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Houses of the Past
The Contemporary Gothic Novel and the Space of Citizenship

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Declaration

I, Jesse van Amelsvoort, hereby declare that this thesis, entitled “Houses of the Past: The Contemporary Gothic Novel and the Space of Citizenship”, submitted as partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within this text of works of other authors in any form (e.g. ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the bibliography.

I declare that the written (printed and bound) and the electronic copy of the submitted MA thesis are identical.

I hereby also acknowledge that I was informed about the regulations pertaining to the assessment of the MA thesis Euroculture and about the general completion rules for the Master of Arts Programme Euroculture.

Signed

Date 30 May 2016
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Introduction

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard writes of the home as the intimate basis of every human’s life: “[O]ur house is our corner of the world. (…) [I]t is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the word.”¹ It is the most fundamental place in the world, from which we move out to other spaces – school, work, friends. Edward Casey says of Bachelard’s approach that his “topoanalysis tries to convince us that the house is a world.”² If the world is our cosmos, the house is our world: a place of daydreams and fantasies.

Bachelard’s house, in *The Poetics of Space*, is fundamentally an intimate space, unaffected by the outside world. Bachelard writes:

> Before he [sic] is “cast into the world,” as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house. (…) Life begins well, it begins enclosed, protected, all warm in the bosom of the house.”³

What is perhaps most notable about Bachelard’s work is how apolitical it is. His book stays focused on this one particular site called the home and its poetic potential. It therefore stands in stark contrast with, for example, Homi Bhabha and his idea of the “unhomely,” in which the house figures as the site of world-historical intrusions.⁴ In this opposition, we find the house both as a political and as a non-political space. For Bachelard, the house is a place of belonging, symbolised by warmth and fond childhood memories. Compare this with Bhabha’s statement that “the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites history’s most intricate invasions.”⁵ Such invasions are necessarily political: they disrupt one’s sense of belonging and call for action or for a response; in other words, for individuals to position themselves vis-à-vis processes that are larger than they are. The processes Bhabha refers to in his essay are, for example, slavery, exploitation and domination, as in Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* (1987), which manifest themselves and their violent histories and legacies in the house haunted

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⁵ Ibid.: 141.
by the titular character. In that instant, the private and the public are mixed: the unhomely moment is that in which the world shows itself in the home, and vice versa. In this exchange between Bachelard and Bhabha, we see an understanding of the political as “a radical questioning of what it is to belong.”

The Italian philosopher Norberto Bobbio once referred to this distinction between the public and the private as one of the “grand dichotomies” of Western thought, extending far beyond the political-legal domain. What is public, is thought to be of interest to everybody: it is a common good. One can think here of parks, schools and hospitals, but also of streets and highways. At the same time, the “public sphere” constitutes more than institutions: it is also the space where people come together and discuss ideas. George Steiner thinks of European coffee houses in the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in this way, for example. Concomitantly, the private could roughly be defined as whatever the public is not, that is, it is those things that are of personal interest and do not require communal deliberation. It is the house, the home – spaces that are intimate in a way that a coffee house or market square could never be.

Yet there are also spaces that do not easily fit into either of these two spheres. How to think, for example, about the workplace, especially one of a small firm, where all employees know each other relatively well? Is this a new sphere, in addition to the private and the public, or a combination or fusion of the two? The unhomely would be an example of the latter category, yet the former also counts many examples – one may think of the workplace as such.

In his articulation of the unhomely moment as a collision of the public and the private spheres, Bhabha contends that these moments refuse to be accommodated in a binary way. Implicit in this statement are definitions of the political and what it means to be political that are not at all commonsensical in the social scientific disciplines that discuss the public and the private. In fact, when we look at belonging and membership from the legal-political perspective of citizenship, the political is largely located in the public sphere. It is on streets, squares and in government buildings that subjects become citizens. Thus, while talking about similar issues – such as inclusion, exclusion, com-

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8 George Steiner, The Idea of Europe (Tilburg: Nexus Institute, 2004).
community –, citizenship studies on the one hand and postcolonialism on the other hand find themselves on opposite ends of a spectrum.

In this thesis, I intend to bring these two bodies of thought to speak to each other through analysing three contemporary novels from the perspective of citizenship, postcolonialism and space. Although these might sounds as disparate topics of inquiry, that is not the case. Space has always been part of postcolonial analyses, ever since Edward Said brought the discipline to western academia. Andrew Teverson and Sara Upstone address the importance of space to postcolonialism as follows: “place plays a significant role in how one defines one’s own identity and, equally, how that identity is defined by others.” Some put it even stronger, stating that “empire was (...) a quintessentially geographical project.” Thus, it is not at all unusual to discuss space when thinking about the postcolonial state of affairs. Furthermore, it is not unusual to include the home in this thinking either: Bhabha is joined by Anne McClintock, who claims that “imperialism cannot be understood without a theory of domestic space.” Lisa Lowe’s recent monograph *The Intimacies of Four Continents* is perhaps the best example of such a theory: she traces “the intimate” both in global relations of slavery and trade, as well as in the manifestation of colonial wealth in the houses of William Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair.* In this thesis, I built on theirs and others postcolonial scholarship in exploring the possibilities and meanings of citizenship in the private sphere.

Citizenship, here, is not taken to narrowly mean membership of a bounded, political community, as it is in more legalistic studies. Contrarily, I specifically understand it as membership of communities in general, which may or may not be formally recognised. As Joe Turner writes: “The racialized, classed, sexualised, gendered dimensions of citizenship produce a complex assemblage of marginality; even when achieved, formal status is differentiated and does not always equate to legitimacy or belonging.” Indeed, this thesis explicitly aims to incorporate into theorisations of membership more

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14 Turner, “(En)gendering the Political,” 143.
subjective feelings of belonging – which, in Bhikhu Parekh’s words, “is about being accepted and feeling welcome”\(^\text{15}\) –, in the light of politics as questioning what it is to belong. As such, inclusion and exclusion come to the fore, as well as issues of equality and domination. All the while, my focus is on contemporary postcolonial Europe, rather than historical colonialism. However, the latter’s legacies and memories cannot be denied and do play an important role in the postcolonial present.

This thesis advances its arguments in two ways: firstly, by way of a theoretical argument, which necessitates reconceptualising citizenship as an act (rather than a status), and, secondly, by analysing three contemporary European novels with the theoretical argument in mind. In the first chapter, I define what postcolonial Europe is and what its analytical tools are. Here, too, I introduce the (postcolonial) Gothic as an optic for interpretation. In the second chapter, I present the theoretical argument for private citizenship, building on some suggestions made in these pages already. Chapter three to five form the second part of this work and each consists of the analysis of one novel: Herman Franke’s *Wolfstonen* (2003), António Lobo Antunes’ *Caminho como uma casa em chamas* (2014) and Saskia de Coster’s *Wat alleen wij horen* (2015). In these chapters, I translate the theoretical framework into a reading strategy. These three novels share many thematic similarities: not only are they all situated in apartment buildings, they lend themselves to a Gothic analyses, too. Lastly, all novels thematise tensions stemming from living with diversity. They do so, however, in different ways; together, they cast a more complete light on the difficulties facing postcolonial Europe today.

In the conclusion, I connect the theoretical argument with my readings and once more make the argument for recognising the political in the private sphere in relationship to citizenship. There, I will also touch on what I consider a broader societal movement that also includes the recent popularity of basic income initiatives and a motion adopted in the Dutch parliament calling for the government to research the possibility of including the children’s voice when parents want to home school.\(^\text{16}\) In contemporary Europe, in more ways than one, the private is political.


1 The (Post)Colonial and the Gothic in Europe

Introduction

What is postcolonial Europe? What is the Gothic? And is the postcolonial Gothic a simple combination of the two? If, in other words, this thesis investigates the possibility of private citizenship, what do the Gothic (as the concept employed) and postcolonial Europe (as the perspective used) exactly mean? This chapter consists of a literature review and will bring these concepts into clearer focus. We will, firstly, see the extent to which colonialism was involved in the construction of Europe, followed by the aspirations of scholars studying postcolonial Europe and its linkages with the wider world. Thereafter, this chapter argues that the Gothic is not a genre, but a cultural mode, which has important implications for our understanding of what Gothic writing does. The last section sets out how the postcolonial Gothic can become an analytical lens to show how Gothic motifs and themes echo in contemporary writing about the postcolonial present.

Colonialism and the Construction of Europe

Understanding contemporary Europe as postcolonial assumes that it once must have been colonial. Indeed, Europe’s colonial ventures since the fifteenth century have been extensively documented and researched and reiterating these diverse histories here would serve no real purpose. Instead, I would like to begin this chapter with an altogether brief reflection on how colonialism and imperialism are interwoven with the fabric of contemporary Europe – the continent, the European Union (EU) and the idea – and how this affects our understanding of what Europe is.

All major powers of Western Europe, including Sweden and Denmark, at one time or another possessed colonies overseas. These ranged from small islands and trading posts to large areas of land. Some political entities, such as Spain, had lost their colonies by the early-nineteenth century, while others, such as the United Kingdom and Portugal, held on to theirs much longer, well into the late-twentieth century and sometimes up to the present day. If we understand colonialism not as a necessarily overseas project, a

form that is a modern European invention, then the German imperial and Austro-Hungarian holdings in Eastern Europe come into focus, as do the communist and socialist blocs in the Soviet-Union and Yugoslavia. European colonialism, then, emerges as part of the history of all contemporary European nation-states.

It is curious, therefore, that colonial experiences are often left out of traditional histories of Europe and the European Union. Gurinder Bhambra points out that “[c]olonialism is integral both to the story of European integration and to any understanding of our contemporary world.” She then highlights how our idea of Europe is complicated by adopting a postcolonial lens of analysis. In her critique, Africa plays an especially important role. If Europe is a bounded space, that is, a space coterminous with the European continent, which is surrounded by three seas and whose eastern borders are perhaps somewhat blurry, what, then, to think of the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla, located on the other side of the Mediterranean amidst Moroccan land? Or, alternatively, if the EU is said to be a project that has brought peace to that European continent (as it often is, culminating in the awarding of the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize), how would, for instance, France’s 1954–62 war with Algerian independence fighters fit in such a narrative? After all, at the time, Algeria was as much part of France as the territories we today refer to as “France”.

Other scholars have also emphasised the special role Africa plays in both European politics and the European imagination. In recent years, Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson have published extensively on the idea of “Eurafrica,” which they argue played a prominent role when Western Europe started to think about cooperation and unification in the 1950s. Bhambra traces the influence of the colonies on European politics further back and puts it as follows: “a key aspect contributing to the outbreak of the two world wars was the imperial conflict over territory in both Europe and the wider world.”

18 Young, Empire, Colony, Postcolony, 7–26. Before Europeans started to sail the earth’s oceans, empires were usually connected by land.
22 Bhambra, “Postcolonial Europe,” 72.
by the early-twentieth century most lands were carved up between Britain, France, Germany and Italy. Consequently, tensions over territory also erupted here.

Looking at the UK’s accession to the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1973, based on their application for membership twelve years earlier, John Holmwood stresses the importance of the demise of Britain’s Commonwealth trading empire as one of the reasons to do so. As in Hansen and Jonsson’s work, it appears that the reasons for joining the European Coal and Steel Community, the EEC or the EU are manifold and are in part connected to extra-European territories. That is to say, the very framework of contemporary statehood in Europe is partially created by the colonial. Robert Young pushes this thought one step further, arguing that the entirety of European modernity was created in exchange with the overseas colonies:

it was not that modernity was produced in Europe and then exported, rather that modernity was itself produced by the export of Europe and import of colonial wealth with reciprocal effects around the world, in Europe as elsewhere. The emergence of modernity was intimately connected with the colonial project.

This intimate connection, however, is not usually acknowledged. Jozsef Böröcz and Mahua Sarkar phrase this critique provocatively: “The political process of European identity construction tries to hide the corpse of colonialism while it continues […] to partake of the material inheritance of the same colonialism.” Indeed, uncovering this “corpse of colonialism” and pointing out the connections between the past and the present is arguably one of the foundational missions of postcolonialism as a discipline.

In this section, I have gestured at some connections between colonialism and contemporary Europe. These linkages show that Europe’s colonial past has had a profound influence upon the continent today, an influence that is seldom acknowledged. The question arises, then, what “postcolonial Europe” actually means. This is the focus of the next section.

24 Young, Empire, Colony, Postcolony, 39.
What is Postcolonial Europe?

To understand what the idea of postcolonial Europe entails, we must first develop a notion of what postcolonialism is and does. Robert Young states it succinctly: “postcolonialism focuses on the power of first-world nations and their historic exploitations and oppressions of the global South.”26 For him, above all, postcolonialism is an activist political project: elsewhere, he described its aim as “[turning] the power structures of the world upside down, [refashioning] the world from below.”27 Following this, then, the idea of postcolonial Europe transports the “global South” into Europe itself, which is part of what is referred to as the “global North.” It means being attentive to the ways North and South, in our day and age, are no longer separated – if they ever were.

In an essay for New Literary History, Young calls for a reorientation of the postcolonial project, to focus more on “contemporary issues that have involved what can be characterised as the politics of invisibility and unreadability.”28 In the same issue, Dipesh Chakrabarty argues for postcolonialism to take up “the challenge of having to think of human agency over multiple and incommensurable scales at once” in the face of both globalisation and global warming.29 Even though their essays received critical responses in the journal’s next issue,30 pointing out several problematic aspects, what was not problematised was what Young sees as the task of postcolonialism:

the issue is rather to locate the hidden rhizomes of colonialism’s historical reach, of what remains invisible, unseen, silent, or unspoken. In a sense, postcolonialism has always been about the ongoing life of residues, living remains, lingering legacies.31

This echoes his earlier statement that “the postcolonial remains,”32 as well as his call to action to “make the invisible … visible.”33 The sentiment expressed in Young’s article – that the colonial past is not a past perfect, but should rather be visualised as a residue or remains – is shared more widely by postcolonial scholars. When, for example, Paul Gilroy writes that “[t]he imperial and colonial past continues to shape political life in the

26 Young, Empire, Colony, Postcolony, 149.
28 Ibid.: 22.
31 Young, “Postcolonial Remains,” 21.
32 Ibid.: 19.
33 Ibid.: 23.
overdeveloped-but-no-longer-imperial countries,” he also stresses the influence of the colonial past on the present in no unclear terms. Dissecting this influence is the task of the postcolonial scholar.

Young mostly looks outside Europe, pointing to issues such as indigeneity in Canada and Australia and Islamic resistance to the Western way of life as objects of study for postcolonial scholars. With the previous section on the complicity of colonialism in constructing Europe in mind, it is nevertheless easy to see how we can direct this task at postcolonial Europe. For Sandra Ponzanesi and Bolette Blaagaard, this is not a commonsensical move: they observe an “absence of Europe within postcolonial studies.” They, too, agree with the idea that Europe is caught somewhere in the middle of its past and its present: “Europe’s idea of self, and of its polity, is still struggling with the continuing hold of colonialist and imperialist attitudes.” Here, they engage directly with the idea of Europe, its self-definition in a changing world, a theme that will resurface later in this chapter and indeed throughout this thesis.

Writing some years earlier, Gurminder Bhambra turned to “the relationship of Europe to non-Europe (the ‘non-Europe’ within, as well as outside, ‘Europe’)” as a locus of postcolonial attention. This requires “to think Europe from a global perspective,” or, in Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s words, it necessitates a retelling of Europe’s history “in ways that bring forward the perspective of the world.” Postcolonial Europe, then, Bhambra argues, changes its perspective on both itself and the rest of the world. Concurrently, it allows new histories of the world to emerge, whose narrators are not located in Europe. Importantly, these new histories do not offer “a different interpretation of the same facts,” but instead bring forward “new facts.” Only when new facts are brought into being can historians escape the interpretations of Europe and the world as they exist today, Bhambra argues. Here, it becomes clear that postcolonial Europe might not necessarily be a description of the world as it is today, but rather “an aspirational project,” as Graham Huggan phrases it. In Bhambra and Trouillot’s words, this project closely

36 Ibid.: 4.
37 Bhambra, “Postcolonial Europe,” 69. Original emphasis.
38 Ibid.: 70.
resembles what Dipesh Chakrabarty termed “provincializing Europe,” which goes further than a postcolonial attempt to deconstruct the discourse underpinning colonialism. For Chakrabarty, it entails finding out how Europe’s particular history and ideas were disguised as universal. As such, “postcolonial Europe” is not a project which aspires to devalue Europe; rather, the project’s aims are to shed Europe’s universalism and provide a critical contextualisation, which so far has been missing.

Huggan, in an article that is both a reflection upon postcolonial Europe as well as a call for reorienting the field of postcolonial studies, puts forward another aspect of postcolonial Europe to be studied. He argues for being attentive to “new forms of colonialism (...) impinging powerfully on both individual nations and the region as a whole.”

Prime among these new forms are race relations in Europe: whereas racism in the past was grounded in biology, the new racism is one without biological race. It is foremost a cultural racism, which closely aligns itself with the notion of ethnicity. The new racism without race finds expression in perceived difficulties of people of various cultural backgrounds living together peacefully, i.e. in the (supposed) failure of multiculturalism. With Avtar Brah, Huggan speaks in this context of “intersecting configurations” of race, which positions and repositions those who are subjected to racism in antagonistic relationships to each other. Postcolonial Europe as an aspirational project, then, aims at going beyond racism and the politics of difference that accompany it. It thus also aims at moving beyond psychological borders that have instilled themselves in European citizens and that create and reinforce difference and separation. Writing on the borders of Europe, Étienne Balibar states that “border areas – zones, countries, and cities – are not marginal to the constitution of a public sphere but rather at the center.” Although Balibar discusses in first instance physical borders, exemplified in, for example, intensified luggage control at airports, his words also grasp the reality of Europe’s invisible borders: these are not ephemeral, but rather constitutive of society today.

