (2017: 17) argues, ‘[t]o be lost and found in this volatile urban environment, then, is to oscillate inexorably between the legible and illegible, the actual and the fantastical, to inhabit each space synchronously but separately.’ This emphasizes what Nuttall and Mbembe (2008) have described as the ‘elusive’ nature of Johannesburg and the difficulty in mapping it. The struggle in Gevisser’s writing is partly connected with profoundly embodied and emotional sexual geographies.

Gevisser explores hidden sexualities in Johannesburg throughout the memoir, which is another significant thread along with the home invasion. A central example in addition to the writer’s own experiences is the story of Phil and Edgar, two black men who were married to women but met each other in secret over the course of many years, living a kind of double life (Gevisser 2014: 192-207). The disconnect between (white) childhood sexual geographies and repressive racial politics are thus made explicit, as Phil states the following: “‘To be black and gay, uh, uh, uh! It was double trouble’” (197). Gevisser himself started working at the Children’s Bookshop when in high school and kept meeting his former friend Adam there for quick sexual encounters. The bookshop provided him with a ‘release from both the inevitable claustrophobia of family life and the nihilism of teenage suburbia’ (152-53). The secret meetings provided Gevisser with a sense of freedom whereas Phil and Edgar were in a more precarious situation due to racial policies: “‘Gay life in Johannesburg, it was very tough, especially amongst blacks because of the curfew, and your freedom and your privacy was the most important thing. With whites, I would say, it was much easier’” (197). The emotional geographies implied in these two separate experiences are thus highly political. Apartheid South Africa regarded homosexuality as a threat to the ‘white South African patriarch’ (Falkof 2019: 274) and as ‘abnormal, perverse, immoral, sick, corrupting’ (Nyeck and Epprecht 2012: 94). Repressive politics affected both black and white South Africans but on entirely different terms.

However, such embodied experiences, making claims to Johannesburg through bodily experiences and recollections, enables looking at embodied placemaking in more ways than just through the history of apartheid which legacy can still be seen and felt throughout Johannesburg: '[W]hile the politics underpinning social relations may have changed to some extent, its urban sprawl continues to reflect apartheid's geography and South Africa's perennial curse: white wealth, black poverty' (Vale and Murray 2017: 5). Gevisser writes about spaces that are being transformed from symbols of apartheid to shared ground with more positive connotations. An example of this was the new court built after the end of apartheid partly from bricks taken from a dismantled prison, 'as if to model the way that South Africa has begun building the possibilities of the future out of the difficulties of the past' (2014: 125-26). As Gevisser confirms, this transformation has been difficult 'because of politics and poor management, but also because the kind of civic space it envisaged was just not possible in a twenty-first century inner-city Johannesburg given over to dirt-poor peasants and refugees' (126). Despite good intentions, the lived and embodied reality of the city made such endeavours challenging.

These notions fit in well with a discussion of slum demolition that has been a central topic in several fictional works such as *GraceLand* by Chris Abani (2004) and *We Need New Names* by NoViolet Bulawayo (2013). Such restructuring and remodelling of space is perhaps at its most extreme raising questions about agency related to place. However, as Jones and Evans (2012: 2320) confirm, 'place construction is fundamentally embodied.' In terms of restructuring urban areas, they argue that these new restructured areas are often meant for a different group of people than those who lived in the original setting, and that such processes often ignore the previous embodied experiences of the place in question. However, these transformed spaces may face difficulties such as those outlined by Jones and Evans, even when there seem to be good intentions to overcome painful history through restructuring and rebuilding.

The most central example from the memoir in terms of embodied place, and particularly the notion of balancing between agency and political silencing, is the home invasion of which Gevisser became victim. It emphasizes the barriers and boundaries in Johannesburg, the divided space and apartheid legacy, as well as the deeply personal, embodied trauma arising from such an ordeal. Again, placemaking occurs primarily through the body and bodily sensations. The place in question was the flat in which Gevisser's friends lived, a flat where he himself had lived previously. Three armed robbers entered one evening when he was visiting his friends and bound all three of them, including Gevisser himself. They then went on to ransack the flat for valuables and sexually assaulted one of the women to make her give up the location of the safe. Gevisser writes about the aftermath of the attack, how 'I could barely negotiate the few kilometres of familiar night-time road between Killarney and Melville. If I was out for dinner, my heart would begin beating fast at around 8.30, and if I was not at home, barricaded in my bedroom by 9.30, the panic would overwhelm me' (2014: 273-74). These few lines from the memoir emphasize the emotional and physical turmoil unfolding after the invasion, and the anxiety arising in familiar streets that no longer felt safe. The attack erected psychological barriers to places in which he had previously felt comfortable.

