


The power of exclusion in the works of André Brink and Assia Djebar

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South African author André Brink and the Algerian Assia Djebar have been described as a duo of literature and struggle. Various parallels exist between the authors' oeuvres: both authors strive to create a chain of voices for those who have been ignored or silenced; they attempt to re-evaluate the colonial experience while problematising the complexities of present-day South Africa and Algeria; their narratives foreground language, space, and power struggles between coloniser and colonised, master and slave, man and woman. Their characters represent a desire for freedom and the need for resistance in the quest for liberation. In this article I focus on the comparable role of space, and more specifically spaces of exclusion, in a selection of the authors' works. Postcolonial theories serve as a framework for establishing Brink and Djebar's similar stance regarding the notion of exclusion. Amongst others, Homi Bhabha's concept of the 'beyond' and Édouard Glissant's notion of 'relation' are employed to strengthen arguments made concerning the characters' desire for movement which results from them being excluded from certain spaces. In this article I demonstrate how their characters feel attracted to cross borders that exclude in a quest for inclusion. An endless, open, and powerful movement is the result of the opposing forces of exclusion and attraction their characters experience. **Keywords:** André Brink, Assia Djebar, spaces, exclusion, isolation, postcolonial.

Introduction

South African author André Brink (1935–2015) and the Algerian Assia Djebar (1936–2015) have been described as a duo of literature and struggle (Chanda). Despite perhaps evident differences that separate these two authors of opposing poles of the African continent (the authors' different sexes, South Africa and Algeria's distinct colonial histories, systems of oppression, and literary traditions), many parallels exist in their work: both authors see writing as a form of resistance and aim to give a type of voice to the silenced and oppressed people of their countries. Due to the critical way in which their texts question colonial forms of oppression, their work can moreover be identified as postcolonial. Both writers also demonstrate a sensitivity to language and find it difficult to employ a language of oppression in their work. They also

experience a similar difficulty to finally grasp the landscape of their respective countries through their novels. It is, however, the comparable portrayal of spaces, and more specifically spaces of exclusion, in a selection of Brink and Djebar's work that I seek to explore in this article.

The notion of exclusion is a common thread that runs throughout Brink and Djebar's work. Its representation is often interlaced with ideas concerning isolation, alienation, enclosure, and solitude. Their oeuvres often raise a postcolonial critique against exclusionary practices and they have frequently been studied through the lens of postcolonial studies (see Burger and Szczurek 13–4; Kossew; and Viljoen for examples of critical postcolonial responses to Brink's work, and Murray; Hiddleston; Ringrose; Hirchi; and Faulkner for postcolonial readings of some of Djebar's novels). One can consider that their texts echo the concerns of postcolonial critics who call for a "resistance against exclusionary, reterritorializing processes" (Rose 60) and insist on the need for a spatial revolution that would undermine hierarchical engendering of spaces and spatial dualisms that are used to control, suppress, confine, and exclude (Duncan 7–8, 142–3; McDowell 31, 39). As a first objective in this article, I set out to explore how the spatial notion of exclusion is represented in a selection of works in Brink and Djebar's respective oeuvres. By referring to theories of postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Édouard Glissant, I will highlight the authors' similar postcolonial stance regarding the notion of exclusion. The extensive nature of Djebar and Brink's work requires me to select five novels from each author's oeuvre. After investigating the depiction of spatial exclusion in Brink's *'n Oomblik in die wind* (*An instant in the wind*, 1975), *Kennis van die aand* (*Looking on Darkness*, 1973), *Inteendeel* (*On the Contrary*, 1993), *Duiwelskloof* (*Devil's Valley*, 1998), and *Philida* (2012), I examine the portrayal of exclusion and isolation in the following texts of Djebar: *L'Amour, la fantasia* (*Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade*, 1985), *Ombre sultane* (*A Sister to Scheherazade*, 1987), *Vaste est la prison* (*So Vast the Prison*, 1995), *La femme sans sépulture* (*The Woman without a Tomb*, 2002), and *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* (*Nowhere in my Father's House*, 2008). These novels give a balanced representation of the authors' oeuvres. Due to the wide ranging publication dates, the novels provide a type of chronological overview of their oeuvres. This will lead to my second objective: the exposition of Brink and Djebar's comparable representation of exclusion. I will conclude by demonstrating how both authors emphasise the significant need and role of spaces of exclusion.

Movement beyond the boundary

The notions of borders, boundaries, thresholds, spatial binaries, and 'in-between' spaces are central in Brink and Djebar's work. Their characters often find themselves confined in a strictly divided space. The other side is frequently inaccessible and remains out of reach. As a result of this exclusion, their characters are often situated on the margins in an in-between space.