To paraphrase Paulo de Medeiros writing on Lusophone postcolonial films, the idea of postcolonial Europe demonstrates “the impossibility of thinking” Europe “without

43 Huggan, “Perspectives,” 242.
44 Avtar Brah, Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities (London/New York: Routledge, 1996), 169. Brah’s example here is “black” Britons and those with Irish parentage: although both groups are discriminated against in different ways, they are taught to distrust the other group.
also thinking of its [relations]" to its former colonies and dependent territories. The argument here is, of course, that in a way the former colonies are found not only outside Europe’s borders, but also inside. This is ultimately the sense in which I deploy the term “postcolonial Europe” in this thesis: as Europe once went to the world, the world has now come to Europe. The task is to fully comprehend what this means. I close this section with de Medeiros’ words of warning:

[W]hat is at stake is the conceptualization of a form of postcoloniality that is haunted, by colonialism of course, but also by the irruption into the present of those forces from the past that condition that possibilities for any future development of the polities in question.

The Gothic: Modernity’s Fellow Traveller

As has been mentioned before, the literary works that will be the object of analysis in later chapters of this thesis display elements that belong to the Gothic mode of writing. But what does such a categorisation actually mean? It is important, in the context of the Gothic, to differentiate between the origins of Gothic writing mid-eighteenth century and the developments after that period. We have to bear in mind Agnes Andeweg’s assertion that “Gothic (...) has proven to be an extremely mobile concept.” Thus, as we shall see, the historical Gothic novel is quite different from its contemporary brother. In this section I will consider both and spell out the implications of a division between the origins and the developments for the analysis of the novels later. Additionally, this section will be both a history of Gothic fiction, as well as a history of its reception and study in academia, which I shall refer to as Gothic criticism.

In order to understand how to contextualise the contemporary Gothic novel, I will first zoom in on the origins of the Gothic in the 1760s. In 1764, Horace Walpole published *The Castle of Otranto*, widely considered to be the first Gothic novel. In its second printing, following a quickly sold-out first print, the book received the subtitle “A Gothic Story,” which is indicative of Walpole’s self-reflexivity. In the middle of the Enlightenment, the age of reason and progress, he harkened back to the late Middle Ag-

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47 Paul Gilroy, in *After Empire*, phrases it slightly differently: “The immigrant is now here because Britain, Europe, was once out there.” (109–10)
es. Inspired by the architecture of the time, he rebelled against the privileging of reason and order over feelings and chaos. *The Castle of Otranto* purports to be a translation of a sixteenth-century Italian text, in which Lord Manfred of Otranto tries to avert prophesied doom. The novel is filled with knights, Catholic clergymen and inexplicable events (the novel starts with Manfred’s son being crushed by a giant helmet). These elements soon became “classics” of the Gothic repertoire: subsequent novels were set in southern lands, were filled with devilish priests and other religious (mostly Catholic) figures, as well as supernatural creatures and events.

Walpole brought a new type of novel into the world, one that, all things considered, is an oxymoron: the Gothic novel, “the old new”. In 1764, classicism was *en vogue*, and not dark, mediaeval Gothicism. The Gothic, therefore, was always already old-fashioned, while the novel was a new literary form – and, moreover, a word that means “new.” This ambiguity, we will see, is one of the Gothic’s driving forces.

Walpole’s fantastic tale enthused many writers to start publishing their own take on his mixture of romance, horror and adventure story. Until the 1820s, the British isles were metaphorically flooded with Gothic novels, including such well-known works as Ann Radcliffe’s *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818) and Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820). The Victorians can also be said to have been quite fond of the Gothic: many well-known novels of the era, such as *Jane Eyre* (1847), *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) and *Dracula* (1897) have been read through the lens of the Gothic. Robert Mighall has argued to also include some of Charles Dickens’ writings in the Gothic canon, for example, *Bleak House* (1854).50

However, scholars have recently questioned this comfortable origin story. Anne Williams was among the first to write outside the confines of tradition, claiming that

> [t]he Gothicists’ creation myth serves, among other things, to established the uniqueness of Gothic as a mode of fiction *sui generis*. In so doing, it imposes a kind of order on the chaos of the Gothic, but also, like other such “stories,” serves vested critical interests.51

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The protection of Romantic poetry, viewed by (male) scholarship as too important to be even touched by the idea of the Gothic, is one of the elements of that “creation myth” Williams takes issue with. She also makes a methodological point, though, which has important consequences for the Gothic criticism and interpretation: “As long as we think of genre in terms of ‘drawing the line,’ of distinguishing between things inherently Gothic from things that are not, we will be trapped.” This is to say that some things might be “more” Gothic than others. Here, things become complex.

For instance, even though most theorists would agree that Toni Morrison’s Beloved is a prime example of contemporary Gothic writing, there is a sense of unease to use the phrase “genre” or “tradition” to delineate the connection between The Castle of Otranto and Beloved. This, many contend with Williams, would run the risk of essentializing the object of study, a point with which I concur. After all, Beloved is in some aspects not a Gothic novel at all, or at least very different from its predecessors: Morrison turns the inexplicable (the ghostly presence of a deceased daughter) into the result of psychological disturbances. Similarly, the recent Twilight series of novels and films also exhibit some Gothic characteristics – but they are in no way similar to Morrison’s novel. Moreover, as “Gothic is so pervasively organized around anxieties about boundaries,” it would be ironic for the critic to occupy himself with border-patrolling. As we shall see later in this section, the Gothic concerns itself with finding life in the dead, the unknown in the familiar, the wrong in the right: in such a world of exchange, why insist on demarcation?

What is needed, then, is a concept that has enough analytical clarity and precision to be able to make sense of Gothic writing, without suffocating it. To that end, Williams speaks of a “poetic tradition,” while Fred Botting states that “Gothic signifies a writing of excess.” Neither of these I would deem satisfactory, however, as both limit the usage of the term: Botting’s use of the phrase “writing,” for example, although appropriate in the context of this thesis, constricts the Gothic to the literary form, which hinders a possible understanding of the Gothic in other art forms. More fruitful is Rosemarie Buikema and Lies Wesseling’s term “cultural mode.” This term is more produc-

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52 Ibid.: 15. Original emphasis.
53 Ibid.: 16.
54 Ibid.: 1.
tive because it shifts the focus of analysis: as Andeweg says in her monograph on Dutch Gothic, in which she uses the term “cultural strategy,” we have to inquire “not so much the question of what the Gothic is in contemporary literature, but what it does.” This shift from being to doing is of course a critical reorientation, with which the authors of Gothic fiction throughout the centuries are not necessarily concerned. Yet it is important to stress the importance of this move, as it allows the critic to focus their attention on understanding the Gothic. What comes to the fore is not the question of generic definition – what makes some literature Gothic –, but what this lens of interpretation brings us – what this interpretation shows us about a literary text.

This does not mean, however, that the Gothic can go undefined. As a cultural mode, it might have changed its appearance a number of times in the past 250 years, but there are always recurring elements, motifs and themes. The mode’s obsession with borders, boundaries and transgressions has been mentioned already; and a brief glance at the titles mentioned above shows us a broad array of monstrous characters: zombies, vampires, the undead, the returned-from-the-dead, the madwoman in the attic. These are, of course, also transgressions, personalised, infused with fears for and anxieties about various Others: Jane Eyre’s Bertha Mason, the madwoman in the attic, is a Creole woman from the Caribbean, while Lewis’s monk is an horrifically evil clergyman.

In his introduction to The Cambridge Companion to the Modern Gothic, Jerrold Hogle characterizes these anxieties as the “unresolved undercurrent of modernity.” The Gothic, he claims, is the thorn in modernity’s side, which is expressed through its often conflicted and two-sided political nature:

The regressive and progressive nature of the Gothic has been and remains necessary to deal with the social unconscious of modern humanity in all its extreme contradictions spawned by its looking backward and forward so much of the time, even today. (…) the Gothic is endemic to the modern.

The Gothic novel’s oxymoron, its “old new,” is central to the mode. On the one hand, we could say, it moves forward along with society, concerned with topical issues

60 Ibid.: 7. Original emphases.
and debates, while, on the other hand, it always harks back to the past by virtue of its form and memory. It is not surprising that phrases such as “the return of the repressed” and “sins of the father” are often associated with the Gothic. (This complex temporal relationship will return in the next section of this chapter.) Identifying “the dynamics of family, the limits of rationality and passion, the definition of statehood and citizenship [and] the cultural effects of technology” as central concerns, Steven Bruhm contends that these apply to both classical and contemporary Gothic.61

Here, then, is the Gothic, both old and new: modernity’s fellow traveller, always eager to point to those who cannot come along, who cannot participate in contemporary society and consequently run the risk of falling behind or being left out. As such, a Gothic novel is never one or the other, never this or that: it prefers both together, at the same time. It provides no clear answers or simple solutions to the questions it raises. This moral or political opacity, if you wish, is heightened by its “writing of excess,” to recall Botting’s statement: the Gothic does not particularly care for stylistic realism (whether written or visual). In the next section, I will define the Gothic further in ways fruitful for this thesis, namely as the “postcolonial Gothic.”

The Postcolonial Gothic: Unhomely Moments
Since the late 1980s, scholars of the Gothic have worked on what Patrick Brantlinger, in his monograph Rule of Darkness, termed the “imperial Gothic.”62 This subgenre of Gothic writing, to which texts such as Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness (1899) belong, “combines the seemingly scientific, progressive, often Darwinian ideology of imperialism with an antithetical interest in the occult.”63 Part of the imperial Gothic was an “increase in scale,” which we can understand as the change from “complex, obscure buildings in which gruesome secrets are hidden in inaccessible rooms” to “comprehensive wanderings in primitive [...] regions, where the most fundamental taboos of Western society are violated.”64 The late Victorians were especially fond of this particular

63 Ibid.: 227.
64 Buikema and Wesseling, Het heilige huis, 38. The full original Dutch quote reads: “Het verschil tussen [de avonturenroman en de gotieke vertelling] bestaat onder meer uit schaalvergroting. Imperial Gothic blaast de kleinschalige dooltochten door complexe, onoverzichtelijke bouwwerken waarin gruwelijke geheimen verborgen zijn in ontoegankelijke vertrekken op tot grootschalige omzwervingen in het primitieve, van de verlichte West-Europese naties afgeschermdde regionen waar de meest fundamentele taboes van de westere beschaving worden geschonden.”
combination of the rational and the irrational, although Brantlinger identifies examples up to 1914, the chronological end of his study. More recently, however, the imperial Gothic has been supplanted by the “postcolonial Gothic,” which is at the same time a different as well as a more inclusive term.

In 2002, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert wrote that Gothic fiction “was, from its earliest history in England and Europe, fundamentally linked to colonial settings, characters and realities as frequent embodiments of the forbidding and frightening.” Although traditional histories of the Gothic tie its beginnings to the Enlightenment and posit it as a reaction to that period, especially to its celebration of progress and rationality, as we saw before, Paravisini-Gebert places the genre more explicitly in relation to the later end of the first wave of colonialism. While she does not deny that the Gothic reacts in first instance to Enlightenment values, she does claim that the imperial enterprise offered “a new sort of darkness,” one of “race, landscape, erotic desire and despair.”

She identifies a fear of invasion by the colonial subjects in the European imagination, stemming from a variety of reasons, which one might wish to categorize as the ambiguities of empire. Maisha Wester labels this fear “an imperial fantasy,” as well as racism, aimed to protect “our land.” These fears also include “the need to foster and simultaneously control black physical strength, the ever-threatening possibility of slave rebellion, and the potential spread of anticolonial, antimonarchic ideologies” in the overseas territories. As such, the apparent advantages of imperialism, if you like, are always contrasted with potential loss and danger.

But as we saw before, the Gothic is a cultural mode that is fraught with ambiguities and ambivalences. That is to say that it is difficult to extract a clear political message from a Gothic novel, or, as Paravisini-Gebert states with regard to the type of writing she describes, Gothic literature can on the one hand “give voice to fears awakened by colonial realities,” but on the other hand can be used “to dramatize the horrors and tortures of enslavement.” In their introduction to the edited volume Empire and the Gothic, Andrew Smith and William Hughes give these words to this two-sidedness of the Gothic:

66 Ibid.: 229.
69 Ibid.: 231.
One of the defining ambivalences of the Gothic is that its labelling of otherness is often employed in the service of supporting, rather than questioning, the status quo. (…) However, any restoration of Enlightenment certainty tends to be compromised by the presence of a debate within the Gothic concerning the relationship between rationality and irrationality. (…) Key elements of the dominant culture become debated, affirmed and questioned.70

In other words, the Gothic is neither explicitly progressive, nor explicitly conservative, and if it appears as either one of those, a more thorough reading will reveal the other side of the coin. The word “compromised,” therefore, is an apt description of what the Gothic does: it does not destroy what it criticizes, it compromises it. The object of its gaze is allowed to walk on, but with a limp, making visible its inherent problems to the wider audience. The Gothic, then, could be called a platform of debate, where certain issues – in our case, colonialism – are both and at the same time affirmed and questioned.

Howard Malchow demonstrates how the postcolonial Gothic compromises what it is talking about. He reads the monster in Frankenstein as “Frankenstein’s Jamaican monster.”71 As such, it is a product of both “social and sexual,” but also “racial apprehensions of [Britain’s] literate middle and lower middle classes.”72 Malchow’s interpretation of Frankenstein is an excellent example of how adopting the lens of the postcolonial Gothic can highlight certain issues in classic Gothic fictions which would otherwise have remained out of sight: Frankenstein becomes a novel occupied not only with unmanageable scientific progress, but also with the racialised Other as the result of such developments gone wrong. In her article, Paravisini-Gebert refers to lesser-known works “where Gothic conventions play a crucial role in unveiling the atrocities of the slave system” in the Caribbean.73 She speaks of a postcolonial “dialogue with the Gothic,”74 “a powerful reminder of how the Gothic, especially in the Caribbean, has become a part of the language of the colonised, appropriated, reinvented, and in that way very much alive in worlds far beyond western Europe and the continental United States.”75

72 Ibid.: 4-5.
74 Ibid.: 254.
75 Ibid.: 254-5.
Later, critics would also come to study the postcolonial Gothic as it surfaces in countries and cultures outside the Caribbean, such as India and South Africa; furthermore, the present undertaking is of course aimed at locating the postcolonial Gothic in literature written within the borders of Europe. However, Paravisi-Gebert’s comments still ring true: if we understand both postcolonialism and the Gothic as modes of resistance to Western or European modernity and universality, albeit in different respects, then a combination of the two is only logical and reinforcing.

This is, indeed, the argument Andrew Smith and William Hughes make. They state that “an historical examination of the Gothic and accounts of postcolonialism indicate the presence of a shared interest in challenging post-enlightenment notions of rationality.” The Enlightenment saw, of course, both the discourse on rights and liberty in Western Europe expand to until then unseen dimensions, as well as a continuation of Atlantic triangular trade, in which sea-faring colonizing states such as Britain, France and the Dutch Republic brought weapons to Africa, slaves to the Americas and gold, sugar and coffee to their own cities. As Susan Buck-Morss points out, the eighteenth century saw in fact both a quantitative increase and a qualitative intensification of slavery. So, while the philosophes and others proclaimed liberty on a theoretical level, colonial subjects were not granted freedom. All the while, European philosophers proclaimed rationality and reason as the highest human faculties, upon which statehood and life were to be based.

In this context, Horace Walpole wrote *The Castle of Otranto*. This novel already exhibits many elements that would become central to the mode, including inexplicable and irrational events. The Gothic, Smith and Hughes contend, focuses on feelings and the irrational to contest Enlightenment rationality, which has stretched its influence into the present day. Because of the Gothic’s use of heightened emotions (what Edmund Burke has called the sublime), many fictions classified as Gothic are also studied in the context of Romanticism.

Postcolonialism, meanwhile, takes issue with the particular kind of rational being the Enlightenment philosophers constructed and consequently presented as universal and an emblem of modernity. In a way, this is the postcolonial project: contesting what has come to be understood as universal and modern, that is, as the only way contemporary

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76 Smith and Hughes, “Enlightenment Gothic and Postcolonialism,” 1.
societies should be designed. Through equating Western rational man with progress and modernity, the Enlightenment philosophers constructed a type of otherness that has run until the present day. They were unaware, or unwilling to confront, that they presented a culturally specific version of humanity as a blueprint upon which the entire world should base itself. Postcolonialism, then, works against this specific way of knowledge-production and prioritisisation. Smith and Hughes put it as follows:

Postcolonialism helps to isolate images of Self and Other in such a way that they identify how a particular brand of colonial politics works towards constructing difference, whilst at the same time indicating the presence of the inherently unstable version of the subject on which such a politics rests. In other words, postcolonialism explains the Gothic's instabilities by other means.  

In a different article, Smith and Hughes emphasize how postcolonialism and the Gothic work together on the same intellectual project. They write that

[t]here is a sense, though, in which the Gothic is, and has always been, postcolonial, and this is where, in the Gothic text, disruption accelerates into change, where the colonial encounter – or the encounter which may be read or interpreted through the colonial filter – proves a catalyst to corrupt, to confuse or to redefine the boundaries of power, knowledge and ownership.  