Gevisser's husband C arrived from Paris after the attack and Gevisser explains how C reacted differently to Johannesburg 'and would be hypervigilant even in Reykjavik.' Eventually, spending time together enabled Gevisser to 're-enter my own body' (2014: 274), suggesting that the intense trauma of being subject to the violent home invasion caused Gevisser to experience being outside his own body, no longer inhabiting it. This for its part highlights and exemplifies most concretely the connection between place and body. The loss of past geographical selves is evident here too, as the attack marks a rift with what was before and what came after. Annie Gagiano (2009: 263) makes a noteworthy point here about autobiographical pasts: '[W]hile autobiographical texts recall an experienced past, they need to be recognised also as intended contributions to a shared future or to the history lessons of those who come after.' *Lost and Found* is in many ways a tribute to Johannesburg but the home robbery serves as a reminder about the persisting inequalities. Despite being a deeply personal experience, the memoir also reveals just how common such crimes are. *Statistics South Africa* assert in their Victims of Crime Survey from 2011 (p. 4) that people who participated in the survey responded that home robbery was the crime they feared the most. The attack, which frames the memoir throughout, becomes part of the many barriers of Johannesburg, of its geography of fear; the 'frontier of fear' (Gevisser 2014: 243).

When hearing about the robbery, some of Gevisser's friends were able to reason and reflect on how such a thing could happen to anyone, while others chose to believe that Gevisser and his friends had been specifically targeted. Another friend expressed his anger quite forcefully surprising Gevisser with his emotional outburst. He had had to endure a home invasion a few years previously (2014: 272-73). As O'Connor (2016: 11) outlines, people have 'unique embodied life-histories' but also certain common experiences of inhabiting or occupying the same spaces. This would suggest that being white in Johannesburg may come with certain specific embodied experiences and ways of seeing (and fearing) the immediate environment, including one's own home. Here, Johnson's (1999: 99) conclusion is essential and summarizes this discussion neatly: 'We conceptualize and reason the ways we do because of the kinds of bodies we have, the kinds of environments we inhabit, and the symbolic systems we inherit, which are themselves grounded in our embodiment.' Thus, body and place are inseparable and as the attack on Gevisser and his friends showed, experiences of both may change profoundly and become out of balance.

The history and legacy of apartheid is here inherently entrenched in Johannesburg both physically and psychologically. The frontier of fear stretches in many directions, but as Johnson (1999: 99) also refers to our 'imaginative capacities' which help us understand and make sense of things on a highly complex and abstract level, so Gevisser himself felt conflicted when one of the robbers was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. 'I felt rage rise against Sibanda once more, this time for making me so aware of my place in the world. I hated him for having made me so hateful, and I hated myself for hating him' (2014: 294). Johnson's (1999: 99) claim is that certain constraints such as 'our sensorimotor system, our cognitive processing capacities, our interests, and aspects of our environments' impact our reasoning and how we make sense of whatever goes on around us and in our lives. Therefore, a conclusion here would be that the embodied reactions to the home invasion

have everything to do with place, the place in which Gevisser grew up and the place in which the attack took place. The shared experience, and shared fear connected with living in Johannesburg elicited emotional responses from his friends emphasizing the divide still present in the city in terms of privilege.