When considering their characters' similar drive toward the 'beyond' from a postcolonial perspective, the use of the concept of the threshold is significant. Postcolonial critics often make use of concepts such as thresholds or liminality to counter and challenge spatial binary oppositions such as the Global South and North, east and west (or 'the West' and 'the rest'), the periphery and centre, etc. (Gregory 74; McDowell 38; Wilson and Tunca 1). Wilson and Tunca describe the notion of the 'threshold' as a "ubiquitous term in postcolonial criticism, which along with cognate labels like the liminal, the interstitial and the in-between contributes to the redefining of perceptions of space and place that is happening under globalization". They define the concept of the threshold or the liminal as a "passageway across a boundary, an opening which permits movement from one space to another; in being associated with borders and gateways it comprises [...] zones of exchange and transit which signify entry into and exit from existing structures" (1). Examples of such threshold concepts in current postcolonial thinking include the notion of 'between-ness', an idea developed by postcolonial theorists and feminists of colour; and more specifically Bhabha's notions of the "middle passage" or the "middle ground" where "identities can metamorphose or be transformed and power relations negotiated [...] the place where translation, migrancy, ambivalence and the transnational are reconfigured" (Wilson and Tunca 1). Bhabha develops the concept of 'between-ness', or what he calls 'in-between space' or the 'Third Space'. He explains that the Third Space "though unrepresentable in itself [...] constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity [...] the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew" (Bhabha 55). We can deduce that Bhabha's Third Space represents a hybrid, flexible, and innovative 'border dimension' which refuses any final and fixed meaning. Bhabha's concepts additionally involve the idea of the 'beyond', a notion he associates with the term of postcoloniality in that it embodies "restless and revisionary energy" (6). He reasons that to be in the 'beyond' is more than merely inhabiting an intervening space. "[T]o dwell 'in the beyond'", Bhabha insists, "is also [...] to be part of a revisionary time, a return to the present to redescribe our cultural contemporaneity; to reinscribe our human, historic commonality; to touch the future on its hither side. In that sense, then, the intervening space 'beyond', becomes a space of intervention in the here and now" (10). Bhabha raises the idea of a movement *au-delà*, or a movement forward which results from borderline engagements. He states:

we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the 'beyond': an exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of the words *au-delà*—here and there, on all sides, fort/da, hither and thither, back and forth (1).

In the boundary or threshold between binaries (between past and present, between inside and outside, between exclusion and inclusion) there is a

disaccord of opposing energies or forces. It is from this disaccord that the need for movement or action is born to pursue the *au-delà*, for it is from the boundary, as Heidegger (qtd in Bhabha 1) points out, that “something begins its presencing”. The boundary represents a bridge or passage from where presencing, or in Brink and Djebar’s characters’ perspective, movement or imagination begins. This drive of their characters has parallels with the constant movement or action of postcolonial theorist Glissant’s concept of *relation*, a notion that encompasses all the characteristics of his ‘ideal’ world view or *tout-monde*. He describes *relation* as “*totalité en mouvement*” (a totality of movement) or “*totalité ouverte*” (an overt totality) (Glissant 147, 206) and accentuates its connection with Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of *rhizome* due to its relational character: “Within the rhizome of the *totalité-monde* [...] the notions of the centre and the periphery are obsolete” (Glissant 137–8, my translation). These notions should to his mind rather be considered as multiple participating elements (138–9). Glissant (147, 151, 206) insists that within *relation*, there is constant action or movement. He describes the action as a double movement resulting from opposing forces working constantly on each other. He maintains that the result is not destruction, but rather openness and creation that springs forth from the margins (Glissant 170). In describing the movement present in *relation*, Glissant (153) observes *inter alia*: “*Plus il produit de l’exclusion et plus il génère de l’attraction*” (the more it produces exclusion, the more attraction it generates). In the following sections, I argue that, in a Glissantian sense, the more Brink and Djebar’s characters are presented with exclusions, the more they feel attracted to cross the borders that exclude them in a quest for inclusion. The opposing forces of exclusion and attraction their characters experience results in an endless, open, and powerful movement.

The need for the unreachable

In many of Brink’s novels, the idea of spatial isolation is frequently portrayed in characters’ search of faraway spaces from which they are excluded. In *Inteendeel*, Estienne describes the “thirst” he has for such spaces (28). He yearns for an “*Ultima thule*” or an “other Side” beyond his known borders (*Inteendeel* 22, 27, 38). In *Kennis van die aand*, Josef refers to how Simon Hlabeni who, ‘stuck’ in London and unable to return to South Africa, longs for his home country:

Slegs ’n paar van ons het geweet hoe graag hy dit alles van hom wou afskuif om net weer stil tuis in die son te sit en in Zoeloe verse te skryf wat nooit gepubliseer sou word nie.
(*Kennis* 177)

Only a few of us knew how willingly he would have liked to push it all away just to sit in the sun at home again and to write verses in Zulu that will never be published.¹

Simon does not idealise the space from which he is excluded. He knows his country’s imperfections, and yet the persistent yearning for it remains. In contrast to Simon’s desire, some of Brink’s characters long for idealistic spaces that are often directly equated with ‘The Promised Land’ (*’n Oomblik in die wind*

182). Other forms of 'promised lands' are conjured up in desires: Philida, for instance, dreams about an idealistic land of freedom:

Eendag, dit weet ek, eendag gaan ek nie meer hier wees nie; ek gaan op 'n plek van my eie wees, 'n plaas soos Zandvliet maar nie Zandvliet nie [...] ons almal saam, vry, vir altyd en altyd en met skoene aan. (Philida 36)

One day, and that I know, one day I won't be here anymore, I will be on a place of my own, a farm like Zandvliet but not Zandvliet [...] all of us together, free, forever and ever with shoes on.