In their view, the postcolonial Gothic is among the cultural modes best suited to resist “the project of Empire.” Empire, which refers here to the pervasiveness of colonialism and imperialism in all aspects of life, “in Gothic writings, is frequently conducted at a personal level,” where “the invasive urge” also manifests itself. Thus, whereas a part of postcolonial theory focuses on the mutual constitution of larger, societal structures on the one hand and on the other hand imperialism, in the postcolonial Gothic Empire appears in smaller-scale units. That way, it resembles Homi Bhabha’s recasting of Freud’s “uncanny” as the “unhomely,” that moment when the world intrudes on and manifests itself in the home. Ultimately, the unhomely moment invokes questions of legitimacy: these relate, as one commentator puts it, to “one’s right to occupy one place

80 Ibid.: 2.
81 Ibid.: 2.
and not another, the origins of one’s claims on property and the lives of others, one’s capacity to possess something or to be dispossessed of something.”

Postcolonial Gothic, then, is two things: firstly, the reinterpretation of classic Gothic fictions through postcolonial criticism, showing their involvement in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries’ colonialism, referred to by Smith and Hughes as the study of the Gothic’s “seminal early Orientalist texts,” and secondly, the study of the adoption of Gothic themes and motifs in contemporary postcolonial writing. As such, it is both the making-colonial of established Gothic texts and the making-Gothic of established postcolonial texts. In the former category, in addition to Malchow, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s reading of Frankenstein as concerned with what it means to be English when faced with the monstrous unknown comes to mind. In the latter category, well-known examples of postcolonial novels that are interpreted as postcolonial Gothic include Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things (1997) and J.M. Coetzee’s Disgrace (1999). As such, since the field’s inception in the early 2000s, it has added layers to then-contemporary Gothic criticism, uncovering the extent to which anxieties surrounding the expansion of empire pervaded the cultural imagination, as well as to postcolonial writing, detailing the intensity and force of colonialism’s residues. Put this way, it is easy to understand why scholars have come to prefer the postcolonial Gothic over Brantlinger’s imperial Gothic, which remains an altogether limited notion, used to refer to a subgenre of Gothic writing that would fail to address the incorporation of Gothic elements into, for example, Roy and Coetzee’s novels.

Conclusion
This chapter has put forward a number of points that are important to bear in mind in the following chapters, especially those in which the corpus is analysed. Firstly, as a result of incongruities between Europe’s past and present, postcolonial Europe is a place where, to use Paul Gilroy’s terminology, “postcolonial melancholia” is still very much present, instead of its less harmful and less (physically) violent alternative, conviviali-

As an activist project, postcolonial Europe addresses inequalities of opportunity and intends to overcome these, as well as the “racism without race” that operates as a biopolitical power and excludes non-white migrants from participating in society.

Secondly, the Gothic is best conceptualised as a cultural mode, rather than a genre, which prohibits the critic from employing it with enough flexibility. What is more, in following chapters my attention goes out to what the novels’ Gothic elements do or achieve. On a theoretical level, what the Gothic does is to give shape to societal anxieties and fears that stem from the upward-moving processes of modernisation and progress. The Gothic is an ambiguous mode, concerned with those who cannot partake in modernity, although it refrains from one-sidedly condemning either progress or conservative objections.

Lastly, the postcolonial Gothic is a lens of analysis that brings to the fore how anxieties about societies’ postcolonial state-of-being are articulated within, in this thesis, literature. It is attentive to tensions arising when the world intrudes on the home, i.e. when the divide between private and public collapses. This is especially important in relation to citizenship theories, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

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86 Gilroy, *After Empire.*
2 Acting Out of View of the Public

Introduction

Ever since the earliest days of what has grown to be Western civilisation, there has been talk of citizenship. Already in ancient Greece (Athens, in particular) and Rome, policies regulated which part of the populace was considered a “citizen” and which part was not. In the modern era, citizenship has become tied to the nation-state, as developed in Europe and consequently (violently) exported to other parts of the globe. Recently, however, under the influence of migration, globalisation and other processes of scale, the link between citizenship and the nation-state has started to erode.

Paradoxically, at the moment that citizenship practices, in Europe most clearly, became increasingly complex, the study of it took off. For a while now, citizenship has been the concern not only of political philosophers and legal scholars; historians, sociologists and others have joined them in their efforts to elucidate what it means to be a member of a political community. However, this proliferation of the study of citizenship has by and large focused on the public sphere. Citizenship, states Richard Bellamy, “implies the capacity to participate in both the political and the socio-economic life of the community.”87 Community matters, so to say, as does its “political” life. Some have observed a “the steady decline in involvement in public life by ordinary people,”88 further emphasizing the centrality of the public sphere when it comes to citizenship.

What these perspectives leave out, is the dimension of the home, or the private sphere. As we shall see in this chapter, to introduce the private into theories of citizenship requires re-conceptualizing what it means to be political and what is considered as political and what is not. The connection between “the political” on the one hand and “the public sphere” on the other hand often goes without critical commentary or reference. However, this linkage has a profound impact on our notion of citizenship and, indeed, on our very ability to conceptualise it. In this chapter, I take issue with this construction and, by combining Engin Isin’s concept of “acts of citizenship” with theories on the space of citizenship, provide some first indicators of how to think beyond this simplistic binary.

What It Means to Enact Citizenship

Let us first consider Engin Isin’s idea of acts of citizenship. In a 2008 volume of that name, co-edited with Greg Nielsen, Isin proposes an understanding of citizenship as an act, or as something that can be enacted, as opposed to only a status that is conferred on subjects. He sees in this theory of acts the potential of a renewing, in some sense maybe even a disruptive force that has the power to break open established ideas and practices of citizenship.⁸⁹

Until roughly twenty years ago, scholars usually thought of citizenship as something “decidedly ‘political’,” write Joe Painter and Chris Philo, which meant it was “anchored in questions about the individual’s position vis-à-vis an overarching political body.”⁹⁰ Such a conception places the individual in a passive position, waiting for citizenship to come to them, as it were. Citizenship, in turn, was a “thing or a static condition” – or, in other words, a status.⁹¹ Gradually, this idea became contested and new avenues of thought were explored, but Isin’s reconceptualisation was arguably the most powerful intervention in this debate.

At the core, Isin’s work is preoccupied with the question “What makes the citizen?”, rather than the definitional “Who is the citizen?”⁹² “Acts of citizenship” takes the former question as its starting point, as it is concerned with the possibilities of and ways of subjects positioning themselves as claimants of citizenship rights. Elaborating on Isin’s activist turn, Rutvica Andrijasevic writes that

“Acts of citizenship” shifts attention from citizenship as a formal status towards the question of how subjects constitute themselves as citizens irrespective of their status, and in doing so makes collective and marginal struggles its entry point of analysis.⁹³

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⁹² Engin Isin, “Citizenship in Flux: The Figure of the Activist Citizen,” Subjectivity 29 (2009): 383. Original emphases. This calls to mind last chapter’s emphasis on what the Gothic does, rather than what the Gothic is.

Andrijasevic emphasises here the moments in which subjects transform themselves into citizens-to-be. Isin and Nielsen stress a different aspect of acts of citizenship when they write that they want to be attentive to “collective or individual deeds that rupture social-historical patterns.” Indeed, in her writing, Andrijasevic leaves out personal struggles, preferring instead those by the collective. It also seems she is more keen to read acts of citizenship through legalistic glasses, while Isin intends to conceptualise acts of citizenship as a political and philosophical coup d’état.

For him, acts of citizenship are “the actual moments that shift established practices, status and order.” Those moments could include almost anything: from a certain perspective, sitting down in a room and not engaging in further activity also becomes an act – maybe the people doing so was not invited to take part in the discussion being held. Them being present can then be read as political. This enactment of a citizenship that one does not formally hold (note that “citizenship” instantly becomes much more broad than a standard, legalistic reading would allow) becomes a rupture with the status-quo. Others now have to engage with this act, by either sending the non-citizens away, ignoring them or incorporating them into the group and welcoming them in the discussion. This example shows that understanding citizenship as acts both contributes to a broader understanding of who can be a citizen and, more importantly, a deeper understanding of what it means to be a citizen. Ultimately, then, “[t]o investigate acts of citizenship is to draw attention to acts that may not be considered as political and demonstrate that their enactment does indeed instantiate constituents.” That is to say that the definition and the sphere of the political have to be enlarged and, in line with that enlargement, to conceive of citizenship as acts demands a rethinking of underlying epistemological assumptions. Although Isin does formidable work on this, more work is needed.

In a recent article, Gurminder Bhambra takes up this point. Citizenship, she argues, is usually presented as a positive history of the excluded becoming included, yet we

95 Ibid.: 10.
96 In answer to a question by an audience member at the international symposium “The Role of the Post-colonial Intellectual: Figures, Ideas and Connections,” held at Utrecht University, 28–29 January 2016.
97 This arguably parallels the history of citizenship: more people enfranchised, more rights. Gurminder Bhambra objects to this scheme: in her view, citizenship is based on a fundamental division of those who in pre-modernity and early modernity received citizenship rights (usually, wealthy men) and the rest. Fundamentally, citizenship is exclusionary. Any inclusion thus necessarily is a concession, and not a full inclusion.
should be attentive to the ways in which modern citizenship is built on domination over, for example, slaves and indigenous peoples – to citizenship’s “wider history.” Fundamentally, this entails a critique of the mechanisms of how subjects come to matter – that is, how they become political.

Isin presumes “the existence of two domains,” one political and one non-political, and “suggests that it is through struggles for citizenship that people move from nonpolitical society to political society, that is, from being excluded to being included.” This model of the political, however, privileges the public sphere as the place of ownership and engagement. It is here that “the positive form of citizenship” is performed, but what is missed is that the “political sphere is always restricted and works to maintain the institutions of privilege.” Claim-making in the non-political, that is, the private, sphere is therefore considered impossible. Put simply, Bhambra’s argument is the postcolonial version of the feminist “the private is political.” Raia Prokhovnik’s translates that motto as follows:

It is not that women need to be liberated from the private realm, in order to take part in the public realm as equal citizens, but that women – and men – already undertake responsibilities of citizenship in both the public and the private realms.

For Prokhovnik, citizenship is both a status and an activity, which she defines as “an equal ethical social status.” While Isin rejects the general “activity” and opts instead for the more focussed “act,” the core of his ideas is present already – and, notably, improved. After all, Prokhovnik is aware that the political and citizenship manifest themselves not only in the public sphere.

So here we see a first example of how, in order to fully utilise the potential of acts of citizenship to give an account of citizenship in the private sphere, the political and the non-political need to be rethought. What is needed is an even more wide-ranging definition of how subjects can become political. In addition to feminist perspectives, I sug-

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100 Ibid.: 105. To be clear, Isin is far from the only theorist to do so.
101 Ibid.: 106.
103 Ibid.: 98.
104 In addition to Prokhovnik, see also Ruth Lister, Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and Carole Pateman’s classical essay “Feminist Critiques of the Public Private Dichot-
gest in this thesis that the solution might also be the application of insights from post-colonial studies to citizenship studies. It is here that the political is rearticulated as part of both the public and the private sphere, as will become clear in later chapters. To be sure, I agree with Prokhovnik when she states that the public and the private are separate domains: the aim here is, rather, to separate the political from the public sphere and show that the private sphere is a space that can be politicised.

Since Isin introduced acts as a way of thinking of citizenship, his claims have been taken up and commented upon by many other theorists. One critique, whether voiced explicitly or more implicitly, concerns what we could call the object of enactment. Isin seems fascinated by the performative power of the act, but his writing remains rather vague on how acts are enacted against a certain background. That is to say that every acts requires contextualisation to understand how they might be successful, but here Isin fails to provide sufficient clarity.

Some, such as Angharad Stephens, try to make up for this deficit by exploring the relation between acts of citizenship and (inter)personal identity, by pointing out that the moment of enactment changes the way “through which identities, allegiances, and associations are formed.” Studying acts of citizenship should, then, focus on “what takes place when we encounter, engage with and attach ourselves to others.”

What becomes clear, in Stephens’ words, are the “contours” of citizens’ relationships with each other, denizens and non-citizens. Alternatively, Harald Bauder has a more precise understanding of the nature of acts, claiming they are made of “social practices and political action.” Although the latter part of this statement is not particularly useful (after all, what is considered political is the crucial question), he does suggest that it is interpersonal relations where acts of citizenship have an effect.

The most sustained and important critique comes from Lynn Staeheli et al., who pose the concept of “ordinary citizenship” as a solution. They engage directly with the social order against which acts of citizenship are supposed to take place, and from which they derive their disruptive force. “Ordinary citizenship” derives its name not only from what is normal or habitual, but also from that word “order,” which to Staeheli et al. signify


106 Ibid.: 34.

social norms, daily life and the law. In their book, citizenship is “practiced and experienced,” as well as “simultaneously constituted through encounters with law and daily life; in these encounters, the spatiality of each is integral to the relationships and practices that position individuals and social groups with respect to such communities.”

These encounters move between on the one hand one’s own positionality, which is always unique and personal, and on the other hand by status and law. An act of citizenship negotiates between these two.

Importantly, Staeheli et al. claim that “citizenship is also involved in establishing an order that enables us to about our lives.” They draw attention to the status quo Isin rebels against, that is, to the rules that dictate who and what can be political. Consequently, what is important is not only the contestation of the status quo, but also “the importance of authority, standing, office, custom, what is commonplace and standard.”

In essence, Staeheli et al. argue for expanding the scope of analysis, to not only include new and innovative ways of being political, as exemplified by and made concrete in an act of citizenship, but also the order against which is rallied.

Out of Place: the Space of Citizenship

In 1995, geographers Joe Painter and Chris Philo edited a special issue of the journal *Political Geography*, dedicated to the topic of citizenship and space. This indicated the moment at which citizenship studies definitively opened up to scholars from fields other than law and political theory: now, cultural, human and urban geographies, for example, viewed citizenship issues in terms of space and scale, rather than as stemming from various traditions (civic, ethnic, liberal or republican). Reframing the field in this way brought forward new connections and perspectives on the history and future of citizenship. Whereas older scholarship would have regarded the territorial organisation of citizenship less important, theorists of the space of citizenship made the move from Greek *polis* to mediaeval city-state to early modern empire to modern nation-state their central concern.

Crucial to this “scalar” development, where citizens are members of communities of various sizes and on various levels of organisation, is the contrast between or combination of demos and ethnos. Angharad Stephens writes that the demos is the group of peo-

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ple that partake in “the privileges of sovereignty in a bounded space,” in which we rec-
ognise the idea of citizenship as a status conferred from the state, while the ethn-
“shares in a progressive temporal journey.” In the ethn, notions of belonging and community are added to the demos, through which we can attempt a first characterisation of the tensions rising in many Western European societies. The project of the modern nation-state, as it developed in especially the nineteenth century and, as we saw last chapter, in relation with its colonies, was, very simply, to connect the state to the nation, that is, to disguise a state’s ethn as its demos. Those who shared each other’s history, a history often presented as either a liberation struggle from some foreign oppressor (such as in the case of the Netherlands: first from Spain during the Eighty Years War, and later from Napoleonic France) or a struggle for unification (as in Germany or Italy in the 1860s and 70s), became the citizens, thus excluding foreigners.

However, even though nineteenth-century nation-building required the demos and the ethn be equalised, practice proved more stubborn. The idea of the demos suggests that every citizen is an equal subject before the law, yet ethnic communal feelings can destabilise this equation, as they complicate people’s everyday experiences. This is, indeed, an element of Staeheli’s concept of ordinary citizenship. Michael Shapiro phrases the tension I am describing here succinctly, when he writes that citizenship is “located both in a legal, territorial entity (...) and in a cultural community.” In contemporary societies, of which the novels discussed later are products, the assumed combination of neutral membership of a territorial entity such as the nation-state on the one hand and value-laden notions of community and culture on the other hand has been problematised by processes such as globalisation and immigration. This is a point to which we shall return later in this thesis.

According to Stephens, the key assumption underlying citizenship in the era after the French revolution is that “[the] right to be political can only be realised in a state.” The political community citizens are part of is located in the (nation-)state, or, put differently, on the level of the nation-state. In so far as “citizenship is something that occurs in bounded space,” this is also the nation-state. Of course, citizenship has been

112 Of course, the demos was generally comprised of affluent, older men, excluding the poor, women and the young.
theorised at other levels than the national, mostly the urban and – in the context of Europe – at EU level. However, national citizenship seems to be hegemonic in the sense that conceptions of citizenship on other levels are by and large theoretical or partial, notwithstanding those instances in which citizenship is also practised outside the nation-state. When discussing European citizenship, for example, it is easy to point out that this is a “ius tractum” type of citizenship, meaning someone can be only a European citizen if they hold the citizenship of one of the EU’s member states. What is more, citizenship on other scales than the national are usually presented as “special”, further reinforcing the idea that national citizenship is the dominant, maybe even hegemonic, form of citizenship in the world today.

To be clear, in this thesis I do not wish to conceptualise citizenship outside the nation-state and then propose an alternative on a different scale. My attention goes out to what I perceive to be a more fundamental tension inherent in theorisations of the space of citizenship. In this thesis, I argue that the space of citizenship has been, and still is, theorised too narrowly as the public sphere. To be sure, as I show below, sometimes commentators do mention possible problems with the distinction between public and private, yet they then do not actively address that problem, nor are possible alternatives and solutions discussed. However, to my mind, such an observation cannot serve as a disclaimer, but must be a point of enquiry.

In the introduction to their special issue, Joe Painter and Chris Philo state that discussions on citizenship are now (anno 1995 at least) about “questions about who is accepted as a worthy, valuable and responsible member of an everyday community of living and working.” They see potentially contrasting understandings of citizenship: on the one hand informal understandings among citizens and subjects and formal understandings on the other hand. Now, while Painter and Philo do speak of “living,” their definition of this strangely does not incorporate the private sphere. Rather than explore what “living” can mean, they choose to emphasise those aspects in the public sphere that might make people feel “uncomfortable, victimized and basically ‘out of place’.”