Johannesburg as a still deeply divided city also relates to who gets to walk the streets of the city or drive in certain areas. According to Gevisser, deep inequality is embedded in these practices. ‘The people who walk Johannesburg daily are not *flâneurs* at all, but migrants, or workers, to whom the city still denies the right to public transport. [...] The rest of us drive’ (2014: 20). The lines cited above from the memoir to some extent contradict the comment by Gevisser (2014: 16) a few pages earlier where he explains that a new map was published in 1976 which included Soweto. The township was mapped in the same way as the white suburbs, with the same cartographic symbols. This, to Gevisser, manifested his belief that ‘even if we were forced to live in different places under different conditions, we were all the same.’ This definitely underscores Cresswell’s (1996: 8) emphasis on the social nature of place: ‘the effect of place is not simply a geographical matter. It always intersects with sociocultural experience.’ This also for its part highlights the relationship between place and the body and attempts to explain how human interaction creates place and gives it meaning.

### **Transgressing Boundaries**

The sexual encounters recounted in Gevisser’s memoir constitute transgression of apartheid laws, whereas the home invasion exemplifies transgression of physical boundaries both bodily and material. Its aftermath manifests the disconnect between body, place, and mind. The memoir gives evidence of other kinds of transgressive acts too which offer further insights about the relationship between place and body. Gevisser included several pictures in his memoir, pictures not just of himself or his family and relatives but images that highlight quite explicitly the exclusive practices of the apartheid city and the transgressive actions of some of its citizens. In one of the pictures, a black man and white woman swam together in a swimming pool. Gevisser explains how the pictures evoked strong bodily sentiments in him:

I look at this photo and feel a hunger that ripples down the sides of my tongue and gathers in my throat, for the sycamore berries and the blue-gum pods beneath bare feet, caught in the grooves between the slats; for that tray of lemon-barley squash and Tennis biscuits on a glass-topped iron table; for the sun reflected off a zinc roof onto beds of Namaqualand daisies; for the insane, prehistoric shriek of hadeda ibises piercing the sky, the purple violence of cloudburst, the lengthening shadows, the inevitable nightfall as quick as a gangster’s knife. (Gevisser 2014: 112-13)

The embodied experience here relates to all five senses: taste, smell, touch, sight, and sound. The paragraph also touches on a number of emotions, nostalgia and fear, first and foremost. This shows how a physical environment is brought into being by the people that inhabit it, as Sen and Silverman suggested.

The places in question for their part also shape human experiences. Through embodiment, we can 'identify and underscore the important element of human agency in both the physical construction as well as the social production of place' (Sen and Silverman 2014: 4). Can there be agency in recollection and remembrance? The answer must be yes, and even Gevisser himself seems to come to this conclusion as he ends the chapter by stating that the picture is now on his desk along with a picture of his parents swimming together. The 'blissful transparency' and 'hidden desire' (114) apparent in the photos create balance in which 'I find my place.' The political implications are embedded in Gevisser's bodily experience of place as triggered by the photo. The two people in the picture, transgressing apartheid laws, define the place in question and bring it into being.

The concept of transgression thus suggests moving into a territory in which one does not belong. However, Dustin Crowley presents another perspective in his work on narrative geographies in African writing. Crowley draws on Westphal's theory of transgression and transgressivity, claiming that his concepts of striated and smooth spaces support notions of space as inherently dichotomous. This leads to 'strict categorization [...] with one side (borders) relegated to the workings of domination, and the other (transgression) privileged as a source of liberation' (Crowley 2015: 8-9). This resistance to easy categorization and simple binaries is crucial particularly when dealing with something as complex as African city literature, which is also suggested by Stephen Clingman (2012: 52) who argues that 'South Africa has been subject to binaristic overload.' Refraining from making quick conclusions, or starting at a given point, is essential when analysing literature that could be categorized as postcolonial writing. Postcolonial literature in its very nature deals with dichotomies: colonial/postcolonial, colonizer/colonized, apartheid/post-apartheid (the latter, for Gagiano (2009: 262) being visible in the notion of a 'somewhat misnamed post-apartheid decade'), etc. Crowley (2015: 18) suggests instead looking at 'how authors represent these geographic forces in their work without preset assumptions regarding their oppressive or liberatory effects.'