In *Philida*, the Gariep River becomes the embodiment of such a paradisaical land. A place on the other side of their familiar world, the Gariep represents a paradise that welcomes all (219–20, 242–3). Similar utopian spaces are pursued in *Kennis van die aand*. Josef recounts how his ancestor Moos would proclaim the possibility of a free country where they would be considered equals and recalls how Moos started talking amongst the slaves:

vreemde verwarde woorde oor vryheid, gelykheid en broederskap; oor 'n beloofde land waarin hy net so vurig geglo het as die eerste Moses in syne. O, my gevaarlike voorvader! (Kennis 46)

strange, muddled words of freedom, equality, and fraternity; of a promised land that he ardently believed in just like the first Moses believed in his. Oh, my dangerous ancestor!

Josef insists on how Moos would address the people in the language of Wilberforce and Rousseau:

oor die mens wat vry gebore is en nou in kettings sit, en oor die dag wat voorlê [...] Moos het met al meer begeesting gespreek oor die Beloofde Land. (48)

about men born free and now chained, and the day ahead [...] Moos spoke more and more spiritedly about the Promised Land.

Josef himself wishes for worlds that seem dreamlike and 'out of reach'. As a child, he longs for ideal worlds that are portrayed through fiction. When he and Willem are caught in the mist on the mountain and they must spend the night alone in a cave, they talk about Robinson Crusoe (108): "*en oor hoe graag ons op 'n eiland soos syne wou uitkom en vir goed daar bly woon*" (and how eagerly we wanted to reach an island like his and to stay there for good). Josef, however, longs for more than a mere space in a story, but spaces of stories itself. He emphasises how, contrary to Willem, he was excluded from the fictional worlds offered by books:

lets soos 'n boek het ek self nooit besit nie: dit was deel van die wilmenswêreld, soos Oukersaandkonserte, en skoolgaan, en poeding na ete, en nuwe klere. (99)

Something like a book I never owned myself: it was part of the white man's world, like Christmas Eve concerts, and going to school, and dessert after dinner, and new clothes.

Books are part of the white man's world—a terrain that is considered forbidden. He recalls how he finally stole the book *Robinson Crusoe* and states:

Dit was nie net gewone diefstal nie [...] wat ek geneem het, het behoort aan 'n gans ander wêreld as myne, 'n terrein van volstrekte taboe. (100)

It wasn't normal theft [...] what I took belonged to a whole other world than my own, a terrain of absolute taboo.

In stealing the book, Josef commits a double offense: it is not only criminal, but he also transgresses enforced borders in taking something from a space which, according to the social norms of the time, should exclude him.

An additional common pursuit present in Brink's novels is couples' yearning for utopian spaces which will allow them to hide or take shelter or repose together. In *'n Oomblik in die wind*, Adam and Elisabeth frequently long for a new space. On their journey, the narrator stresses how their hankering for the Cape is intensified by the cold which surrounds them:

Maar stadiqaan sou die triestigheid terugsyfer waar hulle vlak teen die vuurtjie in die beroekte grot sit. Sommer net sit. Of praat en praat: gewoonlik oor die Kaap, nou so ver, en so begeerlik anderkant die grysheid van dié winterse dae, 'n hunkering soos wat hulle vroeër na die see verlang het. (*Oomblik* 110)

But the miserableness would slowly filter through again where they were sitting, close to the fire in the fumed cave. Simply sitting. Or talking: usually about the Cape, now so far away, and so desirable on the other side of these grey winter days, a hankering like they had earlier for the sea.

In *Kennis van die aand*, the quest for a resting place is also prominent in Josef and Jessica's relationship. Josef expresses the urgent need that he and Jessica had to find a place to be alone:

Vreemd watter nood dit in ons albei was [...] om by die see te kom, by 'n verlate strandjie waar ons alleen kon wees en kaal kon swem en ons skoon spoel van alles, van die hele wêreld. Maar dit het nooit gebeur nie [...] Mettertyd het ons dit maar aanvaar, asof ons stilswyend besef het dat dit nie mag gebeur nie. (*Kennis* 336)

Strange the need we both had [...] to get to the sea, to a desolate beach where we could be alone and swim naked and rinse us clean of everything, of the whole world. But it never happened [...] we accepted it in time, as though we silently realised that it may not happen.