Eleonore Kofman’s contribution to Painter and Philo’s special issue also touches upon the issue I am concerned with here, but ultimately steers away from taking it up. She writes that it is part of citizenship studies to divorce the private sphere from the public

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118 Ibid.: 115.
sphere, stating that “there is a failure to recognise the extent to which the state is imbricated in the private and community sectors, most evident at the local level.”  

Although in her statement she shows that she is aware of the complex connections between the state and those sectors that are not the public sector, on both the national and the local level (thus combining both the space and the scale of citizenship), I read in her words a challenge she does not, then, take up. Instead, she writes that

[t]he home, associated as it is with notions of inviolate privacy and naturalness of kinship (...), represents a captivating anchor against shifting and uncertain situations, and from the home it is still generally legitimate to exclude with whom one does not wish to mix.

Kofman’s language here is descriptive, rather than prescriptive: she does not openly argue to uphold the “divorce” of the private sphere from the public sphere; however, neither does she repudiate this observation. Thus, in fact, their separation continues. And while it may be “legitimate” to exclude strangers and foreigners from the home, Homi Bhabha’s notion of the “unhomely,” points out that this separation is not always possible. We will see this tension return in our readings of the corpus in later chapters.

To find some criticism of this state of affairs, we have to return to feminist critics, as well as Lynn Staeheli et al. and Gurminder Bhambra’s writings. Bhambra’s is of course a perspective that is explicitly infused with postcolonial thought, while Staeheli et al. take a different approach, staying within a combination of law, political theory and geography. Writing on the idea of ordinary citizenship, Staeheli et al. put forward the example of border controls and monitoring, which have become increasingly present in the post-9/11 era and contend that

the security state that is justified by fear is enhanced by an internalized sense of fear that regulates the exercise of citizenship in a reordered border zone that reaches beyond the legal border and into the spaces of the home and community.

In the previous chapter, Balibar’s “border areas” were briefly mentioned, which he regards as complicit in the construction of Europe’s public spheres. Here, Staeheli et al.

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120 Kofman, “Citizenship for Some,” 130.

121 Staeheli et al., “Dreaming the Ordinary,” 638.
trace the affective power of such areas or zones beyond the public. While they acknowledge the “legal border” between the public and the private sphere, they also recognise that this border is continuously crossed and can thus by no means be a strict boundary between the two. Citizenship’s borders, rearticulated and reshaped by contemporary methods of securitisation and governance, reach into the home, into the private lives of citizens. Border-crossing, then, becomes a part of ordinary citizenship, of citizenship between the law and the everyday, as an extra-legal factor that is nevertheless of influence.

This time, the observation is followed by a plea to redirect citizenship studies. They state:

We need to explore a more complete geography of citizenship that includes the geographies of daily life and of attachment. This more complete geography needs to include the obvious and institutionalized spaces of citizenship — such as public spaces, schools, and places of government — as well as citizenship’s hidden spaces — such as homes, workplaces, and houses of worship. (…) The sites we have mentioned do not exist in isolation, and so conceptualizations of the spatiality of citizenship [need] to include the relations and flows through which the sites are connected and through which the everyday and the law are enacted.

The geography of ordinary citizenship, then, is really the geography of sociospatial relationships, including political and economic relationships.\(^\text{122}\)

More important, perhaps, than granting “citizenship’s hidden spaces” a place in theorisation is Staeheli et al.’s attention to the relationality of those hidden and institutionalised spaces. Whatever is public receives its identity as such in part from not being private, and vice versa. That is, identity is always relational. This does not mean, however, that citizens change their entire being when moving from to the other, or between the two. As Raia Prokohvnik reminds us, “[i]t is the same self” that moves in the two spheres.\(^\text{123}\) People are citizens when inside and when outside the home and, although those spaces might require different roles to be played, the underlying identity of the citizen is not affected.

Let me, lastly, briefly reiterate the points made by Gurminder Bhambra, which have been discussed more extensively in the previous section. Bhambra finds citizenship’s inherent division of the political and the non-political problematic. She argues that this privileges certain ways of being political that are not reflected on. These objections ap-

\(^{122}\) Staeheli et al., “Dreaming the Ordinary,” 641.

\(^{123}\) Prokohvnik, “Public and Private Citizenship,” 98.
ply not only, of course, to Engin Isin’s theory of acts of citizenship, but just as well, or maybe even more, to the space of citizenship. Being political, after all, is conceptualised to be only possible in the public sphere, e.g. through voting in elections, holding office or partaking in demonstrations. As Bhambra argues, what needs to be contested is this assumption that the political and the public sphere are necessarily tied together. And as feminist and postcolonial scholarship have shown, the private sphere is not an a-political space – far from it. Thus, following Bhambra, we should attempt a study and a reformulation of ways of being political in citizenship outside traditional confines. The political reveals itself in the private sphere, too. This thesis constitutes the beginnings of such an attempt to rethink the political.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have reviewed the literature on acts of citizenship and the space of citizenship. While various authors come close to incorporating the private sphere in their theories of citizenship, most ultimately refrain from doing so. Others gesture at the home as one of “citizenship’s hidden spaces,” as Lynn Staeheli et al. call it. Gurminder Bhambra levels the most profound charges against citizenship studies and critiques the discipline for upholding a distinction between the private and the political, a distinction moreover that is ingrained in its own history and analytical vocabulary.

However, because of these valid objections, we can start to see where this thesis’s argument is heading to. In this chapter, I have explored the theoretical case for citizenship in the private sphere. In what follows, I will show how the home is also a place of identity and citizenship and how sometimes the world impacts on the home, implying that divorcing the two, and, by implication, the supposedly political from the supposedly non-political, is a shaky venture at best.
3 Multiculturalism’s Wolf Tones

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have argued the theoretical case for the importance of including the private sphere in theorising citizenship. With Gurminder Bhambra, I concurred that this sphere is also political, or, put differently, it is a space with political potential. This potential can, as in Bhabha’s “unhomely,” be activated and made to work and exert influence on people’s lives and thus has an effect on citizenship, as I will show in the following three chapters, first through an analysis of Herman Franke’s 2003 novel *Wolfstonen*. In chapter four, I will look at António Lobo Antunes’ novel *Caminho como uma casa em chamas* and chapter five will focus on Saskia de Coster’s *Wat alleen wij horen*.

*Wolfstonen* (“Wolf Tones”) was Franke’s fourth novel, and his first after the Generale Bank Prize-winning *De verbeelding* (1998). The novel was generally well-received, although criticism was sparse: few critics engaged with the novel’s themes and literary techniques in a substantive manner. In 2010, some months before Franke’s death, literary magazine *De Gids* devoted one of their issues to his work. *Wolfstonen* received its first academic attention from Buikema and Wesseling, who tried to make sense of its themes and literary techniques and placed it in the Gothic mode. The novel, they argue, attempts to translate “with the help of conventions of the Gothic tale the postcolonial twenty-first century Dutch multicultural drama into a classic class struggle.”

In this chapter, I will build on Buikema and Wesseling’s insights and extend their analysis of *Wolfstonen* as a novel that uses Gothic motifs and themes. I will argue that through the Gothic the voices of various socio-economic groups that are otherwise not

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125 For a brief overview, see Joosten, but also Kees ’t Hart, “De horden staan voor de deur,” in *De Groene Amsterdammer* (22 March 2003).
126 Herman Franke-nummer, *De Gids* 173.4 (2010).
always heard in postcolonial Europe’s “multicultural dramas” are represented and heard. *Wolfstonen* stages the struggle over the power of definition in contemporary societies as a particularly spatial conflict between the residents of a newly-built apartment building and their working-class neighbours. We will see that, in this struggle, the public and the private spheres cannot remain separate(d).

**Postcolonial Fremdkörper**

At the centre of *Wolfstonen* is a large apartment building, built to fill a gap in a row of run-down nineteenth-century houses in a multicultural, working-class neighbourhood. The building, an “architectural *Fremdkörper,*”\(^ {129}\) is designed by an architect fond of postmodern, playful features: rooms have rounded corners and the centrally placed bedrooms contain raised “seats of love”. The building’s common space is also adorned with oddities: for example, the central staircase is transparent and located in a hall made of glass. From the start, the neighbours do not like this “monument of postmodern playfulness”\(^ {130}\): “[t]he building had cold-bloodedly wrenched itself between the old houses, remorselessly different in building style and choice of materials.”\(^ {131}\) Although the neighbours did not like the gap before – on the contrary, “[p]arents forbade their children to enter the terrain,”\(^ {132}\) where, according to rumours, toxic waste was dumped and child molesters lurked in the dark –, it is clear that the new building is out of place in the neighbourhood – and that this feeling of being “out of place” is more psychological than physical.

The building, which, after a slip-up of the city’s mayor, is called the “beehive,”\(^ {133}\) is meant as a “social injection” into the dilapidated neighbourhood.\(^ {134}\) The more expensive apartments, the city council had hoped, would attract residents with more means than those already living in the area. As Buikema and Wesseling ironically state: “The ultimate spirit of integration.”\(^ {135}\) And so, a group of eight well-educated, well-to-do members of the (upper) middle class moves to the building: Ista, a psychologist and lecturer, who reluctantly takes it upon himself to be the housemaster, and Angolie, a translator

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\(^{129}\) Buikema and Wesseling, “Contesting Consensus Culture,” 135.

\(^{130}\) Ibid., 135.


\(^{132}\) Ibid., 8. Original Dutch: “Ouders verboden hun kinderen het terrein te betreden.”

\(^{133}\) Ibid., 13.

\(^{134}\) Ibid., 11. Original Dutch: “sociale injectie.”

from French, live together on the ground floor. Across the hall lives an old couple, the Forstenalts, pensioners who are frequently confronted with Mr Forstenalt’s war memories. Above these two couples live four singles: the violinist Elto, who wants to capture in music the purest possible emotion; Mernin, a journalist; Paulice, who descends into madness after breast surgery; and Vartor, an architect and PhD student, writing a history of failed inventions.

Wolfstonen follows the lives of these people, as they become more and more disturbed by the sounds reverberating through their houses. The novel, however, has two other main characters: Milla and Jacho, young children who are experiencing their first puppy love. As we will see later, they play a crucial role in breaking through the novel’s quickly-established rules of movement and governance of space. To fully understand both those rules and how Milla and Jacho confront them, we must first understand how the novel operates in the space of postcolonial Europe.

Recall that, in the first chapter, postcolonial Europe was conceptualised as a space haunted by its often unrecognised past. Ann Laura Stoler refers to this haunting as a process of “ruination,” emphasising the connections between past and present. What is important, is not necessarily the expression, but rather its formation and effects. By this logic, colonial and imperialist attitudes concerning race, difference and the structuring of the world are carried over after the processes of decolonisation into the present, postcolonial moment. Recently, Gloria Wekker has criticised the Dutch attitude of not thoroughly interrogating racial discrimination, under the banner of “white innocence.” Debates on what is sometimes called “Dutch tolerance” have in recent years centred on the heavily racialised figure of Black Pete, but have a much longer history, as Wekker shows. In the early 2000s, in the wake of the murders on politician Pim Fortuyn and filmmaker Theo van Gogh and the subsequent increase of electoral support for far-right political parties, the Dutch self-image as an exceptionally open and tolerant country was intensively discussed.

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137 For a reflection on these processes in Europe, see Ponzanesi and Colpani, *Postcolonial Transitions in Europe*.
contexts of what has come to be known as the “multicultural drama,” i.e. they read it as a literary contribution to its debates and discussions. This context is important; however, Buikema and Wesseling do not go into too much detail on what the exact contribution of Wolfstonen to those debates is. This chapter overcomes that shortcoming.

The well-educated inhabitants of the “beehive” move to a neighbourhood whose neighbours are, generally speaking, less educated than they, in a traditional sense less cultured than they are and, importantly, more ethnically diverse. The novel’s narrator divides the neighbourhood into two groups: the autochtonen, autochthonous people, and the allochtonen, allochtone, i.e., migrants. Jacho’s father Jano could be characterised as an allochthone, as he hails from the fictional country of Quanador. Although it never becomes clear where this country can be found on a map, it is suggested it is a South-American country. Jano and Jacho’s uncles speak in a vernacular that resembles stereotypical representations of Moroccan- and Turkish-Dutch. “You beautiful boy, Jacho, you already have girl?” one of the uncles asks him at a party, and a second uncle later says: “So, so, you have girl.” The narrator, which focalises here through Jacho, says of the men that they are “brown, sometimes almost black,” and refers to his father as “light brown.”

Also present at the party is a “big black man,” who speaks about the boxing match between the autochthonous and the allochthonous neighbours that the city council organised to enhance integration and which ended in a stalemate. He maintains that the members of the city council fear that “the neighbourhood will be ours,” and that this is the reason the “beehive” was built. “They there laugh at us but we won’t be laughed at,” he ends his speech, jabbing at both the political and the intellectual élite. His anger represents the deeply-felt conviction that allochthones are not (sufficiently) heard or seen. This feeling of distrust is, at least to some extent, mutual.

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140 Buikema and Wesseling, Het heilige huis, 104. The term “multicultural drama” (“multiculturele drama” in Dutch) was coined by Paul Scheffer, in an article entitled “Het multiculturele drama” in NRC Handelsblad (29 January 2000).
141 Compare the folkish lyric “Nobody will say I’ve never known no happiness” (Franke, Wolfstonen, 7; original Dutch: “Niemand zal zeggen dat ik nooit geen geluk heb gekend”) with Elto’s knowledge and preference for classical music and the violin.
143 Ibid., 363. Original Dutch: “grote zwarte man.”
144 Ibid., 364. Original Dutch: “dat de buurt van ons wordt” and “Die daar lachen om ons maar wij laten ons niet uitlachen.”
145 Ibid., 364. Original Dutch: “dat de buurt van ons wordt” and “Die daar lachen om ons maar wij laten ons niet uitlachen.”
Sonic Transgressions

Ista has barely met all his neighbours when, upon returning home, Angolie says that she will “go crazy if that pounding doesn’t stop.” On both sides of the building, neighbours have started practising for their boxing match: Jano leads a team on one side, and next to Ista and Angolie’s apartment a man called Nander leads the autochthonous men. To address the issue, Ista goes to his neighbour, whom he has imagined as something of a brute. When he faces his neighbour, he is thrown off balance:

Heavily breathing, [Nander] piercingly looked at Ista. Ista was hit most forcefully by the tender, silver necklace, from which hang a small golden cross. On his chest, which radiated aggression and invincibility, that symbol of human suffering looked absurd, as if a Star of David was pinned on a Nazi uniform.

This is one of the first of Wolfstonen’s many misunderstandings, moments when characters try to act upon their preconceived notions of the world and find that these do not describe reality. Here, Ista has to adjust his image of his neighbour: the golden cross signifies a sensibility that he did not expect on the basis of the aggressive sounds. He is not immediately successful in adjusting, comparing the frail cross with a Star of David on a Nazi uniform, evoking one of the starkest contrasts possible in Western culture. In other words, this moment is one of transgression, where the order that characters have established for themselves falls apart. As such, with the possibility of exchanging ideas and encountering each other anew, they bear convivial potential. Yet this is not the case, as time and again characters retreat back to familiar territory. When, at the end of a laborious conversation on jobs and mortgages, the parameters of which seem to be set by Nander, Ista asks if he could practise against other wall, they quickly fall silent. Nander seems upset that Ista wishes to leave almost immediately afterwards, although, uttering the clichéd words “freedom, happiness,” he gives in. The question that remains is whose freedom this is: only Ista’s, or also Nander’s?

This is one example of transgressions in Wolfstonen. Importantly, psychological and physical space are mixed: Ista wished to negotiate his and Angolie’s freedom to be un-

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147 Ibid., 24. Original Dutch: “Als dat gebons niet ophoudt, word ik gek.”
148 Ibid., 52. Original Dutch: “Zwaar ademend keek hij Ista aan. Maar het sterkst trof Ista het iele, zilverkleurige halsketting waaraan een gouden kruisje hing. Op zijn borstkas die een en al aanvallend en onoverwinnelijkheid uitstraaldde, kreeg het symbool van menselijk lijden iets ongerijmds, alsof er een jodenster op een nazi-uniform gespeld was.”
149 Ibid., 58. Original Dutch: “vrijheid blijheid.”
disturbed in their own lives, but grounded that effort in a clash of lifestyles, too. How short-lived his apparent success was, quickly becomes clear (Nander and his team quickly resume practising against the wall), but the deeper implications of the conversation are initially obscured by the novel’s narrative structure. Although the narrator focalises through the residents of the apartment building and through Milla and Jacho, he never turns to, for example, Nander or Jano – characters who, having lost their illusions about supposed equality, grow angry at the way they are treated. Their voices are mostly left out of the novel, representing the way in which the residents frequently respond to their neighbours’ actions without knowing their motivations and reasons for acting the way they do. This absence or silence of the voices of those who do not belong to the same group or class is menacing.