Crowley's call for turning away from binaries such as oppression and liberation is noteworthy particularly because of South Africa's heavy apartheid burden. Johannesburg in Gevisser's writing remains largely a place of dichotomies but the city is also from time to time presented in more ambiguous terms. Gevisser (2014: 127) writes about Cecil Williams, a 'gay white communist theatre director', who was arrested during the State of Emergency in 1960 and detained in Johannesburg Fort. Friends of Williams were having a "queer" party' (127) on a nearby balcony while Williams himself was in the prison courtyard. 'The partygoers themselves occupied their own partitioned space in society, somewhat invisible to the mainstream. And yet here they were, white people, [...] looking straight at Cecil Williams but unable to see him. He had crossed into the void' (127). Both parties were invisible and performing their separate acts of transgression. Prison becomes a symbol of both oppression and liberation: Williams worked with Nelson Mandela, who was also later imprisoned but whose liberation enabled a new South Africa to be born. The partygoers occupy a dual space, repressed in their sexuality yet invisible to most South Africans which provides a certain freedom. Their free space on the balcony overlooked the courtyard in which another white homosexual and political activist was being held

captive. Freedom and repression converge in complex ways in this example and space becomes neither simply liberatory nor oppressive.

Gaining access to certain, previously inaccessible, spaces is also directly tied to discourses of oppression and liberation, and such experiences are recounted in for example Ivan Vladislavić's (2012) [2001] novel *The Restless Supermarket*, where the aging (white) protagonist watches his Hillbrow change from a predominantly white to a mixed inner-city area. Applying Crowley's notions does not, therefore, entail overlooking themes of oppression and resistance. In terms of *Lost and Found*, it is merely a matter of agency, and this goes back to the question of embodied space. As Setha Low (2014: 19) argues, '[t]he concept of embodied space, however, draws these disparate notions together, underscoring the importance of the body as a physical and biological entity, as lived experience, and as a center of agency, a location for speaking and acting on the world.' Acts of transgression of space are particularly useful for an examination of spatial norms. In relation to Gevisser's memoir, these questions become even more complex as the history of apartheid remains the backdrop to his story; a backdrop which still defines place and the bodies inhabiting it in numerous ways.

Cresswell (1996: 9) also focuses on transgression in his study, which according to him 'serves to foreground the mapping of ideology onto space and place'. Examining ideology attached to place becomes possible through the concept of transgression, and Cresswell also suggests seeing transgression 'as a form of politics' (9). These notions are particularly interesting in terms of the servants Gevisser's family employed. Sandton and Alexandra emerge as two central areas here, one predominantly white and the other black. 'The vast majority of middle-class white South Africans who lived in Sandton had never set foot in Alexandra, although Alexandra's citizens, of course, crossed daily out of the bounds of page 75 to work in the white city' (Gevisser 2014: 23). The page number refers to the map he played with as a child. This one-way movement, a kind of lawful yet strictly controlled transgression from black townships to white suburbs for work-related purposes, highlights politics in several ways.

This is exemplified quite explicitly in the South African laws Gevisser (2014: 81) refers to when talking about the physical quarters in which servants usually lived: '[T]he servants' quarters were required to be across the yard (there were to be no shared walls between white master and black servant) and were typically mean little rooms with a sink and a toilet.' These recollections end with the following comment: 'Thus was the other, the outsider, woven structurally into the Johannesburg of my childhood' but, paradoxically, this also enabled contact and interaction across racial lines despite laws prohibiting any such encounters (81). In relation to this, Soja (2010: 4) explains the following: '[S]pace is actively involved in generating and sustaining inequality, injustice, economic exploitation, racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression and discrimination.' Therefore, political agency in terms of people living in slums and informal settlements, on the periphery of wealthy and powerful cities, is not just restricted to the people themselves and how they make sense of their lives and the places in which they live, but also very much tied to place itself. Agency must thus be examined from a spatial perspective too.

Transgression also takes place in an opposite manner in *Lost and Found*. Gevisser visited the area called Alexandra after the attack in his friends' home. This final part of the

memoir is called 'Homeward Bound', relating to the author's attempts to reconnect with his home city after the traumatic incident. He went to Alexandra to visit Hope, the daughter of his childhood nanny Bettinah (2014: 299-300): '[I]ts mean streets kill you or teach you; embrace or extinguish you.' The word 'mean' is here again applied to space, giving it a human dimension. The streets themselves are portrayed as having agency and power over the people walking those streets. Gevisser (300) describes Alexandra as 'a place that absorbed all of apartheid's evils.' However, he also concludes that the streets of Alexandra held the promise of 'something redemptive' (300). This could be a subtle remark with regard to the efforts to heal South African society after apartheid. Gevisser himself travelled to Alexandra after the home invasion seeking redemption and to reconnect with his city.