The space for which they long remains unreachable. For Josef, the longing for 'unreachable' spaces is later even depicted in his dreams (12). Unable to reach a place where they can be free and safe together, Josef and Jessica settle on the

only other alternative space that will allow them freedom: death. The decision allows them to break free from the rules set by the apartheid regime, and for the first and last time, they go and buy cigarettes together. The outing allows Josef to finally get a glimpse of the space from which he and Jessica as a couple are excluded. He defines walking next to each other as a feast (390). Josef's final thoughts in prison depict the utopia of which he had a glimpse—a space that he will perhaps fully experience in death:

Jessica sal in my arm lê, in die aand, in die nag, in die vertroude donker. En ek sal vir haar sê [...] kom ons gaan uit na die strate, kom ons loop hand aan hand deur die stad, moenie bang wees nie, niemand sal omgee nie, niemand sal ons keer nie [...] Kom, my liefing. Die wêreld is oop en die wette is weg. Kom, loop saam met my nakend oor die strand sonder einde. (Kennis 342)

Jessica will lie in my arm, in the evening, in the night, in the familiar darkness. And I will tell her [...] let's go out to the streets, let's walk hand in hand in the city, don't be afraid, no one will mind, no one will stop us [...] Come, my darling. The world is open and the laws are gone. Come, walk naked with me on the beach without end.

Josef's utopia is not incredible. He merely wishes for an open, familiar space that will allow him and Jessica freedom to move and to be who they are.

Amongst the different variations of 'promised lands', new worlds, utopias, and 'Other Sides' in Brink's work, a common thread can be observed: all point to the importance of being isolated from the idealistic world to be able to believe in it. In *Kennis van die aand*, when discussing the possibility of a new world, Josef tells Jessica and Richard:

Julle wil julle albei probeer uitsluit uit die nuwe wêreld, julle dink albei aan die moontlikheid van 'n hemel. Ek gun julle dit. Miskien beny ek julle dit. Maar die enigste wêreld waarin ek kan glo, is een waaruit ek nie uitgesluit sal wees nie—mê my bruinheid, mê al my gebreke, mê al my befoeterdheid, mê alles wat van my 'n mens maak. En ongelukkig beteken dit juis 'n wêreld waarin die stryd nooit sal ophou nie [...] Dis tog in elk geval stront wat ons hier sit en praat. Maak dit enige verskil aan die wêreld en al die hel daarbuite? En al die hel in óns? En die eintlike hel, dink ek [...] is dalk juis die woorde wat ons moet gebruik om die hemel te beskryf. (Kennis 342)

You both wish to exclude yourself from the new world, you both believe in the possibility of a heaven. You are welcome to it. Perhaps I envy you. But the only world in which I can believe, is one from which I will not be excluded—with my brownness, with all my faults, with all my contrariness, with everything that makes me human. And unfortunately, that precisely means a world where the struggle will never end [...] It is nevertheless mere nonsense that we are discussing here. Does it make any change to the world and all the hell outside? And all the hell in us? And the true hell, I think [...] is perhaps exactly the words that we must use to describe heaven.

Josef longs for a world where he would be included. He realises that a world where no one is excluded means a world where the struggle will never end.

Inclusion will be a never-ending strife. He additionally suggests that the language used to imagine this new world is inadequate: the words at their disposal are a type of hell or prison for it does not allow them to describe matters on the other side of their known, existing borders. *Inteendeel*'s Estienne similarly emphasises the limits of language to describe the other side for, as he states,

[s]olank mens dit 'n naam kan gee, is dit nooit genoeg nie. Wat ek soek, lê daar ánderkant. Anderkant al wat naam is. (103)

for as long as you can give it a name, it is never enough. What I am looking for, lies there beyond. Beyond anything that is a name.

The necessity of exclusion is suggested in *'n Oomblik in die wind* as well. Elisabeth observes:

Eendag was daar 'n paradys by die see; ons was daar: onthou jy nog? Omdat ons daar uitgedryf is, kan ons daaraan bly glo. (Oomblik 164)

There once was a paradise by the sea; we were there: do you still remember? And since we were driven out, we can still believe in it.

Just like paradise, happiness, too, resembles a place from which she is isolated:

Bestaan geluk dan? Of is dit net iets waarna jy verlang? Maar met skielike hartstog dink sy weer: Nee! Ek het dit deurgrond, ek het dit gedrink, dit bestaan, ek ken dit. Die paradys bestaan. (193)

Does happiness exist? Or is it merely something for which you long? But with a sudden passion, she realises: No! I fathomed it, I drank it, it exists, I know it. Paradise exists.

Both Adam and Elisabeth also acknowledge the importance of the mirage. The narrator observes:

Dit is hy wat dit die eerste begin vermoed [...] Hy moes vanoggend al daaraan gedink het. Maar mens wil nie. Dalk het jy dit nodig: hoe sal jy anders aan die gang bly? (158–9)

He was the first to suspect it [...] He must have already thought about it this morning. But you don't want to. Perhaps you need it: how else can you carry on?

After realising that it was just an illusion, Elisabeth realises that she could, contrary to her prior belief, go further (159): "*Omdat ek skielik weer in iets geglo het*" (Because I suddenly believed in something again). They both needed the mirage, an unreachable 'other side', in order to believe and to carry on. The unreachable strengthens the need to continue the journey. The quest remains for there is a belief in the existence of an other side, even though it might remain inaccessible.