However, their voices are not really silent. The various sounds that impinge on the residents’ lives – as Buikema and Wesseling succinctly put it, “boxing neighbours, a locked-up old mother singing tear-jerkers (…), the booming beat of a student, the excited shrieks of a masochist maltreated by her husband and then also all the sounds that the house seems to produce out of thin air, in other words, that seem to be the endless echo of untraceable causes”150 – may be untraceable, within the framework of the Gothic they are far from unexplainable. To understand this, we have to zoom in on the novel’s last pages, when the source of the noise pollution is in fact clear. When a brass band starts playing loud music to accompany the neighbours’ riotously protesting against the residents and the “beehive,” everybody inside can hear it: even Elto, who has turned the bedroom into a soundproof studio.151 Angolie likens the situation to an “acoustic madhouse,”152 a judgement in which (the anger over) all earlier sonic intrusions reverberate. What is explicit in the novel’s closing scenes has until then been implicit: the sounds are symbolic representations of the outside world – and thus transgressions of inside and outside, manifestations of the world in the home – and the residents’ efforts to insulate themselves and retreat from the noise constituted nothing more than their moves in a cat-and-mouse-game. As Buikema and Wesseling state, the ways in which the residents try to block the sounds “function as icons for the way in which the cultured elite attempt to safeguard their own privileged niche in society by closing their eyes to the sordid

150 Buikema and Wesseling, *Het heilige huis*, 105. Original Dutch: “boksende buurmannen, een smartlappen vertolkende opgesloten zittende oude moeder […], de dreunende beat van een student, de lustvolle kreten van een door haar man mishandende masochiste en dan nog alle geluiden die het huis vanuit het niets lijkt te produceren, oftewel, die de eindeloze echo zijn van niet te achterhalen oorzaken.”
reality of the outside world.” Yet *Wolfstonen* demonstrates, that sordid reality does not stay quiet; in fact, its screams become louder and louder as time progresses.

When one evening Paulice is sitting with Vartor and they hear music from the neighbours – amplified by one of the many cheap building techniques used or construction errors made in the building process –, Paulice thinks that “the sounds, like curdled water, had found new ways and came in via gaps and crevices.” Her words resemble the phrase, famous in Gothic criticism, “the return of the repressed.” This phrase signals the return of those voices that have put outside history and outside the realm of representation, often in a violent manner. As we will see, in *Wolfstonen* the “sordid reality of the outside world” makes such a return, and in the remainder of this chapter I will explore what this return entails.

The cat-and-mouse-game described above is an explicitly spatial process, in which the residents repeatedly try to install and reinforce the boundaries between their homes and the outside world. All residents engage in this effort to bar intrusive sounds from their homes, but Elto goes the furthest, as he looks for complete quietness to work on his musical projects. We can understand the residents’ efforts more generally as motivated by a desire for quiet and peace of mind, i.e., as expressions of personal preferences, but we should also consider the spatial dimensions present here. Doing so brings us right to *Wolfstonen’s* most haunting elements: the struggle over the question who has the power to decide how the novel’s physical spaces are governed.

**Multicultural Politics of Space**

Ista’s conversation with Nander, in which he asks his boxing neighbour to practise against a different wall than the one separating their two houses, already introduced the complex relationships between physical and psychological space in *Wolfstonen*. Negotiating one always involves negotiating the other as well. This dynamic has important consequences for ideas of citizenship and belonging, which I will try to make clearer in this section. In order to so, I will look at the apartment building as the central space in the novel and the ways in which characters are allowed to come in or are explicitly forbidden to enter.

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Ista and Nander occupy different worlds, as it were. They stand for differing values and differing types of behaviour. We can read them as *partes pro toto*: individual instances of a larger whole, with Ista representing his fellow residents and Nander representing the working class neighbours. Over the course of the novel, Ista, having taken it upon himself to be the building’s housemaster and feeling a certain responsibility towards the neighbourhood – which Angolie mockingly refers to as “extravert social regulatory zeal”\(^{156}\) –, undertakes various efforts to talk to his neighbours. When he speaks to the allochthonous half of the boxing match, who practise against another wall of the “beehive,” he is laughed at and says, to his immediate regret that “they,” i.e., the men, being (former) migrants, “should be lucky that it’s not a habit in this hospitable country to laugh at strangers.”\(^{157}\) The conversation that follows becomes a discussion on the rules Ista wants to establish for one of them, Jano, to clean the building’s windows, and whether these rules are desirable in the first place.

This discussion, which is continued at various points during the novel, both reveals the differing values of the residents and the neighbours and has spatial implications. It does not become clear whether Jano can clean the windows according to his own liking, or whether he should adhere to a drawn-up schedule, as Ista insists upon. However, what is clear, is that Jano is prohibited from entering the “beehive”. This state of affairs continues until the novel’s final scenes, in which a mob violently storms the building and burns it to the ground, a plot twist to which I shall turn later. Thus, the conflict of values is never resolved, that is, not until the situation becomes so strenuous that it explodes into violence.

There are, however, three neighbours that do cross the building’s doorstep and have access to (some of) the residents’ houses. The first is Marlees, Nander’s wife, who, as the cleaning lady, is granted access. Additionally, Elto, the soft-spoken violinist, teaches Milla and two of her friends how to play the violin. One day, Milla takes Jacho with her. As symbols of youthful innocence, these “little nymph-like creatures”\(^{158}\) enjoy the least complicated access to the “beehive.” After all, both Jano and Marlees can only ever interact with the residents in their own space on the basis of their job, that is, in a hierarchical relationship that structures interpersonal relationships according to a rigid scheme of employer and employee. However, this scheme is continuously questioned

and contested because the space in which the characters move is not clearly work-related. That is, there is a continuous tension between those characters who think they are hiring somebody to work for them (the residents) and those characters who implicitly contest that this is the only possible relationship in the private sphere (the neighbours). For example, when Paulice, having heard from Vartor that Marlees is his cleaning lady, goes to her neighbour, she is put off by what she interprets as the woman’s nosy behaviour and inclination for gossip: Vartor’s apartment “looks (...) like Willy Wortel’s workshop (...). You do wonder what such a man does with sex, right?”159

When Marlees notices that Paulice’s breasts are smaller after a surgery and articulates her thoughts in no uncertain terms, Paulice “abruptly” turns around and flees to her house.160 This kind of behaviour suggests a greater intimacy between the two women than Paulice is willing to acknowledge. Her stance seems to be: either professional contact, or no contact at all. To compare, Milla and Jacho are not forced to operate according to the professional hierarchies Jano and Marlees are subjected to. Yet they too only enter the building in a hierarchically lower position, namely as Elto’s students.

Wolfstonen, then, presents us with a contrast that is pushed to the extreme. For while all the novel’s characters share the same geography, that is, the same urban space, there is little interaction between the various groups they are made subject of. Strict borders are erected, which govern the little interaction there is according to hierarchies, thus preventing the characters to speak to each other as equals. These borders are articulated along the lines of class, creating a group of well-educated intellectuals and a group of less-educated working class people. Yet class is not the only structuring principle, since the novel frames the latter group’s poor integration practices as the political impetus behind the erection of what will be known as the “beehive.” This is one element of the “multicultural drama”: lawmakers, politicians and civil society are time and again confronted with the legacy and consequences of absent or failing integration policies (such as segregation) decades before. Yet the way they (lawmakers, politicians, etc.) act upon and attempt to remedy these faulty integration practices seldom lead to positive outcomes; instead, ill-conceived boxing matches and building projects such as those we encounter in Wolfstonen lead to more problems, rather than solutions. The multicultural drama is a downward spiral.

160 Ibid., 335. Original Dutch: “bruusk.”
Violence and Citizenship

*Wolfstonen* ends violently. The boxing match held between the autochthonous and the allochthonous residents of the neighbourhood did not lead to integration or a new form of living together, nor did the presence of the apartment building and its residents have any ameliorating (because diversifying) effects. However, in an ironic twist, the residents do unite their neighbours – but against themselves. The neighbours’ solidarity is the result of their, that is, the residents’, presence and is brought about at their expense. Buikema and Wesseling observe that “integration and assimilation are achieved under pressure of mass hysteria.”161 This hysteria is pointed at the residents in general and two of them in particular: Elto, whose androgynous appearance and amiable interaction with his pupils during the violin lessons become reasons to suspect him of child molestation, and the old Mr Forstenalt, who is believed to have a Nazi past.162

The violence to which the “beehive” and its residents are exposed seems to be carefully orchestrated and prepared. The Forstenalt couple is tricked to come outside, believing *he* is being honoured for being a good citizen. Instead, a brass band starts playing military tunes, including the Horst-Wessel-Lied, the official Nazi anthem. The neighbours, having gathered in a large crowd, watch the humiliation, as do Angolie, Ista, Mernin and Vartor from the building’s hallway. When Mr Forstenalt collapses, presumably dying from a heart attack, the two men rush outside, in the process leaving the front door open.163 This is the crowd’s cue to storm the building. A city newspaper later summarises the events in the following way: “White, black and brown fought shoulder to shoulder against an enemy deemed elitist, who they created with folkish fantasies in a months-long hate campaign.”164 In those fantasies, there was no place for nuance or empathy and thus the result was hysteria and violence. The crowd sets the building on fire, which finds “very quickly [and] curiously inventively the path of least resistance,”165 ultimately leaving the site on which the building was erected in its “original” state: empty, but quickly filled with rumours and stories.

And so, in this Gothic story, these voices find their place in the narrative – as aggressive roars from an angry crowd, as violent behaviour and as flames. But it appears the

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162 Interestingly, this charge is also brought forward by Jano and his friends from Quanador, for whom the Second World War and the Holocaust might not be an obvious historical point of reference. Franke, *Wolfstonen*, 509.
163 Ibid., 512. Original Dutch: “Blank, zwart en bruin vochten schouder aan schouder tegen een elitair bevonden vijand die ze met volkse fantasie in een maandenlange haatcampagne zelf hadden gekweekt.”
164 Ibid., 516. Original Dutch: “heel snel merkwaardig inventief de weg van de minste weerstand te vinden.”
building, which one neighbour characterises as having “something provocative, something arrogant, even something very haughty,”¹⁶⁶ will not go down easily. In the siege, an interesting spatial divide appears: the central hallway’s glass proves too thick and durable. The crowd has to move through the individual apartments – Ista and Angolie’s and the Forstenalt’s – to get into the building’s hallway: “Stones and tiles were thrown through the apartments’ windows, but everything flung back from the hallway’s façade of thick glass.”¹⁶⁷ Only when Ista and Vartor go out to rescue Mr Forstenalt, an opportunity opens up for the neighbours to enter into the building as a whole. This suggests that the intellectual élite that the residents of the “beehive” represent are difficult to attack in their common space, but only as individuals. The hallway constitutes the residents’ communal space, in which they do not operate much, but which does provide them (some) safety in times of need. Furthermore, the thick glass protects the community, rather than the individuals who constitute that community, who remain vulnerable to attacks – in this case, bricks breaking the glass. Here, I would like to draw a comparison: Ista, in his role of housemaster, asks Vartor to investigate what can be done with regards to the building’s structure to fight the sonic intrusion, thus using individual knowledge and skills to reinforce communal safety. Compare this with the hallway’s relative impenetrability, which protects the community, but also forces the violent crowd to divert their attention to (or through) the residents’ homes. Thus, one could conclude that in this order of things, the individual sacrifices him- or herself for the greater good of the group.

As said, Wolfstonen ends with Elto and Mr Forstenalt dead and their former houses burnt to the ground. When the building collapses, it produces “a deafening noise,” which “vaporised into thin air and became forever inaudible or resounded everywhere again and again.”¹⁶⁸ These are the building’s last sounds, and they are as haunting as any other for the eternal recurrence, to speak with Nietzsche, they suggest – or, indeed, the return of the repressed.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 481. Original Dutch: “iets uitdagends, iets arrogants, om niet te zeggen iets buitengewoon hooghartigs”.
¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 513. Original Dutch: “Er vlogen stenen en tegels door de ramen van de appartementen, maar tegen de dikke glazen pui van het trappenhuis ketste alles af.”
Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen how Wolfstonen’s central space – a postmodern apartment building housing eight creative, intellectual members of the upper middle class – becomes the principal site for a polarised struggle over the governance of space in postcolonial Europe. In this struggle, these eight residents increasingly find themselves opposed by and opposing their neighbours, with neither group establishing sustained contact with the other. Who – which group – has the power to prescribe the logic according to which society is organised, and how is that position legitimised? I have shown how in Wolfstonen this debate is worked through by the question of whose voices are heard in the novel, and how. To productively answer this question, we must be attentive to the Gothic qualities of the novel.

Wolfstonen suggests that it is impossible for people to isolate themselves to find their world: through the very modern Gothic trope of noise pollution and sonic intrusion, the outside world always finds its way in. Turning away from what in Dutch is called “straatrumoer,” street noises, is likely to ensure increasingly violent returns. On the matter of the debate on multiculturalism, Wolfstonen suggests two things: firstly, that those politically, intellectually, theoretically – are the staunchest supporters of a multicultural society, might end up at the receiving end of physical or psychological violence, because, secondly, these theoretical proponents of multiculturalism are not innocent, nor are they automatically on the right side of history by virtue of their points of view, as their behaviour not always reflects their theoretical beliefs. Tolerant thoughts do not automatically translate into tolerant behaviour. In postcolonial Europe, the supposedly clear-cut distinction between victims and perpetrators becomes blurred: the residents are subjected to psychological violence (sounds), as well as with lethal physical violence at the end of the novel. But are they only victims? The storming of the apartment building is the ultimate, violent act of citizenship available to the neighbours to ensure they are finally heard. Persistent exclusions and denials of agency regarding the governance of space led to it. As an act, it contests the way the élite – here represented as the residents – govern space: narrowly conceived this entails how the residents regulate access to their houses and their communal space, but as I have been stressing, we can read this practice as emblematic of larger societal processes. Ultimately, what is

169 In this chapter, I focused on noise and sound as symbols of postcolonial Europe. Gender and sexuality are outside the scope of this thesis; however, the novel also lends itself to an analysis from these perspectives. The Gothic then appears in the form of voyeurism.
at stake here is Prokhovnik’s equal ethical social status for everybody, despite socio-economic, cultural and educational background. *Wolfstonen* shows how a one-sided focus on those backgrounds impedes recognition of such an equal status.

Thus, we can draw parallels between the events unfolding in *Wolfstonen* and the theoretical case for private citizenship made in the previous chapter. The problems with which both the residents and their neighbours are faced can never be only located in the public sphere, but are always a mixture of the public and the private sphere. They are the same citizens with the same self, regardless of where they are. Moreover, grievances about public mistreatment and misrecognition are not laid to rest when in private. Contrarily, in *Wolfstonen*, these grievances are expressed exactly in the private sphere. The home is explicitly a political space: the novel’s central conflict arises from the residents retreat into their homes (symbolised most forcefully by Elto’s bedroom-turned-studio) and their efforts to regulate the neighbours’ ways of doing and being (e.g., practising in private for the public boxing match). That is the multicultural drama in full force.
4 Portugal: History, Memory and Community

Introduction

In this chapter, we move to an explicitly historicised perspective on the nation-state, as found in António Lobo Antunes’ most recent novel. His fiction often centres around the legacy and memory of the various sites in the Portuguese Colonial War, which lasted from 1961 until 1974 and took place in what is now Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique. While Portugal did achieve military victories and had, by the end of the war, restored formal control over Angola and most of Mozambique, the April 25, 1974 coup d’état, also known as the Carnation Revolution, overthrew the dictatorial regime in Lisbon, thus bringing an end to the conflict. Between 1974 and 1975, together with Cape Verde and São Tomé e Príncipe, the three colonies became independent. Thus, following the fall of the so-called Estado Novo regime in Lisbon, over 500 years of Portuguese imperial presence in Africa came to an end. As Farley’s provocatively states, “[t]he Portuguese were the first Europeans to colonise Africa and the last to leave it.”

Lobo Antunes, trained as a psychiatrist, worked as a doctor during the war in Angola and returned to Portugal in 1973. His experiences there formed the basis of his first two novels, Memória de Elefante (Elephant’s Memory) and Os cus de Judas (translated as The Land at the End of the World), both published in 1979. The colonial experience and its aftermath resurface in many of his later novels, including the well-known Fado Alexandrino (1983) and, as we shall see, also in Caminho como uma casa en chamas (2014, translated into Dutch as Als een brandend huis). It comes as no surprise, therefore, that critical attention of Lobo Antunes’ work has by and large focused on these postcolonial concerns. Other authors, however, look at other aspects of his work, pre-
senting for example psychoanalytic and linguistic readings. In this chapter, I will focus on the various legacies of violence and memories thereof that are represented in Caminho and the central role accorded to the former dictator António de Oliveira Salazar. By and large, this chapter follows the same pattern as the previous, approaching the novel from the perspectives of postcolonialism, with the Gothic and citizenship as analytical categories. What comes to the fore, are complicated spatial and temporal relations framed through the nation-state. I will argue that these relations strain any clear sense of community.

Empire, Its Loss and Its Legacy

Writing about Lobo Antunes’ 1988 novel As Naus (translated as The Return of the Caravels), Helena Carvalhão Buesco remarks that, for the characters, “place exists so that it may be left and escaped from, and to open up the possibility of coming back.” She embeds this characterisation of place in more general remarks about Portugal and the nature of being Portuguese, claiming that “the end of the [twentieth] century confronted Portugal with a land that history had led it to shun and sometimes even to reject, and escape.” Carvalhão Buesco’s effectively agrees with Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ characterisation of Portugal as a country that is at once at the centre of a global empire, and at the periphery of Europe, and adds to this complex relations with Portugal itself. Furthermore, after the period of decolonisation in the mid-1970s introduced feelings of loss of empire, the nexus of belonging and space became even more complex. In Caminho, this takes the shape of forceful memories of empire, its loss and its legacy.