During his first talks with Hope in Alexandra, Gevisser found out that she had actually lived in his family's backyard with her mother for several years when she was still quite young (2014: 306). Hope referred to Gevisser's childhood home as Betty's Place, and he thought of it as an attempt to claim it in her mother's name (2014: 310). These complicated notions of place emphasize what Crowley called for, seeing space without preconceived ideas of oppression or liberation. Hope also told Gevisser that she was called a 'coconut' by other children in Alexandra, as she herself lived in a white suburb with her mother but transgressed the border into the township when going to school (311-12). Thus, through the story of Hope and her mother living in the backyard of the white employer, place becomes inherently multidimensional and highlights the transformation of both people and spaces and how they affect each other. Hope's transgression into the white suburb crossed racial lines and broke apartheid laws (as family members were forbidden from staying with relatives employed by white families), and her transition back across the lines when going to school was another act of transgression, of not belonging even in Alexandra. Through reconnecting with Hope, someone who was there throughout his childhood even though not on equal terms, and by himself transgressing into Alexandra, a place he had not visited properly before (324-25), Gevisser was able to if not become one with the city then at least make peace with it. This for its part underlines the need for understanding embodied experiences of the city of those with and without privileges; perhaps most urgently in a city such as Johannesburg.

### **Emotional Geographies and Belonging**

The final section of this paper attempts to conclude the discussion of *Lost and Found* through a brief look at the emotional geographies present in the memoir. These geographies have of course already been mentioned a number of times in relation to the notions of embodiment and transgression, but the aim of this section is to more explicitly examine place in the memoir from a perspective that is less directly political and more personal and emotional. Cresswell argues that 'places are neither totally material nor completely mental; they are combinations of the material and mental and cannot be reduced to either' (1996: 13). This suggests that places are neither entirely bodily nor emotional. Despite the material and mental aspects being equally important, it is the individual perspective and inner world, the so-called emotional geographies, which reveal,

reproduce and reconfigure ideologies tied to place when examining literary works. Cresswell's argument that place is never only physical or ideological/political is significant here. The question as to whether an act itself can be judged morally good or bad based on ethical premises or whether it is the place itself which determines its character is essential, and Cresswell (1996: 14) seems to suggest that it is the latter. The 'mean streets' of Alexandra and the 'mean little room' in the servants' quarters seem to suggest exactly this: the locations themselves have character; they have power and agency to change people's lives in a number of ways.

Memoirs, for their part, as a literary genre are inherently emotional; they are life-stories and as Jones (2005: 205) asserts, '[l]ife is inherently spatial, and inherently emotional.' In a South African context, they often balance between the personal and political, perhaps more so than in many other contexts. As Gagiano (2009: 278) explains, autobiographies become 'stores of knowledge available for our society's benefit.' Hence, they are about far more than simply the telling of personal stories, becoming part of a national repository available to South Africans and beyond. Autobiographical writing in and of South Africa has been studied in detail, for example in the notable edited volume *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa* (Nuttall and Coetzee 1998), which is largely preoccupied with remembering in the immediate aftermath of the end of apartheid and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. However, Ndebele (1998, 20) makes the following noteworthy comment in connection to apartheid narratives: 'I believe we have yet to find meaning. In fact, it is going to be the search for meanings that may trigger off more narratives.' *Lost and Found* is such a narrative, carrying on the tradition of remembering and witnessing while simultaneously attempting to transgress and transcend boundaries of geographies of self, body and place. According to Hedley Twidle (2012: 9), the last few decades have seen an 'outpouring of life-writing' in South Africa. Gagiano (2009: 273-74), for her part, lists a number of notable autobiographical texts published between 2000-2008 by South African journalists. Gevisser's memoir can definitely be added to this list of works which 'constitute worthwhile additions to the South African historical archive' (274).