A corresponding recognition is made in *Inteendeel*. Jeanne encourages Estienne to be aware of his seclusion and therefore to know his borders and

limitations. Only then will he be able to aim to move across them. She refers to the role of Jean de Luxembourg who sold her to the English:

Al wat hy gedoen het, was om die vreeslike perke van die moontlike te bewys [...] Dis hulle almal se sonde [...] die spel van die moontlike. Hulle word magtig omdat hulle die verbeelding aan bande lê. Dis waarop hulle hele mag berus. Hulle verbied ons om te onthou wat regtig onmoontlik is. En deur net op die moontlike te konsentreer [...] het hulle die wêreld 'n onmoontlike plek gemaak om in te woon [...] Ons het iemand nodig om weer ons oë vir die onmoontlike oop te maak, Estienne. Dis al manier om die wêreld te verander in 'n plek waar lewe weer moontlik is. (Inteendeel 151–2)

All he did was to prove the terrible limits of the possible [...] It's the sin of all of them [...] the game of the possible. They become powerful because they restrict the imagination. That is what their power is vested in. They forbid us to remember what is really impossible. And by only focusing on the possible [...] they turned the world into an impossible place to live in [...] We need someone to open our eyes for the impossible again, Estienne. It's the only way to change the world into a place where life is once more possible.

Jeanne suggests that it is essential to imagine the impossible. The impossible and the unreachable are needed to survive in the mundane, enclosed, and realistic present. Estienne realises that that is the secret:

Dit, dink ek, is die geheim: om te weet wanneer om jou rug op die alledaagse te draai en uit te gaan in daardie ruimte wat ander as waansin bestempel. (Inteendeel 230)

That, I think, is the secret: to know when to turn your back on the everyday and to go out into the space that others describe as madness.

It is this belief in the unlikely, the absurd, or the impossible other side 'beyond' that drives most of Brink's characters.

Propelled through exclusion

In comparison to Brink's work, Djebar's characters also frequently emphasise the presence of 'impossible' spaces from which they are excluded: whether it be taboo areas in the house (*L'Amour, la fantasia* 20–3; *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* 55–6, 110–1), an exclusion from the outside world (*Vaste est la prison* 124; *Nulle part* 29; *Ombre sultane* 136–7), a sentiment of exclusion due to estrangement (*La femme sans sépulture* 79, 100–1, 237), or figurative interdicted spaces constituted for instance by romantic rendezvous (*Nulle part* 409). The gendering of space and its consequential exclusionary practices is especially central in Djebar's oeuvre (Mortimer 306). The spatial effect of sexual discrimination often comes to the forefront in references made about characters' education. The narrator in both *L'Amour, la fantasia* and *Vaste est la prison* emphasises the spatial distinction in school and insists that it is her sex that excludes and isolates her (*Amour* 257; *Vaste* 195–6, 198–9). The narrator in *Vaste est la prison*'s sex also plays a role in her spatial exclusion in her work environment. In the process of making her film, she describes the others'

confusion for not having a male boss: “*Je sais qu’ils sont désorientés bien sûr, parce qu’une femme pour la première fois est le ‘patron’*” (I know that they are of course confused, because for the first time a woman is the ‘boss’) (Vaste 143). She additionally observes a female bystander’s bafflement: “*Elle a observé ma répétition [...] elle m’a regardée, ne comprenant pas ce que, femme, je faisais là*” (She observed my rehearsal [...] she watched me, not understanding what, as a woman, I was doing there) (Vaste 200).

In alignment with the principal notion in Djebar’s oeuvre, language is also at the heart of many of her characters’ sense of spatial exclusion. While references are made to the French language that causes a type of exclusion for some characters (*Nulle part* 20–1), it is predominantly the idea of being excluded from her maternal languages, Arab, but especially the Berber language, that is continually emphasised (*Nulle part* 121–2, 315). Across her oeuvre, this exclusion from the mother tongue is spatially depicted. In *L’Amour, la fantasia*, the narrator notes:

Silencieuse, coupée des mots de ma mère par une mutilation de la mémoire, j’ai parcouru les eaux sombres du corridor en miraculée, sans en deviner les murailles [...] De quelle roche nocturne du plaisir suis-je parvenue à l’arracher? (*L’Amour* 13)

Silent, cut from my mother’s words through a mutilation of memory, I travelled across the dark waters of the miraculous passage, without perceiving its walls [...] From which nocturnal rock of pleasure did I manage to get pulled from?

The narrator implies that, cut adrift, she is spatially removed, albeit figuratively, from her maternal language. The narrator in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* similarly admits that she realised too late that she has been in love all along with this “lost” language. It remains ‘lost’ for, even in an attempt to study it, the language turns into mere rhetoric:

Je la recevais en poésie ressuscitée des batailles ancestrales, alors qu’il ne faisait que l’étudier comme rhétorique. ‘Poèmes suspendus’ dans le désert d’Arabie, parmi la foule et la poussière [...] Je me suis ainsi attachée, je me suis voulue prisonnière de cet héritage-là. (*Nulle part* 408)

I received it in resurrected poetry of ancestral battles, while he was simply studying it as rhetoric. ‘Poems suspended’ in the Arabian Desert, amongst the masses and dust [...] I attached myself in such a way, I desired to be a prisoner of the heritage.