Idália, a former judge, one of inhabitants of the run-down apartment building in Lisbon at the centre of the novel, mourns – among many other things – that her husband left her long ago. He went to war in “Africa,” and after divorcing Idália took off to

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176 See, for example, Alison Ribeiro de Menezes, “Psychoanalysing the Nation: A Comparative Reading of António Lobo Antunes’ Memória de elefante and Luis Martín-Santos’s Tiempo de silencio,” Orbis Litterarum 63.5 (2008); and Aino Rinhaug, “António Lobo Antunes: Production and Consumption of Subjectivity,” Review of European Studies 1.2 (2009).


178 Ibid., 263.


180 António Lobo Antunes, Als een brandend huis (Amsterdam: Ambo|Anthos, 2014), 34.
Mozambique to re-marry.\textsuperscript{181} She also refers to a neighbour who was sent to Tarrafal, or “Campo da Morte Lenta,” in Cape Verde.\textsuperscript{182} As Idália is not the only character whose thoughts are continuously pulled back away from the present to the past, the colonial and postcolonial experience are thus inextricably linked, both geographically and chronologically. Joaquim, one of the other residents, reinforces this idea that the past and the present, Portugal and its former colonies are bound together. When he observes a sergeant “who had lost half his leg / ‘A bullet please’ / or no / ‘A bullet through my head cornet’,”\textsuperscript{183} he sees traces of the colonial war fought years earlier in the present streetscape – traces, moreover, that traverse time and space and bind it together.

Other residents are the communist and Jewish couples on the ground floor, a drunkard and a civil servant on the first floor, as well as a retired actress and a retired soldier living in the two apartments on the third floor. Most affected by the colonial experience, however, is Augusto, a colonel who was stationed in Angola during the war. His thoughts continually go back to the affair he had with a Mulatto woman, Sofia Rosa, who stayed there when he left with the armed forces. As with all of the characters in \textit{Caminho}, Augusto’s mood is melancholic, caught up in the difficult relations between past and present, between here and there: “when I could no longer see Angola from the ship, when the last bird let us go and flew back to the land, I walked to my cabin as if I returned home (…) and you have no idea how much it hurt that you weren’t there,”\textsuperscript{184} he says to an imagined Sofia Rosa. “Home,” here, is a difficult concept: it is not Angola, nor does it seem to be Portugal. Neither is it where Sofia Rosa is. All of these places overlap to some extent: Sofia is in Luanda, Angola, where Augusto was as a soldier in the colonial occupation army. However, he could never be there but as a Portuguese: “Say do you live with a negro?” one of his commanding officers asks,\textsuperscript{185} prompting Augusto to describe her as the woman who does his laundry. He is then told to show in his behaviour that she is that, as the officer does not like “mixing.” Such racist comments serve as reminders for Augusto that he is not in place in Luanda, that he is and probably always will be a foreigner, whose intimacy with a colonial subject cannot be accepted by the Portuguese. In fact, it is not understood at all: “how can you like some-

\textsuperscript{181} \textit{Ibid.}, 28.
\textsuperscript{182} \textit{Ibid.}, 35.
\textsuperscript{183} \textit{Ibid.}, 228. Original Dutch: “[de sergeant] die zijn halve been kwijt was / ‘Een kogel alsjeblieft’ / of nee / ‘Een kogel door mijn koop vaandrig’.”
\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Ibid.}, 47. Original Dutch: “toen ik Angola niet langer kon zien vanaf het schip, toen de laatste vogel ons liet gaan en terugvloog naar het land, liep ik naar mijn hut alsof ik terugkeerde naar huis, … en je hebt geen idee hoeveel pijn het me deed dat jij er niet was.”
\textsuperscript{185} \textit{Ibid.}, 45. Original Dutch: “Zeg hok jij met een negerin?”
body from an inferior race?” he is asked. Consequently, the intimacy between Augusto and Sofia Rosa is necessarily co-constructed and compromised by the officer’s non-acceptance and Augusto’s efforts to be with Sofia without being too close to her. However, in Lisbon, he is consumed by guilt and doubt: “when somebody insinuates that I long back to Africa I don’t know what I should answer,” he thinks. His body is in Portugal, his thoughts are in Angola; as a result, he concurrently is in both and in neither of those countries.

But the postcolonial experience pervades the novel in a different sense, too, one that goes beyond references to the colonial period and the colonial war. The end of Portugal as a colonial power came with the end of the right-wing dictatorship established by António de Oliveira Salazar in the early 1930s and, after he fell ill, controlled by Marcelo Caetano from 1968 until the 1974 military coup. Thus, the postcolonial transition is linked with the end and legacy of Salazar’s authoritarian regime. For example, Tarrafal, where one of Idália’s neighbours was sent to, is a relatively little-known Cape Verdean prison camp or penal colony, established by Salazar upon the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. It was used to house political opponents of the regime, who were exiled to Chão Bom on the island of Santiago in Cape Verde. The camp initially closed down in 1954, but reopened seven years later as a labour camp for African leaders who opposed the Portuguese during the colonial war. Tarrafal finally closed on April 25, 1974, the day of the military coup in Lisbon and was handed over to Cape Verdean authorities the year afterwards. In this history, Salazar’s authoritarian regime and the colonial enterprise are impossible to separate. Consequently, as is also apparent from Caminho, it becomes difficult to think the end of the colonial era, the loss of empire and the end of the dictatorship apart, as that particular moment in time (the mid-1970s) exists as a combination of multiple legacies of violence, oppression and domination. This plays an important role in Caminho, and in the present analysis.

**A House on Fire**

In alternating chapters, Caminho follows the thoughts of eight characters living together in a dilapidated apartment building. At times, their thoughts are punctured by one of

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186 Ibid., 144. Original Dutch: “hoe kun je iemand van een inferieur ras nou aardig vinden.”
187 Ibid., 260. Original Dutch: “als iemand insinueert dat ik terugverlang naar Afrika weet ik niet wat ik moet antwoorden.”
188 Marta Araújo and Silvia Rodríguez Maeso, in The Contours of Eurocentrism: Race, History, and Political Texts (London: Lexington Books, 2016), 168–9, comment on this fact and trace its reproduction in school textbooks.
them, the “drunkard,” calling for his daughter, or Idália playing the piano, to the point that one of the “communists” living on the ground floor notices that when these sounds are gone: “it’s so nice and quiet (…) the drunkard’s gone, the piano of the judge is silenced.” Later in this chapter, I will consider these sounds in more detail.

More generally speaking, Caminho is a novel in which the characters’ streams-of-consciousness are frequently interrupted by chorus-like sounds. Often, these are memories of their youth and of growing up in Salazar’s Portugal. I will refer to them as the “sounds of history” and focus more on them in the next section of this chapter. Here, I will briefly zoom in one other frequently repeated phrase: the titular “walking like a burning house.” This metaphor is central to certain forms of Buddhism, where it symbolises the frailty of the human mind with all of its judgements and prejudices. In Caminho, the invocations of the burning house do not seem to hold this particular meaning, but they do suggest Portugal is a nation in peril. Sometimes, the phrase refers to the individual characters – “the Jews who also walk like burning houses,” for example, or “I walk like a burning house” –; at other times, it is applied to the building in which they live – “and I find myself in this building, that walks like a burning house.” If, as I would suggest, we read the apartment building as a symbol of the contemporary nation-state, housing citizens with various nationalities and histories, and if we read this particular apartment building as a symbol of Portugal, then Portugal is on fire and burning to ashes.

The drunkard cuts through the menace inherent in the burning house most deeply: “after you turn fifty the little machine starts to wear out, sometimes a bone, sometimes obstructed kidneys, you walk like a burning house, we all walk like burning houses and the roof of our brains is on fire.” Here, the body is explicitly linked to the brain: bodily decline is translated into mental deterioration. At the same time, this quote puts forward a connection between the nation and the mind as the place where that nation is (re)imagined. That is, we have to distinguish between the metaphor as applied to the apartment building-as-nation and the metaphor as applied to the building’s residents.

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189 Lobo Antunes, Brandend huis, 293. Original Dutch: “wat een rust […] de zatlap weg, de piano van de rechter verstomd.”
191 Lobo Antunes, Brandend huis, 37. Original Dutch: “de Joden die ook lopen als brandende huizen.”
192 Ibid., 59, 122. Original Dutch: “ik loop als een brandend huis.”
193 Ibid., 75. Original Dutch: “en ik bevind me in dit pand, dat loopt als een brandend huis.”
194 Ibid., 62. Original Dutch: “na je vijftigste begint het machientje te slijten, nu eens een bot dan weer verstopte nieren, je loopt als een brandend huis, we lopen allemaal als brandende huizen en de vlammen slaan uit het dak van ons brein.”
Thus, it not only describes the individual characters and the perilous state they are in, constantly drawn back to far-away memories and averse to the present. The connection that is established between the characters, the building and the nation also extends that state of peril to Portugal as a whole. In Caminho, this is symbolically represented through the sounds of history that haunt the characters’ lives.

Salazar and the Sounds of History
The drunkard’s calls for his daughter and the judge’s piano playing are emblematic of life in the modern city, in which people live closely together, sharing walls, ceilings and floors with their neighbours. As such, the sounds they produce are constant reminders of lives that remain invisible, yet manifest themselves audibly. At the same time, they also suggest a certain interconnectedness and conviviality: although other lives around us may remain invisible, they do, in fact, exist. In a novel in which characters are so preoccupied with the intricacies of their own minds, memories and traumas, the sounds coming to them signal that there also other histories “out there”: outside the walls of their mind, and outside the confines of their apartment. (Indeed, I pursued such a line of argument for Wolfstonen in the last chapter.) Here, too, we can see how Caminho creates a parallel between the mind and the house, which in turn represents the nation. From this perspective, it remains up in the air whether the silence that the “communists” applaud towards the end of the novel is to be celebrated: does it not signify that the characters have completely moved inside their minds – and thus the triumph of the past over the present?

This suggestion is reinforced by the last chapter, in which the narrative moves away from the residents it has been following, towards the building’s attic, in which a Salazar-like figure seems to be living. It is perhaps not too far-fetched to think of this figure as a “madman in the attic,” to echo the title of Gilbert and Grubar’s seminal Gothic work and its famous description of Jane Eyre’s Bertha Mason. Locked away in the attic of a run-down Lisbon apartment building, he is the repressed, who returns as chor-195 rus-like nightmarish shrieks, to which I will turn in a moment. This figure’s presence is foreshadowed in the first chapter focalised through Augusto, the former colonel, who notices “a cough, whispering”196 in the attic. The drunkard is sure somebody lives there:

196 Ibid., 43. Original Dutch: “een hoest, gefluister.”
while describing the other residents, he says “and in the attic [there is] also somebody because I hear footsteps.”\textsuperscript{197} The actress, lastly, “felt that there was somebody there, no footsteps and no voices either, minimal sounds.”\textsuperscript{198}

The voice in the last chapter presents itself as Salazar’s legacy and memory: he describes himself as “no longer human but a weakened presence of a vanished authority.”\textsuperscript{199} The dictator is present, decades after his death. This continued influence is emphasised later, when he says that “till eternity’s eternity I’ll keep walking around like a burning house and arranging everything in my country.”\textsuperscript{200} This statement makes explicit what was already clear from reading Caminho: that nobody can live outside the history and memory of Portugal’s dictatorship. The memory of him is so alive among the Portuguese that he can be represented as a bodiless voice.

His is a fluid state of being: in the actress’s words, “they say that Salazar is dead, maybe that’s true maybe not, he never showed himself, you had not the slightest idea where he lived.”\textsuperscript{201} Idália, meanwhile, puts it as follows: “and Salazar [is] everywhere because Salazar is endless.”\textsuperscript{202} Although some characters reminisce of the dictator’s concrete actions or attributes (Joaquim calls him a “patriot,”\textsuperscript{203} the drunkard praises him for not letting Portugal become a province of Spain\textsuperscript{204}), Salazar is also – or primarily – endless because he and his legacy are invisible: as the actress says, he might be dead or he might still be alive. For a period as traumatic as a decades-long dictatorship, the dictator’s physical death is not the end: here, too, the prefix “post” in post-dictatorship signals a connection, rather than a break, in the same vein that Portugal’s postcolonial state is not detached from its colonial past.

What I have been referring to as the novel’s sounds of history find an important expression in chorus-like shrieks. They consist of two sets of phrases that are repeated in many chapters and heard by (almost) all characters. The first testifies to the cult of wor-

\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., 55. Original Dutch: “en op de zolder ook iemand want ik hoor voetstappen.”
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 216. Original Dutch: “je voelde dat er iemand was, geen voetstappen en ook geen stemmen, minimale geluidjes.”
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 333. Original Dutch: “omdat ik geen mens meer ben maar de verzwakte aanwezigheid van een verdwenen gezag.”
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid., 334. Original Dutch: “tot in de eeuwen der eeuwen blijf ik rondlopen als een brandend huis en alles regelen in mijn land.”
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid., 222. Original Dutch: “ze zeggen dat Salazar dood is, misschien is dat waar misschien ook niet, hij liet zich nooit zien, je had geen flauw idee waar hij woonde.”
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid., 246. Original Dutch: “en overal Salazar want Salazar is eindeloos.”
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{204} Ibid., 57.
ship for the leader: “‘Who’s the boss here?’ / ‘Salazar Salazar Salazar’”.205 (Sometimes, only the last line is heard.) The second set is more nationalistic, running “‘Hurray for whom?’ / ‘Portugal Portugal Portugal’”.206 Both sets of phrases immediately conjure up a hierarchical relationship between a representative of the regime asking the question, with a group or gathered crowd chanting the answer. These groups are often school children who are taught a love for their country and leader through the frequent repetition of these phrases, since the phrases usually come to the fore when characters think back to their school days. Yet their inclusion in the novel’s present suggests a reproduction across the boundaries of time and space: the sounds of history travel to Angola, where Joaquim hears them, and to contemporary Lisbon, where many other characters are haunted by the chants.

They are, then, emblematic of what Helena Carvalhão Buesco refers to as “time displaced,” that strange condition she observes in Lobo Antunes’ fiction in which time and place seem to be afloat. She writes that “space becomes the last hold of territoriality and identity, in a contemporary world where the loss of identity is so often equated with the absence of territorial anchors.”207 As the soil of identity, such space without anchors is also “quite unmistakably a way of disappearing.”208 This is as true of the novel Carvalhão Buesco discusses (the 1988 Return of the Caravals) as of Caminho. Not only do the characters seem absent in their memories, in those thoughts they also often go back to their childhood outside of Lisbon. Places such as Castelo Branco or Beira, in the Portuguese mountains (the latter on the border with Spain), dislocate the characters even more. To the residents of the Lisbon apartment building, these places are lost in time and geographically inaccessible. Similarly, Joaquim has lost access to Angola, and the Jews feel cut off from their homeland. Somewhere between their youth and Lisbon (notice the opposition of a geographical space – Lisbon – with a certain slice of a person’s chronology – their youth), these places have disappeared. What remains, in Caminho, is a narrative voice that never manages to pull the various threads together. Consequently, memory roams freely.

The one voice that might seem to combine the various story lines and that, once upon a time, pulled the country together, Salazar, now is located in the building’s attic, from where he exercises his influence every day. His state, however, is as precarious as any-

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205 Original Dutch: “‘Wie is hier de baas?’ / ‘Salazar Salazar Salazar’”. First on page 17.
208 Ibid., 266.
one else’s: “the walls rumble when a bus drives by and then a piece of cement falls on my lap, they fall everywhere, yesterday one in my neck, today one on my lap, tomorrow one on my back, angry because they can’t hurt me.” The language in this fragment suggests a certain intentionality on behalf of the house, as if Salazar is repaying a debt by having the house angrily collapse on him.

If we read the novel as a narration of the nation, to use Homi Bhabha’s words, we are drawn again to that phrase “walking like a burning house.” Bhabha writes that “[t]he nation fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor.” I have discussed already the characters’ sense of having lost access or a connection to their past in the Portuguese mountains or overseas. All these characters seem to be disconnected from their communities. The same is true for the Jews, who had to flee persecution, and the Communists, who opposed Salazar’s dictatorship and seem to have lost purpose after the downfall of his regime. Therefore, they are cut off from their youth and their family and have become adrift in the post-imperial metropolis. This loss, as Bhabha contends, is translated into “the language of metaphor”; in Caminho the metaphor of the burning house. The nation of Portugal is in dire need of reparation: the house is on fire, a metaphorical expression of it crumbling and falling apart, a process that seems to start to happen in the novel’s final chapter. In the next section, I turn my attention to citizenship theory and, especially, the role of community in Caminho, building upon the ideas put forward just now.

**Past Identities, Impeded Citizenship**

If we return to the brief definition of the political given in this thesis’ introduction – the political as “a radical questioning of what it is to belong” – and consider that Caminho is fundamentally concerned with questions of belonging and, beyond that, identity, it is clear that this novel advances new ways of thinking about the space of the political. Carvalhão Buesco writes of Return of the Caravels that it “enacts the loss of [a] voice that could once have brought everything together.” Caminho enacts a similar loss: as noted before, in the postcolonial, post-Salazar nation that Portugal is, there seems to be no unifying voice. Instead, the narrative is dispersed over eight focalising characters.

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209 Lobo Antunes, *Caminho*, 335-6. Original Dutch: “de muren dreunen als er een bus voorbijrijdt en dan valt er een brokje cement op mijn schoot, ze vallen overall neer, gisteren eentje in mijn nek, vandaag een op schoot, morgen een op mijn rug, boos om dat ze me niet kunnen bezeren.”


211 Carvalhão Buesco, “Time Displaced,” 266.
nineteen, if you include the last chapter’s Salazar voice). There is only the apartment building, where all currently live, yet none of them seems particularly attached to: “I don’t like this apartment,” Joaquim states, calling it bleak and desolate. Similarly, the drunkard feels threatened by the house.