Memory is also inevitably tied to place, as Hodgkin and Radstone (2003: 11) assert: many 'moments of disjuncture and complexity are associated with changes in place, registering the uncanniness of being at once the same and different, at once time and space.' It is not farfetched to connect these notions with Gevisser's out-of-body experience after the home robbery and his difficulties in feeling at home not just in Johannesburg but in his own body. The connection he makes between his body and the city is an explicit reference to the embodied nature of places, particularly the ones we call home. Hodgkin and Radstone (12) also make the connection to emotions when referring to the 'preservation and abandonment of particular sites, [...] embroiled in political and economic interests, as well as abstract and emotional ones.' This goes to show how complex the relationship between place and memory is. Jones (2005: 210) also concludes that memory 'must play a key, formative role in the construction of our ongoing emotional and imaginative geographies.'

The emotional geographies in *Lost and Found* are largely centred on childhood and in terms of memoir, this is where memory and geography cross paths most explicitly. Parts

of Gevisser's childhood have been discussed previously, but a few more remarks that Gevisser makes about his childhood are particularly noteworthy. Gevisser understood in his early childhood that he was African in addition to being South African, and this was what he called something of a revelation. 'Although I might not have known that I was African, I never doubted that I was South African, or that I was a Gevisser. I belonged to my country and I belonged to my family. But I never fully belonged to my childhood' (2014: 79). This lack of belonging in childhood is partly explained by his being out of sync with his peers, children of the same age, and often preferring solitude to playing with others. The difference was emphasized when Gevisser started school and spent his breaks in the yard which had been divided into two for boys and girls to play separately. Gevisser found himself playing alone somewhere in between the two zones when his teacher intervened. 'I learned that if I was going to fit in, I needed to appear to accept the boundaries set for me while transgressing them silently, underground or in the ether, beyond the patrol of adults' (80). Such experiences connect childhood with identity politics and the need to stay invisible, under the radar. Gevisser becomes the observer and the observed, finding ways to break through barriers that both lock him in place and provide him with the freedom given a white South African male under apartheid.

As Jones (2005: 215) stated earlier about the relationship between emotions of childhood and landscape, an argument here is that the multifaceted dimensions of childhood can be compared to those of the city itself. Childhood is by default elusive as the reconstruction of it remains rooted in present interpretations of the past, and these interpretations are by no means permanent or fixed. *Lost and Found* manifests a sense of detachment in many ways, and this is particularly concrete in terms of the city and childhood. At the core of it all is the home invasion around which the memoir unfolds. Jones and Evans (2012: 2321) neatly summarize this temporal perspective when asserting that body and landscape connect with 'the individual's memory of on-going physical engagements with place. In short, connections to place build up over time.' Such temporality defies linearity, which is always the case when examining the relationship between time and memory as they are inherently intertwined. A final note about childhood geographies in particular is also needed, and here Jones et al. (2016: 1153) argue that 'the extent to which young people have power over shaping their geographies [...] can have long-lasting effects on how young people perceive themselves and their places in relation to others and other places.' Connecting these notions with the Dispatcher game Gevisser played as a child seems accurate, as the game itself provided a possibility for him to shape geographies in apartheid South Africa. Cumpsty (2017: 30) sees the game as 'the book's organizing metaphor.' It is arguably far more than a metaphor, as the memoir itself becomes a kind of elaborate Dispatcher's game for the adult Gevisser. This confirms the importance of placemaking in childhood and its effects lasting well into adulthood.

In terms of the memoir, which is an edited, published text, the workings of place, emotion and memory are perhaps less 'visceral' (Jones and Evans 2012: 2321). Gevisser (2014: 20-21) seems aware of this as he discusses nostalgia from a perspective of psychiatry, seeing it as getting lost in the past, 'looking for a route home.' However, for him it is about the city of Johannesburg, about remembering that it 'is not the city I think I know.' This works as a disclaimer but also gives the city its separate agency and identity. Gevisser