In a comparable manner to Josef in *Kennis van die aand* (207), the narrator in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* also wishes to break into a prison from which she feels excluded: where South Africa represents Josef’s prison, it is the spatial heritage and lost maternal language that constitutes the space in which she wishes to be confined. The idea of being displaced as a result of language is repeated when the narrator in *L’Amour, la fantasia* insists that she is expelled:

On me dit exilée. La différence est plus lourde: je suis expulsée de là-bas pour entendre et ramener à mes parents les traces de la liberté [...] Je crois faire le lien, je ne fais que patouiller, dans un marécage qui s'éclaire à peine. (L'Amour 303)

They call me an exile. But the difference is much larger: I am excluded to listen and to bring back some traces of liberty to my parents [...] I thought I made the link, but I merely fumbled around in a hardly lit marsh.

She additionally suggests that she has been denounced:

au-dehors, votre langue maternelle vous aurait trahie, elle vous aurait dénoncée; on vous aurait presque montrée du doigt! (Nulle part 337)

outside, your mother tongue would have betrayed you, she would have denounced you, you would almost have been accused!

Having been “removed” from her mother tongue moreover gives her a feeling of being deserted: she describes how, abandoned by her maternal language, she was ‘raised’ by her stepmother language (French):

Le français m'est langue marâtre. Quelle est ma langue mère disparue, qui m'a abandonnée sur le trottoir et s'est enfouie? [...] Sous les poids des tabous que je porte en moi en héritage, je me retrouve désertée des chants de l'amour arabe. Est-ce d'avoir été expulsée de ce discours amoureux qui me fait trouver aride le français que j'emploie? [...] Les mots d'amour s'élèvent dans un désert. (L'Amour 298)

French is my stepmother tongue. What is my lost mother tongue, who abandoned me on the sidewalk and buried itself? [...] Underneath the weight of taboos that I carry in me in heritage, I find myself abandoned from Arabian love songs. Is it due to being excluded from this amorous discourse that I find the French I use to be dry? [...] Words of love rise in a desert.

The idea of being abandoned is additionally heightened by suggesting that she has been orphaned. The notion is raised when she describes her envy towards Tarik who studies pre-Islamic poetry (*Nulle part* 308): “*ce garçon possédait un trésor que j'avais souvent envié, dont l'accès me restait fermé*” (this boy possessed a treasure that I often envied, to which I continue to have no access). She insists that French translations of the texts will forever fall short in representing the texts’ beauty, meaning, and its underlying lyricism. It is because she feels exiled from these original “trésors”, or texts, that makes her to her mind an orphan (*Nulle part* 308, 322). Removed, abandoned, and exiled from her mother tongue, the narrator in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* illustrates how she wishes to have her maternal language as a skin (“*ma langue-peau*”) and to be able to carry it around outside and expose it to the sun. She, however, points out that she can merely, and hardly, whisper it indoors and that, once outside, she is obliged to keep quiet or to talk another language (*Nulle part* 340–1). She describes the urgency she experiences:

Une urgence me presse: je veux sortir, sortir 'nue', comme ils disent, laisser mon corps avancer au-dehors impunément, jambes mobiles, yeux dévorants. Mais je ne peux jouir de cette licence qu'à la condition de dissimuler ma langue de lait, de la plaquer tout contre moi, au besoin entre mes seins! (Nulle part 341)

An urgency pushes me: I want to go out, to go out 'naked', as they say, to let my body move forward outside with impunity, mobile legs, consuming eyes. But I can only enjoy this licence if I conceal my milk tongue, pressing it against me, if needed between my breasts!

It is again the idea of exclusion that comes to the forefront: she is unable to move freely and 'unveiled' in the outside world and is therefore excluded from this liberating space. Her only alternative is to move around 'veiled', for her mother tongue, the language that is equated to her mother's milk, is 'veiled' or hidden in her.

Excluded from the listening circle of the maternal language (*L'Amour* 267), the narrator in *L'Amour, la fantasia* declares that she is unable to reach the language which, according to her, holds the power to resurrect the silenced voices of the past (*L'Amour* 303). Without this absolute transcription of her mother language, her autobiography inevitably takes the form of fiction:

Ma fiction est cette autobiographie qui s'esquisse, alourdie par l'héritage qui m'encombre. Vais-je succomber ? [...] Mais la légende tribale zigzague dans les béances et c'est dans le silence des mots d'amour, jamais proférés, de la langue maternelle non écrite, transportée comme un bavardage d'une mime inconnue et hagarde, c'est dans cette nuit-là que l'imagination, mendiant des rues, s'accroupit [...] (L'Amour 304)

My fiction is this autobiography that is being outlined, weighed down by the heritage that blocks me. Will I succumb? [...] But the tribal legend zigzags in the yawning gaps and it is in the silence of loving words, never pronounced, of the unwritten mother tongue, transported as the chatter of an unknown, wild mime, it is in this night that the imagination, beggar of the streets, crouches [...]