As mentioned earlier, the characters feel they belong somewhere else – in Portugal, or elsewhere – but cannot access those places anymore. Belonging is a difficult and contested concept, and so is the concept of the “home.” In the previous pages, this has been pointed out with regard to various of the characters’ situations, in which various histories of violence – colonialism and Salazar’s dictatorship, but also (less commented upon here) the Holocaust and communist opposition to the state – complicate both their access to the past as well as their present. Two things need to be observed here: firstly, the complex time-space relations, in which both there is both a temporal and spatial “there” (characters’ youth in inner Portugal, for example, or their time overseas) that is contrasted with a temporal and spatial “here” (Lisbon). However, in both cases, the space is determined by a sense of having lost something between past and present. This means that, secondly, identity can never be comfortably built in or on the home: this one-dimensional relationality is destroyed in the postcolonial postdictatorship. This precarious position is captured in the metaphor of the burning house, which, following Bhabha, can be interpreted as a sign of the uprooting of community. In this last section, I would like to return to that other central tenet of this thesis, i.e., the distinctions between the public and the private, the political and the non-political.

_Caminho_ does not revolve around a conflict or confrontation with the world surrounding the apartment building and the consequences of that conflict for citizenship, as was the case in _Wolfstonen_. Instead, here, emphasis has to be placed on the implications of the characters’ focus on the past for their present. Through memories, the past continuously finds its way into the house. That is to say that it haunts the house and its inhabitants – and, therefore, the nation. This is most forcefully represented by the inclusion of Salazar in the novel’s last chapter, where the repressed legacies of colonialism and dictatorship that converge in his person return and, it is suggested, make the house fall apart. So, the image that arises from _Caminho_ is that of citizens who are necessarily determined by their past. That past, in turn, maybe even impedes a traditional sense of

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212 Lobo Antunes, _Caminho_, 7. Original Dutch: “Ik houd niet van dit appartement.”
214 _Ibid._, 275.
citizenship altogether: despite occasional references to life outside the building (Idália, for example, thinks about flirtations in the offices of court, although she discusses no court cases) and run-ins in the hallway, all characters seem their own “island,” without connections to others.

Writing on the relations between “home” and “nation,” Rosemary Marangoly George writes that “[i]magining a home is as political as imagining a nation.”²¹⁵ Imagining the home as a house burning as a result of the weight of the past, then, signifies home as a dangerous place, one to escape from, rather than to go back to. Drawing from the Gothic mode in which the house symbolises the nation, the latter is also on fire and thus becomes a place to escape from. The twist is of course that there is no place to escape to. Portugal still exists, but not in any recognisable fashion: the changes of the last quarter of the century have left their marks. Yet, as Caminho shows, the country may have lost its colonies, they still make demands on the former imperial centre: again, “post” signifies a, in this case uneasy, connection with the past.

Caminho’s characters do not belong anywhere: the displacement of time and space creates what George would refer to as the migrant experience: “identity is linked only hypothetically (...) to a specific geographical place on the map.”²¹⁶ Instead, without a steadfast backdrop, identity floats between spaces. The ultimate consequence of that experience is the realisation that the “home” is a fiction, and that identity exists independently of the home – and of the nation. For Caminho’s migrated characters, this means that their identities, construed through their memories and shaped by historical processes, have nowhere to go.

With no destination, they retreat back into their homes, in an effort to become almost apolitical – a move that, paradoxically, can be seen as a political act. What is then left of citizenship? I would suggest that Caminho first and foremost shows the contingency of tying citizenship to the nation-state. Membership, in Caminho, is felt on levels other than the national: ties of kinship and friendship are imagined on levels other than the nation: to a woman in Luanda, for example, a relationship made impossible in the framework of the nation-state, or to places of birth and upbringing, which in the nation-state’s processes of centralisation lose their meaning and importance. Therefore, communities are not built in the nation-state, but on the basis of smaller, individual units

²¹⁶ Ibid., 200.
that sometimes stay within the boundaries of the nation-state, and sometimes go beyond them. This constitutes a crisis of the nation-state, which in *Caminho* is expressed through the Gothic metaphor of the burning house.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have seen how the idea of being “at home” in postcolonial and post-dictatorial Portugal is expressed through the home-as-house. This latter home is imagined as a house on fire, haunted by various histories of violence: principally the colonial war in Angola, which is in multiple ways connected with Salazar’s fascist dictatorship. This constitutes one way in which a past, spatialised as an overseas territory and former colony, continues to make demands on the present. These histories cast a dark shadow over the present, pulling back *Caminho como uma casa em chamas*’ characters time and again to earlier periods in their life elsewhere. Like Wolfstonen, *Caminho* shows that the outside world finds its way into the private lives of people. This time, what remind the characters of this are the sounds of history, especially the sounds of problematic moments in history.

*Caminho* also suggests that tying citizenship to the nation-state is not the only possibility, and might not be the most suitable connection. It does so not by “proposing” in some way urban or European citizenship – that is, citizenship on a different scale than the national –, but by emphasising that the people’s private communities, either the ones they move in or the ones they want to move in, do not align with the nation-state. As Engin Isin points out, “[s]pace is (…) never simply a passive background” for political identification. Accordingly, citizenship appears as an imaginative act, in which citizenship is usually connected to the nation-state. However, *Caminho*’s imaginative act explores the intimate, private connections between people across space and time. It shows the complications of and in the nation-state through various stories of postcolonial movement. Relations of attachment between people that play out in the private sphere continuously call for a sense of the nation-state, while at the same time posing challenges to it.

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5 Modern Life and its Postcolonial Discontents

Introduction
In this final chapter, I turn to Saskia de Coster’s novel *Wat alleen wij horen* (2015, What Only We Hear). It is again a novel that is set in an apartment building, in which a diverse group of residents is hindered by sounds seemingly coming from everywhere. In the novel’s reception, some critics have noted that *Wat alleen wij horen* shares similarities with *Wolfstonen*, which will serve as an interesting intertextual point of debate here. While acknowledging the resemblances between the two novels, it will be clear, too, that they are, in many respects, quite different.

The central building in *Wat alleen wij horen* is called the Atlas building, which was built in the 1920s in what the narrator describes as the “New York of Europe,” “because she is as tireless, because trendiness and tradition embrace each other here, because creative thinkers and doers give the city its umpteenth breath.” Although some have identified this city as Antwerp, I would rather say this description suggest Brussels, in the same way that *Wolfstonen* suggests Amsterdam as its settings – that is, it is always a suggestion and never a confirmation. More importantly, this city is said to be built on “solid little European customs,” which “has always opened the door to growth and progress, but now bursts at the seams due to the influx of new people who don’t share her history.” This provides the novel with an explicitly postcolonial framework of (mass) migration, in which questions of conviviality and living together gain prominence.

Yet, as we will see, *Wat alleen wij horen* is also concerned with representing what I would call “modern life” from the perspective of neoliberal globalisation and capita-

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219 See, for example, Janet Luis, “Het nabuurschap zal zegevieren,” in *NRC Handelsblad* (25 September 2015).
221 Daniëlle Sardijn, “Hele verhalen in enkele zinnen,” in *de Volkskrant* (3 October 2015).
222 On a poetical note, this suggestion makes sense. Before *Wolfstonen*, Franke wrote *De verbeiding* (“The Imagination”), a novel that thematised what the imagination can achieve. It was written from the perspective of Nelson’s Column at Trafalgar Square, London, thus shedding any idea of realism. Similarly, the epigraph to *Wat alleen wij horen* – “Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind / cannot bear very much reality,” taken from T.S. Eliot’s poem “Burnt Norton” – represents a poetics that does not necessarily adhere to realism.
ism, too. I use this term perhaps rather lightly and without offering a sustained critique of its practices, since to my mind the novel does not engage with it in such a manner either. However, I will argue that they are important to understand one of the novel’s thematic red threads: the distinction between the individual and the collective, between the particular and the general.

The Postcolonial State: Change and Connection

In *Wat alleen wij horen*, the residents of the Atlas building are told that they have to move house in six months, as the ninety-year-old building does not “conform to contemporary energy norms anymore” and will be demolished. “The Firm,” which rents out the apartments, says demolition is cheaper than renovation. The eight-storey high Atlas building is home to over 120 people, and the novel follows their initial fight against the Firm and their later resignation. This time, the forces besieging the residents are not the working-class neighbourhood (as in *Wolfstonen*) or their own past (as in *Caminho*); rather, it is the outside world of economy and modernity.

The news brings out various reactions among the Atlas building’s residents, which stem from different answers to the question what they can do faced with decisions that seem set in stone. In the title-less first chapter (all subsequent chapters bear the name of one, or more, of the characters), the narrator sees the city as an “everlasting story of change and desire.” This change, a constant influx of new ideas and people, is a potent force to keep the city moving forward, but on an individual level the constancy of change can also be threatening and disquieting, certainly if its effects are uprooting and forced movement. The question that the residents find themselves faced with, is if they can formulate a common response in which they let the Firm know they do not agree with them being forced to find a new place to live. George, a retired traveller who is showing the first signs of dementia, is fond of “life,” of movement, and observes what he sees happening around him: “People with so many different backgrounds try to understand each other and crawl together to find warmth.” That is to say that they are striving to, and maybe achieving, a sense of conviviality, of living together peacefully.

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226 Ibid., 8. Original Dutch: “een eeuwigdurend verhaal van verandering en verlangen.”

227 Ibid., 17. Original Dutch: “Mensen met zo veel verschillende achtergronden proberen elkaar te verstaan en kruipe bij elkaar om het warmer te krijgen.”
The narrator characterises the residents as “always nearby neighbours and sometimes friends far away who share their walls,” a characterisation most clearly expressed in the two sisters who trade their homemade cakes with their neighbours for ingredients for new ones.

The novel primarily follows the situation of Melanie, an editor at the national public radio, and her son Claus, George and his wife Abigail, Anton, the janitor of the building, and his sister Erin, a writer. At the end of each of the novel’s part, a chapter called “De anderen,” “The Others,” a contemporary chorus from ancient Greek tragedies, gives a voice to some of the other residents. Among these are a Moroccan family, a Polish handyman, a young Asian female dancer and a Greek music teacher. They are the most explicit traces, so to say, of the city’s attraction as a migratory destination. Why they came to the city is never mentioned; rather, Wat alleen wij horen zooms in on important moments in the residents’ lives: the young dancer quitting her job after almost being hit by a falling lamp, or the handyman hearing he will not be of service anymore, for example. All these moments are about change, often the change that will also come to the Atlas building.

A returning element in the novel is the parakeet, sometimes a single bird, sometimes a larger flock. Although the birds come and go at their own convenience, every character imagines having a special relationship with them. However, the novel’s final scene, in which a single parakeet flies out of the collapsing building suggests instead that the birds have a special relationship with the building: “He has seen and heard it all, nothing gets lost.” Arguably, as birds who are capable of moving beyond or even without boundaries, the parakeets are metaphors of the kind of migration that has shaped the novel’s fictional city. Importantly, these parakeets are one form of connection between the various stories that come together in Wat alleen wij horen. They make their appearance in various chapters, connecting them while also suggesting that change is itself a connecting tissue or a red thread in the city.

This idea of constant change is expressed most forcefully towards the end of the novel: “The whole world moves and migrates. People flood each other’s beaches and occupy places that were declared uninhabitable ages ago. They want to build nests there

\footnote{Ibid., 9. Original Dutch: “altijd nabije buren en soms verre vrienden die hun muren met elkaar delen.”}

\footnote{Ibid., 316. Original Dutch: “Hij heeft alles gehoord en gezien, niets gaat verloren.”}
where the birds once started.”

Here, *Wat alleen wij horen* proposes that all are affected by changes in society that result from, among other things, migration. Postcolonial Europe encompasses all of Europe and is characterised by change and the (perceived) difficulty of making connections. As we will see later in this chapter, this difficulty stems from a neoliberal logic that recasts colonial governance strategies in the present and threatens to commodify citizens and play them out against each other. In a world where people flood each other’s beaches, the task becomes exploring ways of what Paul Gilroy calls “conviviality”: living together without racism, discrimination and exclusion.

In *Wat alleen wij horen*, this ideal of conviviality is made concrete as dialogue, which is presented as crucial for an ever-changing city. In the novel, dialogue is literally at the very core of the Atlas building: “below the common meeting room” is a basement with jars. The labels on these jars read “DIALOGUE.” Thus, through this spatialisation, dialogue is posited as the fundament on which the building rests. Through dialogue, difference and change can be mediated and turned into or used to sustain connections. However, it is this idea that is placed under tension in *Wat alleen wij horen*, as we will see next.

### Sounds Without a Conductor

In the previous chapters, we have seen how *Wolfstonen* is haunted by sounds representing the unacknowledged problems of multiculturalism and how the sounds of multiple, intertwined histories of violence echo through *Caminho*. The sounds in *Wat alleen wij horen* have yet another origin: most of them are produced by the residents themselves or by the city around them; however, some are the titular sounds only the residents can hear. In this section, I will explore what that exactly means.

The first category of sounds merits some attention, as it ties in to the idea of modern life that the novel articulates. Early on, Melanie notices that before one sound has passed, another comes: a truck on a building site gives way to an airplane flying over.

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231 This argument is made most provocatively by Achille Mbembe, in *Critique de la raison nègre* (Paris: La Découverte, 2013).

232 Gilroy, *After Empire*.

233 De Coster, *Wat alleen wij horen*, 89. Original Dutch: “dieper dan de gemeenschappelijke vergaderruimte,” “DIALOOG.”

234 Ibid., 14.
They are signs of economic activity, of the business of the city and thus of the city itself, where millions of people work, eat and sleep. George characterises the noise as “the groaning of a city that devours too much land too soon and thus eats itself.”

When the construction of an exact replica of the Atlas building starts across the road, these sounds intensify and constantly remind the residents of the city, its economy and its continuous change and renewal.

Other sounds are produced by the residents: Anton can hear Melanie flush her toilet, or sit down at her desk. Erin hears a central heating boiler start up. These are the sounds of modern life, of being connected with people by being in close quarters with them. There are also other sounds that are expressions of modern life, which are evaluated more negatively: Anton laments the loss of a short moment of silence due to his mobile phone buzzing, for example. Additionally, Erin unexpectedly hears sounds from the apartment above her, which she thought was empty. In that moment, modern life finds its expression in a certain anonymity – knowing that one shares walls with neighbours, but not knowing who those neighbours are – which is punctured by the sounds, which signify life on the other side of the wall, too.

Yet the most disturbing of the novel’s sounds are not produced by the characters or by economic activity; rather, they have untraceable origins. I suggest the novel’s title refers to these sounds, as they are only heard by the residents. Melanie is the first to notice an “annoying, distant bleep.” Later, various residents profess to suffer from “strange ear rustlings.” George looks at the building’s and the city’s light bulbs as the source of the bleeps or rustlings, thinking that “together [they] make for one large dissonant concert. Without a conductor, with only soloists.”

This metaphor is an interesting one, as it recalls the residents’ continuing (and failing) efforts to formulate a joint response to the request to leave: here, too, nobody manages to unite the people and have them reach a conclusion. Instead, everybody plays for himself- or herself. Thus, it points to a missing sense of community among the residents and, broader, the city. Simultaneously, in the unhomely moment created by the sound, the outside world breaks in on the

home, reminding the Atlas building’s residents of a society that is has come to prefer money and efficiency over personal relations of attachment.

Others ignore the bleeps, too. One of Melanie’s former colleagues at the radio finds the idea that “the Firm” would use psychological warfare to make the residents move incredible, or in any case “rather local.” She will therefore not, as Melanie suggested, turn it into a news item on national radio.

As can be expected from a novel borrowing many of its elements from the Gothic, falsely explaining the sounds’ source or ignoring them altogether does not make them go away. After her ineffective talk with her former colleague, Melanie feels that “[t]he sound is also in her, it echoes through her and harms her body from inside, she feels how it hollows her out.” Later, the narrator ironically states that “[t]he previously airy sound, that had indeterminate origins, has made a career for itself,” with one resident suggesting that the ghosts of former residents are resisting the building’s destruction. The explanations quickly turn even wilder: maybe it is the city’s sounds reverberating through smog and overpopulation, while again others claim that the city’s fundamentals are bursting. These reasons can as much be interpreted through the Gothic as they point to discontents of modern life. Interestingly, in its representation of the effects of the continuous sonic intrusions, the novel starts to increasingly refer to Wolfstonen: when one of “the Others” states that even in a sound-proof room one will hear all kinds of things, this recalls Elto’s efforts to isolate himself. In the same vein, as the sounds progressively become more commanding of life in the (in the meantime almost emptied) Atlas building, Anton hears the “echoes of the building,” and Melanie thinks that the building “embraces” its emptiness, “swallows all sounds and casts [them] back hundred-fold.” As the residents leave, the sounds take over, controlling ever larger parts of the lives of those who still live in the building. Those who value interpersonal relations the most are faced with ever more powerfully resounding noise. Though there is no direct link with a colonial past, I would contend that the (societal) forces that oppose the residents in Wat alleen wij horen make use of similar practices that colonial European forces used to motivate and execute their violent overseas expansions. In that con-

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240 Ibid., 186. Original Dutch: “behoorlijk lokaal.”
241 Ibid., 191. Original Dutch: “Het geluid zit ook in haar, het galmt door haar heen en tast haar lichaam vanbinnen aan, ze voelt hoe het haar uitholt.”
242 Ibid., 192. Original Dutch: “Het ijle geluidje van weleer, dat van een onbestemde plek kwam, heeft carrière gemaakt.”
243 Ibid., 193.
244 Ibid., 251, 270. Original Dutch: “echo’s van het gebouw” and “omarmt,” “alle geluiden inslikt en honderdvoudig terugkaatst.”
stellation, postcolonial Europe emerges as a space that in the past exploited and dominated their colonies, but in the present has also initiated the process within European metropolises, the former centres of imperial power.