returns later in the memoir to his childhood and the feeling of being out of place in it. This takes on a significant political dimension as he explains how his parents burnt the books of his grandfather in 1964 as some of them were quite political. Friends of Gevisser's parents were emigrating, and some had been arrested on minor charges (2014: 71). Burning the books was an attempt by his parents to ensure that his childhood was safe: '[t]hey secured the perimeters of my childhood' (2014: 124). This explicit reference to boundaries, as Gevisser explains how the boundaries set by his parents both confined him but also gave him the possibility to develop and grow up in a safe space, is an example of what Bondi, Davidson and Smith (2005: 7) seem to suggest when talking about bodily boundaries. They mention 'bodily interiors and exteriors', and the 'permeability and fluidity of bodily boundaries.' The importance of understanding such boundaries resurfaces again in connection to emotional geographies: 'We define ourselves, at least in part, in terms of what we are not' (7). This notion sheds light on *Lost and Found* too, as this analysis of the memoir has shown how it balances between the safe spaces of childhood and the trauma of the home robbery in 2012, and also between socially approved sexualities and secret encounters away from the public eye. Located between such clashing embodied experiences is the enormous complexity of Johannesburg.

## Conclusion

The question that remains after this examination of *Lost and Found* is whether Gevisser succeeds in creating, representing, or at least advocating a more equal Johannesburg. There seems to be an explicit desire to do so in the memoir, which is partly manifested in the chapters 'Closed City' and 'Open City'. Gevisser's attempt to come to terms with the home robbery is the most profound example of this. Despite the numbers provided by *Statistics South Africa*, and despite the similar experiences among Gevisser's friends and acquaintances, the robbery became a unique, life-changing and deeply personal experience for him. This tragedy combines the agency of the individual with that of the city, and it also exemplifies how place is constructed by those who inhabit it. The empathy shown to Gevisser after the event and the compassion he himself eventually felt for the overburdened police force, and even feeling some compassion for Sibanda, one of the robbers who was eventually caught and convicted, is what in Charlton's (2017: 17) terms is to 'inhabit each space synchronously but separately.' Such a definition seems apt when examining Gevisser's account of his hometown and its many shortcomings since the end of apartheid. Such an existence makes it possible for him to be a participant and an observer at the same time, inside and outside his own experiences. The memoir makes such shifting of positions possible, without losing sight of the 'symbolic systems we inherit' as outlined by Johnson (1999: 99).

The robbery marks a break, a shift in perceptions of the city but also in bodily experiences. Gevisser wrote about feeling as if he were outside his own body, cast out of himself by the city which had so brutalized him. Here, a notion by Cresswell (1996: 10) is particularly important. He writes the following: '[O]ur consciousness of place all but disappears when it appears to be working well.' This notion is relevant as it for its part can help explain the reactions of Gevisser's friends and acquaintances when hearing about the

attack. Cresswell discusses the act of becoming aware of one's surroundings when something goes wrong. His examples relate to the lights going out or other similarly mundane (though not ordinary and everyday) experiences. A violent attack in one's own home, or that of one's friends, elicits strong responses and highlights spatial transgression too. The norm is no longer valid, the familiar has ceased to exist, and such transgression may lead to the disconnect between self and body as described by Gevisser.

A final notion by Swati Chattopadhyay (2014: 44) highlights this complexity:

An embodied understanding of politics and public space thus requires attention to the conditions of our physical situatedness in relation to other bodies and objects. It involves an understanding of our position in a given space, our movement and ability to access space, what we can see, hear, feel, and touch: our vulnerability as well as our capacity to manipulate and change the aforementioned conditions. These states of vulnerability and capacity that actualize our political freedom set the parameters of our relation to fellow subjects. These material conditions (and their limits) are the bases of our political subjectivity and enable our political imagination.

The conditions mentioned here, the position occupied by Gevisser and his friends right before the attack, were profoundly transformed and changed his perception of his city and fellow inhabitants of Johannesburg. The 'states of vulnerability and capacity that actualize our political freedom set the parameters of our relation to fellow subjects', and this defines Gevisser's struggle after the attack to come to terms not just with the event itself but also the city and the people living in it. His decision to visit Alexandra and its 'mean streets' combines the personal tragedy, the fear and disconnect, with positive and safe elements of his childhood, as personified in Hope. The redemptive nature of Alexandra becomes his personal redemption too, and perhaps the overall message is that change and spatial justice will eventually emerge from unexpected, yet so familiar, places and encounters. At the core of it all are the inhabitants and their efforts to look after each other and their city. They alone can reconstruct the city in their image and redefine its spatial and emotional boundaries.

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