Caught in the French language, the narrator declares that her 'lost' oral mother language is presented to her in a form of inaudible chattering, a description that reminds one of Flip's perception of sounds that are "barely inaudible" in *Duiwelskloof* (285–6). She nevertheless suggests that, through her imagination, the personified 'beggar in the street', she can possibly imagine these lost voices. It is her exclusion from her mother tongue that encourages her imagination to come to the fore.

A final space of exclusion that deserves attention in this article is the common exclusionary notion in Djebar's oeuvre of being "nulle part" (nowhere). Not only is the expression used as title for Djebar's last novel, but many intertextual references also allude to it. When looking at the house where her cousins used to live, the narrator in *La Femme sans sépulture* laments: "Nulle part dans la maison de mon père!" (Nowhere in my father's house!) (*La Femme* 87). This is a strange complaint to read at first, for many of Djebar's narrators

accentuate how they identify with their fathers as they are considered their fathers' daughters.² This lamentation of being nowhere in their fathers' houses therefore calls for a closer inspection.

When treated as a French girl amongst her mother's friends, the narrator in *Nulle part dans la maison de mon père* feels estranged: "*Je me tais, je me sens soudain étrange, étrangère à cause de ces menus commérages*" (I keep quiet, I suddenly feel strange, a stranger due to this petty gossip) (*Nulle part* 17). She realises that she does not belong to their world, and expresses:

Moi, silencieuse dans ce patio bruissant des voix de ces femmes de tous âges qui ne sortent qu'ensevelies de la tête jusqu'aux pieds, soudain alarmée par cette remarque, je me sens "la fille de mon père". Une forme d'exclusion—ou une grâce? (*Nulle part* 18)

Me, silent in this patio rustling of women's voices of all ages who only go out enshrouded from head to toe, suddenly alarmed by this remark, I am "the daughter of my father". A form of exclusion—or a grace?

Being her father's daughter can on the one hand be considered a grace, for by following in his footsteps through adopting the French language, she is given a form of mobility, freedom, and power (Sokołowicz 347). On the other hand, her identification with her father is most certainly at the heart of her exclusion as well for she feels both isolated from her compatriots as well as her French classmates (*Nulle part* 195). She states:

j'oublie que, pour mes camarades, je suis différente, avec le nom si long de mon père et ce prénom de Fatima qui m'ennoblissait chez les miens mais m'amoindrit là, en territoire des "Autres". (*Nulle part* 117)

I forget that, for my classmates, I am different, with the name so long of my father and this first name of Fatima that ennobled me amongst my family but that diminishes me here, in the territory of the "Others".

Her sense of exclusion goes further indeed: she even feels excluded from the one 'place' which is hers—the space that can confine and even imprison her (*Nulle part* 231–2): the house of, or identification with, her father. She describes her ambivalent position of being both the loved as well as the "dispossessed" daughter of her father by associating her situation with that of the prophet's youngest daughter, Fatimah:

l'amour paternel qui vous confère le statut envié de "fille de son père", de "fille aimée" à l'image, dans notre culture islamique, du Prophète, qui n'eut que des filles (quatre, et chacune d'exception; la dernière, seule à lui survivre, se retrouvant dépossédée de l'héritage paternel, en souffrira au point d'en mourir. Je pourrais presque l'entendre soupirer, à mi-voix: "nulle part, hélas, nulle part dans la maison de mon père". (*Nulle part* 231–2)

the paternal love that bestows on you the envied status of “daughter of her father”, of “beloved daughter”, to the image, in our Islamic culture, of the Prophet, who had but daughters (four, the last, the only to outlive him, found herself robbed of the paternal heritage which left her suffering to the extent to die from it. I could almost hear her sigh, softly: “Nowhere, alas, nowhere in my father’s house”).

She moreover questions her own conflicted position:

Mais vous—je me parle à moi-même, comme ferait une étrangère sarcastique—, où en êtes-vous, vous qui avez commencé votre vie par l’intervention du père, du père et de sa fille prétendument aimée ou réellement aimée—et qui déclarez soudain presque à la face du monde: “nulle part dans la maison de mon père”? Dépossédée? Vraiment, et quel aiguillon vous incite à l’écrire? Pourquoi vouloir ainsi la clamer à tous vents? (Nulle part 404–5)

But you—I speak to myself as would a sarcastic stranger—, where are you now, you who started your life by the intervention of the father, of the father and his daughter supposedly loved or truly loved—and who now suddenly almost declares to the world: “Nowhere in my father’s house”? Robbed? Really, and what sting incites you to write it? Why the need to proclaim it so to the four winds?