Shared Intimacies

*Wat alleen wij horen*’s central building is to be demolished, “tired after so many years of wear and tear.” The narrator continues:

Still, it used to be a remarkable building, designed by a progressive architect, with a charming marble entrance and fronted with some elegant decorations of wrought iron, as was fashionable in the nineteen-twenties. But with its pimples of puffed paint, the crooked eyebrows of the hanging drains slowly collapsing, the drool at the window-sills, caused by slanting down-pours, the deep acne craters and ironmould from the unrelenting elements that eat into the iron fire ladder, for the past few years the building has been looking a tad run-down.

Words such as “pimples,” “eyebrows,” and “drool” suggest an anthropomorphised building. The imagery used in this passage is that of a tired, old and sickly human being and plays on the difference between “nature” and “culture.” Rain and wind form a constant assault on what once (in the 1920s) was a modern apartment building, built according to the latest styles. What man builds, is stricken down by nature, here in the form of weather. This metaphor of old age, caused or aggravated by the weather, suggests that what is happening is inevitable and beyond human control. There is a lifespan to buildings, just as there is to humans. Everybody ages, and surely some life events and lifestyle choices have beneficial or detrimental effects on that process. However, it is not a given that buildings – what we could cautiously refer to as “culture,” as man-made – *have* to age to the point of destruction. Thus, this metaphor reinforces the neoliberal suggestion that some things “need to” happen.

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246 *Ibid.*, 8-9. Original Dutch: “En toch was het ooit een opmerkelijk gebouw, ontworpen door een vooruitstrevende architect, met een fraaie marmeren inkomhal en op de gevel enkele elegante smeedijzeren decoraties, zoals dat in de jaren twintig mode was. Maar met zijn puisten van opbollende verf, de kromme afhangende wenkbrauwen van regenpijpen die het traag begeven, de kwijl langs de vensterbanken, veroorzaakt door schuine slagregens, de diepe acnekraters en roest/vlekken door de onverbiddelijke elementen die inbijten op de ijzeren brandtrap, ziet het gebouw er de laatste jaren een tikje vervallen uit.”
Inside, we can get a glimpse of how the residents of this building live together in and negotiate what is said to be a small space. (In another reference to *Wolfstonen*, Melanie thinks of the building as “this overcrowded beehive.”\(^{247}\)) Here, again, connection and interconnectedness are two thematic pillars. The building’s hallways are presented as a space in between private and public: they are a shared space built on knowledge of each other’s intimacies. Residents allow each other to walk through the hallways undisturbed, listening “sometimes with their ear against the door.”\(^{248}\)

The building’s decay is initially acknowledged only behind closed doors, and even then only in a whispering voice. It is not until Erin finds some plaster in her cereals that the general stance towards moving out of the Atlas building changes from resistance to complacency.\(^{249}\) At that point, the original solidarity among the residents – brought together in the face of the noise only they seem to hear – falls away.

In *Wat alleen wij horen*, the presence of various sounds is intimately tied up with space. Based on the readings of this and the earlier novels, it seems fair to state that in modern apartment buildings, people are always connected to others. However, such “togetherness” is not equal to Gilroy’s “conviviality.” The question is how the proximity of the modern apartment building is translated into dialogue, contact and connections.

**Community’s Individuals**

In this section, I want to turn my attention to the idea of community in *Wat alleen wij horen*. This includes references to what I have been calling modern life under the influence of neoliberalism. In the previous sections, emphasis has already been placed on the residents’ acknowledgement that they space with their neighbours – hearing each other’s lives through the walls, devising a system to not disturb each other in hallways. However, calls for unity and solidarity with regard to being forced to move out of their homes ultimately fall short. Initial similarities mixed with eccentricities – as exemplified by the building’s doors, being “completely similar: solid brown wood with a metallic grey knob,”\(^{250}\) yet making different sounds when being closed – crumble down when faced with neoliberal, globalised modern life, in which efficiency and standardised rules have become the norm.


\(^{249}\) *Ibid.*, 109. Note the similarity with the chapter in *Caminho* focalised through the Salazar voice, where the walls also start to come down.

The Atlas building residents fail to form a unified front against “the Firm,” and one by one they start to leave. The first cracks in the residents’ unity already occurred earlier. When Melanie says to Erin they need to form a unified front, she replies saying “I’ll see what I can do, but I am…” Sensing where Erin is heading, Melanie contends that everybody is busy, and goes on to argue that things will be even busier when they have to move. This exchange hints at a problematic relationship between the collective and the individual, in which the former is constantly undermined by the latter, who – in the case of Erin – has agreed to write a follow-up novel to her successful début in too short a time span. To Melanie’s dismay, some residents prefer to occupy themselves with leaking taps and broken lights, instead of focussing on the “scandal” that they will all be homeless within a few months. Here, we can see a fusion and frustration of private and communal concerns: short-term, individual goals triumph over longer-term, communal goals.

The same process can be observed in Melanie’s own behaviour, who, despite being the driving force behind the opposition to the Firm, ultimately also moves to the new building that is being built across the street – with, as promised, quite a discount. She takes pride in having slowed down the process and the Firm’s “implacable profit seeking.” “Our battle was not in vain,” she concludes. The outcome of the battle, however, seems to lie somewhere else. In the novel, it remains unclear whether or not and to what extent the Firm suffered financial losses as a result of the residents’ opposition; yet what is certain, is that Melanie and some of the other residents who waited the longest with moving are the ones who are able to benefit from the Firm’s gesture. Those who made the best of a bad bargain come out on the losing end. This is to say that in Wat alleen wij horen, there is the constant suggestion that the only result of communal battles can be individual gains.

What does this mean exactly? To find an answer to this question, we need to take into account the sounds of modern life discussed earlier. Combining the elements of this chapter, what comes to the fore is the end of (beloved) private and communal space, i.e., the Atlas building, at the hands of what could be called “Big Money.” Relations of attachment are of no value in the Firm’s neoliberal logic. Rather than renovating the building, it has chosen for the cheaper option: to demolish it and replace the building.

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251 Ibid., 70. Original Dutch: “Ik zal zien wat ik kan doen maar ik heb…”
252 Ibid., 85. Original Dutch: “schandaal.”
253 Ibid., 292. Original Dutch: “onverbiddelijke winstbejag,” “Onze strijd is zeker niet voor niets geweest.”
with a new one – a copy, most likely. In a passage heavily coloured by metaphors of love, the building built on the other side of the road, opposite to the Atlas building, is described as of “the same type.” For the residents, everything changes, but not the preferences of big money: those remain the same. Finding himself in a different city, George, on a flight probably caused by dementia, finds his surroundings “strangely familiar” and the two cities interchangeable.

This is, of course, the Gothic trope of the unheimlich, reproduced on a larger scale: not the heim, home, resembles itself, but a whole city is made strangely familiar, or familiarly strange. In that move, “non-places” which offer no “identity, relations and history” block the production of ties based on affection; thus stripped of particularities, they become interchangeable clones.

Wat alleen wij horen, then, stages the difficult relationships between the individual and his or her community in a world whose rules are dictated by anonymous and unaccountable corporations. When Anton goes to the Firm (sent by Melanie) to argue against the evictions, he is led to “Enigma Hall” where a woman appears and has sex with him, which settles their dispute. It reads as a Kafkaesque parody: first, Anton is forced to wait, without anybody showing up, to then engage in sexual intercourse that, despite doing nothing to remedy the trouble facing the residents, mysteriously solves that problem. Sex, here, is stripped from any warmth or intimacy and becomes a commodity instead.

Citizenship, in this world, is strained. Communities face pressure to move along in processes which are outside their control and which do not take earlier formed, personal connections into consideration. In Wat alleen wij horen, public decision-making has a negative impact on the domestic lives of people. Consequently, their resistance there becomes an act of citizenship that contests the cold logic of rationality, finance and efficiency and by which the residents claim their right to hold differing opinions and values – values that are not primarily expressed as economic value. They proclaim themselves members of a community that is worth defending. In an uncertain world, the novel suggests, personal connections are necessary: they guarantee an embeddedness and being-at-easy for people. These relations are not expressed in current conceptions of citizen-

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254 Ibid., 287. Original Dutch: “hetzelfde type.”
256 The reference here is to Marc Augé, Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity (London: Verso, 1995).
ship, precisely because their interactions play out not in public, but in private or communal spaces.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have seen how anxieties around globalisation and neoliberal economy have their most profound and disorienting effects on the private sphere, on the home. In the particular case of *Wat alleen wij horen*, the communal spirit of the Atlas building is eroded over the course of a battle with the company that rents out the apartments. Even though the residents’ initial response was focussed on an act of resistance, they ultimately lose their struggle and are forced to move out. In the course of the confrontation, there is increasing pressure to follow and submit to the logic (in itself similar of that of colonial domination) of opaque institutions that seem to be outside the realm of the palpable. However, these tensions remain invisible in the larger scheme of things, since they do not take place in public, but in private.

In a city that is in perpetual motion, change is to be expected. This city is characterised by various flows of migrants, who each bring their own culture and customs to the city and shape it accordingly. However, neoliberal “modern life” does not create a distinct, but rather a generalized identity, as is apparent from the ease with which a new Atlas building is erected. In such a world, people become indistinguishable from one another: from citizens, they become numbers, faces in the crowd. Paying attention to the private space would mean considering citizens as agents, as unique individuals.

Although such a treatment might theoretically lead to a certain equality among citizens, in reality this is far from the truth. Not everybody is able to play along the rules established in a neoliberal society – indeed, only Melanie seems to have some hold on the processes the Atlas building’s residents are subjected to. Solidarity and living together as a community have become an act, which not every resident wishes to perform. Consequently, certain inequalities – the result of age, or opportunity – are reproduced and intensified through the corporatization of the private. In such a society, equality is far from present.
Conclusion

Postcolonial Europe is in flux: not only does our present moment consist of new waves of refugees and migrants coming from the Middle East (especially Syria) and many African countries, it is also characterised by unprocessed reverberations of the past. Nativist and nationalist politics are on the rise, public debates are increasingly polarised between “globalists” and “localists”. Amidst those movements, the home is emphasised as “the place where one is in because an Other(s) is kept out.” Thus occurs a continuous struggle of Othering and keeping that other-ed Other out. In other words, “twentieth-century fiction (...) embodies the desire to come home, to be at home, to be recognized and to be protected by boundaries and a sense of sameness.” There is a desire to be protected by the home – and, in turn, to protect it – from strangers. However, in this thesis I have paid attention to those moments in which protection is unattainable, when an intrusion of the outside world creates an “unhomely moment.” I have done this by applying the Gothic as a lens of interpretation.

In representing the struggle over home in postcolonial Europe, the contemporary postcolonial Gothic takes up the mantle as modernity’s fellow traveller once more. In chapter one, it was argued that the Gothic often focuses on those who cannot come along with modernity and modernisation and are in danger of being left out. Here, those who are attached to home, to having a stable home from where they can engage with the world, are in such danger: they risk falling behind in contemporary, globalised society. Yet simultaneously, in the space of postcolonial Europe the grounds on which one can claim a (stable) home are continuously interrogated.

According to Steven Bruhm, the contemporary Gothic centres on the “problem of a lost object,” which is desired after, while being aware of the dangers inherent in that desire. As Bruhm puts it, there is always the “threat of punishment.” In the three novels analysed in this thesis, this lost object seems to be a sense of freedom and autonomy. In the modern metropolis, this freedom-as-autonomy is constantly compromised by the very structures of living: in the apartment buildings of Herman Franke’s Wolfstonen,

261 Bruhm, “Contemporary Gothic,” 263.
António Lobo Antunes’ *Caminho como uma casa em chamas* and Saskia de Coster’s *Wat alleen wij horen*, nobody is ever alone with him- or herself. Residents desire to reside where they want, rather than be subject to the demands the outside world places on them.

These demands could crudely be summarised as “flexibility”: the flexibility to accept daily (re)negotiations of space and life style in *Wolfstonen*; the flexibility to forget the past and move forward in *Caminho*; and the flexibility to move along without spatial attachments in *Wat alleen wij horen*. Underneath this lies a notion of history and time as linear and progressing, an expression of Western modernity. However, as “the protagonist of the contemporary Gothic often experiences history as mixed up, reversed, and caught in a simultaneity of past-present-future,”262 in these novels it is impossible to accept these demands without question. In the contemporary Gothic, history’s promise, the chronological movement from “vulnerable child” to “autonomous adult,” cannot be held: past, present and future are woven together. In all three novels, we find characters who are to some degree stuck in the past, reliving elements of their history and mixing those up with present-day affairs.

In all three novels, we find that characters are confronted with the sounds of living close to other people in an apartment building. However, at some point, these sounds become more than mere “by-products” of living. In a typically Gothic fashion, they become symbolic representations of whatever it is that is troubling the characters and from which they would like to distance themselves: the outside world in *Wolfstonen*, history in *Caminho* and modern life in *Wat alleen wij horen*. This, I would suggest, is a first way in which the Gothic acts as modernity’s fellow traveller (I will come to a second way soon), representing not only a well-known problem to all who live close to their neighbours (i.e., unsolicited noise), but also exploring the troubling sources of those sounds in some depth. Thus, we can already see that these contemporary Gothic novels can be connected to many examples in the Gothic “canon,” some of which have been cited in this work’s opening chapter.

One last element of the contemporary Gothic Bruhm draws attention to, is its confrontation with “real, historical traumas that we in the west have created but that also continue to control how we think about ourselves as a nation.”263 Here, these traumas include the Second World War, the Holocaust, decolonisation and the multicultural so-

cieties that are the result of late-twentieth century migration. I have touched on this point in relation to Caminho and its imagination of Portugal; Wolfstonen and Wat alleen wij horen do not seem as concerned with imagining a particular nation, although the former can convincingly be located in Dutch debates. Arguably, the gist of those two novels – multiculturalism and neoliberalism – is not confined to a particular Western nation-state. Yet in all instances, trauma has a bearing on the community’s sense of self and identity: it created the dialogue jars in Wat alleen wij horen and is responsible for the polarisation between the residents and their neighbours in Wolfstonen.

Let us now finally turn to the central problem of this thesis: what does the analysis of these literary representations of postcolonial Europe teach us about private citizenship? In the conclusions to each of the chapters, I have already drawn some first conclusions; at this point, I would like to synthesize these and draw more general conclusions, too. In the second chapter, I argued for a conception of citizenship as “the nexus of interpersonal relations on the one hand and individual-institutional relations on the other.” It cannot only be a status conferred on subjects, but also includes bottom-up contestations, what Engin Isin calls “acts.” What is especially important, it seems to me, is that we consider how citizenship practices simultaneously take place in a certain societal order and contest that order. This research shows something different as well: in talking about citizenship, we should not only consider “individual-institutional relations,” but also those interpersonal relationships that are about recognition and acceptance among peers, colleagues, neighbours, etc. It is these relations, after all, that are at the basis of one’s day-to-day wellbeing.

However, the present research shows that both types of relationships (interpersonal and individual-institutional) are often problematic. In the space of postcolonial Europe, they are strained as a result of unprocessed and even unacknowledged historical processes that implicate everybody. This creates tensions, which are in all three novels released in the private sphere, in the home. In Wolfstonen, the residents try to ignore or deny the outside world, to no avail; in Caminho, private relationships are characterised by a mapping that does not conform to the nation-state; and in Wat alleen wij horen, subjects are robbed of their public agency and are pressured to follow a neoliberal logic that is not their own. In each of these novels, a difference is created between the character’s public and private identities that is not in agreement with their own sense of self.

265 Sandra Ponzanesi, Connecting Europe: Postcolonial Mediations (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 2016).
As has been said either implicitly or explicitly at various points in this thesis: the private is political. Space is not a passive background to identity, but rather its fundament.

Private citizenship, or citizenship that takes into account the private, needs to accommodate the affectionate ties that characterise this space. It needs to acknowledge that in our present neoliberal and postcolonial world, solidarity and conviviality is an act. This requires, first of all, a new language, which conceives of the human in a more holistic and inclusive way. Doing so has direct implications for, for example, ideas of the demos on which citizenship (but also democracy) rests. I am arguing here not for top-down state intervention into the home, but rather for a bottom-up awareness of the intricacies and subtleties of private pains and troubles. A citizenship that takes this into account is better suited to the societies of postcolonial Europe.

A few last words on what I called in the introduction a broader societal movement: it seems that, in Western European societies at least, there is growing support – maybe as the result of a growing need – for policies that have such a wide view of the human as I am calling for here. In this respect, an important motion recently adopted in the Dutch parliament tasked the government to investigate if and how a child’s voice can be represented in decisions concerning home schooling. This move away from the idea that parents can decide on behalf of their children until well in their teen years is built on the recognition of the child as a subject with a mostly private identity. Similarly, the recent popularity of basic income initiatives hints at a development that recognises subjects as citizens regardless of their working status. Whereas the current system divides citizens into those who work, those who receive social benefits and those who are retired, thus creating different (fiscal) rights and duties and differentiated identities, introducing a basic income would recognise these people regardless of their status. It is built on the idea that a chronically-ill person is not fundamentally different from an able-bodied worker.

These two examples are about citizens private and public and understand that identities are not built solely in either of those two. They reflect a new, expanded conception of the humans as well as the political – a reorientation that is the most political act possible. Consequently, the contours of a new society and a new membership are becoming visible, in which all citizens have an equal ethical status.

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