In doubting her own sense of place, she signals the difficulty of accepting and coming to terms with her lack of a significant space with regards to her relationship with her father. This lack of space is initially signalled after the bike ‘incident’: the fury her father publicly demonstrates and his refusal that she ever show her legs in public again bruises their relationship and forever mars her identification with him (*Nulle part* 57). She accentuates that this denial of her father is perhaps “*la seule blessure que m’infligea jamais mon père*” (the only wound my father ever inflicted on me) (*Nulle part* 57). It is after this peculiar “injury”, once at home after her father’s outbreak, that she has the need to look for a space that is her own. She recalls:

Je suis allée dans un coin opposé à eux deux (car, déjà, ma mère l’avait rejoint dans leur chambre). Je me voulais loin d’eux, dans la maison certes mais me cherchant une place bien à moi. (Nulle part 57)

I went to a corner opposite the two of them (because my mother already joined him in their room). I wanted to be far away from them, in the house of course but in a space that was my own.

Can it be deduced that it is this search and consequential ‘absence’ of “*une place bien à moi*” in her father’s house that lies at the heart of her feeling forever “*nulle part*” in his house? “*Nulle part*”, or in other words, without her own, secure, and personal space in which she can work through her own emotions? The notion of being nowhere and without place is reiterated by the narrator during another ‘quarrel’—the fight with her boyfriend:

Il prétend me donner un ordre que je n'entends pas [...] Dès la première minute face à face, je sais, je sens en effet que je n'ai plus de lieu! Je n'aurai même plus la maison de mon père! [...] La sensation abrupte de n'avoir désormais plus de lieu ni d'espace pour respirer [...] (Nulle part 380)

He claims to give me an order that I do not hear [...] From the first moment face to face, I know, I in fact sense that I do no longer have a place! I would even never have my father's house! [...] The abrupt feeling of henceforth not having a place nor a space to breathe [...]

The fight with the lover deepens the narrator's awareness that she has no place, not even her father's house, nor a place or space in which she can breathe, or possibly, just be herself. Malgorzata Sokołowicz (350) argues that this lack of place is due to the narrator's inability to find herself between the Oriental and Western world. It is for this reason, Sokołowicz (348–50) insists, that the narrator chooses to commit suicide. To her mind, the narrator demonstrates a will to continue to look for both a place (possibly the space offered by death?) and herself when she states:

Je suis sans lieu là-bas depuis ce jour d'octobre [...] Depuis cette aube de 1953, [...] je cherche, moi, inlassable, où se trouve la petite, l'obscur maison de mon père. (Nulle part 386)

I am without a place since that day in October [...] Since that dawn of 1953, [...] I am tirelessly searching the location of the small, obscure house of my father.

Sokołowicz (350) reasons that postcolonial writers such as Djebar write from outside their country and language, in a type of non-space in which they seek at least a “*petite, obscure maison de (s)on père*”. I agree with Sokołowicz that it is the narrator's sense of finding herself without a place, “nowhere”, or in a type of non-space, that pushes her further in her quest for space. The narrator declares:

Ainsi, depuis le début, s'agissait-il davantage du père—du père qui mourra sans savoir que sa fille aînée, de justesse, n'est pas morte, cet automne d'avant la guerre d'Algérie [...] Revivant cet épisode au plus près, quoique si longtemps après, me laissant conduire, toutes rênes lâchées, par l'ébranlement de cette poussée irrésistible de la mémoire, celle-ci galopant soudain telle une pouliche de race une fois libérée, une conclusion s'impose: “nulle part dans la maison de mon père!” (Nulle part 419–20)

Thus, since the start, it has always been a matter of the father—a father who will die without knowing that his eldest daughter, barely, did not die, that autumn before the Algerian war [...] Closely reliving that episode, although so long afterwards, reins loose, by the shudder of this irresistible thrust of memory, galloping suddenly like a filly when released, leads me to a clear conclusion: “Nowhere in my father's house!”

It is the narrator's sense of exclusion, her conclusion of being "nulle part", that drives her forward. It serves as the source of energy for her constant quest for a liberating space that includes: she moves forward (be it towards death or through life), propelled by her exclusion or non-space, in search of a space that can finally be hers. As suggested earlier in this article, a similar drive can be identified in Brink's characters: it is a desire for movement and action that is born from the existence of barriers, borders, and thresholds that serve to exclude. Borders, restrictions, impossible worlds, and spaces from which they are excluded are necessary to awaken the desire to cross and to continue, even if it is only imaginatively, forward into the other side 'beyond'.

Conclusion

In this article, I have emphasised the central and comparable notion of spatial exclusion in a selection of Brink and Djebar's works. I indicated how the authors' texts share a particular postcolonial stance regarding boundaries, thresholds, and barriers that serve to exclude and isolate. Their novels similarly accentuate the power of exclusion by foregrounding how it is spaces of exclusion that drive their characters' movement and imagination. Due to the limited number of texts analysed from both authors in this article, I believe it will be fruitful for further research to consider the comparable portrayal of spaces in their larger oeuvres.

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Notes

1. All English translations of excerpts from the novels are my own.
2. Sadiqi *et al.* (50) observe: "A North African woman's name is her identity, her home. She lives in it and carries it throughout her life. Unlike her Western counterparts, a North African woman has never been bound socially or legally to take her husband's name after marriage. But her father's name is a badge she carries through life".

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