

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

**Women's Voices, Precarity, and  
Commercialism in Selected Dystopian  
South African Fiction**

by

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## Declaration

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Graduate Programme in English Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the use and effects of women's voices, precarity, and commercialism in selected dystopian South African fiction, namely *Moxyland* (2008) by Lauren Beukes, *For the Mercy of Water* (2012) by Karen Jayes, and *Selling LipService* (2017) by Tammy Baikie.

All three of these texts have female focalisers whose experiences of precarity can be linked to their gender. These women also attempt to share their stories with their society despite the censorship within their societies. For this reason, the analyses of the texts will use a feminist perspective during the textual analysis. The novels' societies also all have an extreme corporate influence which will be discussed following Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (2000), which has not been used previously in literary analysis of fictional corporate control. A discussion of the elements of hope within the texts will show that they can be considered critical dystopias.

This dissertation will reveal that the selected texts can be linked through the experiences of precarity that are partially caused by the corporate influence and control of each text's societies. This highlights that speculative South African fiction uses and exaggerates subconscious fears of corporate influence when creating a dystopian setting, though the appearance of this influence may differ. It also suggests that women are more likely to suffer from the experiences of precarity that result from these dystopias. The women do however, attempt, with some success, to combat this control with varying methods. The chronological examination of the novels reveals the different appearances this corporate control has taken, from obvious privilege and downplayed governmental influence, to obvious interference with the government, and finally, to having infiltrated every corner of society without mention of an independent government.

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## Introduction

Women's voices in fiction and in reality have often been muted, as they have either been being prevented from speaking or have had less importance assigned to their words. This is partially caused by the patriarchal nature of language as suggested by Dale Spender and others, and it contributes in certain ways to some women's experiences of precarity, especially in situations where their requests for help or change are ignored. This is the case in some of my chosen texts, and this precarity is also influenced by the commercially controlled dystopias. The importance of women's voices and commercialism in these dystopias is suggested by the use of female focalisers, although *Moxyland* (2008) by Lauren Beukes has four focalisers, two women and two men. The other two texts are *For the Mercy of Water* by Karen Jayes (2012), and *Selling LipService* by Tammy Baikie (2017). All three authors are white, female South Africans, which confers a southern African *Zeitgeist* to the dystopian worlds of the texts, although only *Moxyland* specifies its African setting: Cape Town 2018. Karen Jayes also has connections to other African countries due to her work as a journalist. The other effect of the whiteness of these authors is that race and racial concerns are not necessarily overt parts of their texts, while race is still a significant factor in many South African lives. The legacy of racial segregation does impact on characters and storylines while remaining almost unmentioned. However, race is not a research focus in this dissertation. In some senses the main protagonists of the texts are "special" – Kendra has been injected with nanotechnology, Lerato acts against her corporate bosses for her own benefit, the unnamed narrator of *For the Mercy of Water* has extreme determination to report on/against the water company, while Frith, in *Selling LipService*, experiences "tastures": her name for the synaesthesia that enables her to taste the things she touches. This study will reveal the ways in which these women characters attempt to ensure their voices are heard, while highlighting the precarity they experience within the commercially influenced dystopias.

This chapter will begin with brief summaries of each text as specific examples are drawn from the texts in order to highlight aspects of the theoretical framework. Thereafter, the discussion of the theory will begin with feminism, then precarity, dystopia, and finally commercialism, using Naomi Klein's (2000) observations on multinationals. The methodology to be used in analysing the selected texts will be discussed before providing an overview of the next chapters.

*Moxylant* by Lauren Beukes has four focalisers with differing experiences of their society, though all rebel against the corporate control to varying degrees. Kendra is an art school dropout who signs up to be a Ghost “sponsorbaby” receiving nanotechnology to keep her healthy that also results in her addiction to the Ghost soft drink. Tendeka hates the inescapable corporate influence and organises protests against this power. Toby films some of these protests and finds them a source of amusement. He gets Lerato to help with some protests despite her position as one of the privileged corporate class. One of Tendeka’s protests results in the police release of a virus which affects him, as well as Kendra and Toby who were also in the train station though not as part of the protest. Tendeka dies due to the virus, while both Toby and Kendra are healed by the nanobots that Kendra sexually transmitted to Toby. Despite recovering from the virus, Kendra is euthanised by her corporate sponsors. Lerato, as a Communique employee, works with the government to suppress news of the state-allowed infection of citizens. After her own illicit activity is discovered, Lerato is given a choice between death and becoming an online inciter of further protest. Toby survives the danger of infection due to Kendra’s transmitted healing nanobots, and, having filmed Tendeka’s death and final speech, he has the ability to determine how Tendeka and the protest will be viewed by society.

*For the Mercy of Water* by Karen Jayes follows the journey of an unnamed female writer who researches an incident in an unnamed valley where water company men are accused of raping and hurting young girls under an older woman’s care. This society is experiencing a drought with extremely limited access to water, provided only by the unnamed water company. Due to the power this grants, water company employees often harm women and children in their mission to protect and gather water, and they face few repercussions. The narrator attempts to find Eve, one of the girls who survived and escaped the guards in the valley, in an effort to share her story internationally. Few other people help the narrator due to their fear of the water company. After she finds Eve in prison, the narrator records her story then helps Eve take revenge on one of the guards, before returning Eve to Mother in the valley. The narrator and Eve both face many instances of gender-based violence, which is prevalent in their world.

*Selling LipService* by Tammy Baikie follows Frith, whose synaesthesia makes her different from other members of her society, prompting her attempts to hide it. In this novel, speech after the age of 18 is provided only through LipService patches. As these patches are written

by copywriters for certain products/brands, this pre-programmed speech is closely linked to advertising and commercialism. Frith's unusual exposure to books as a child leads to a love of language and a desire to make her own speech rather than use the pre-programmed patches. After doctors discover her tastes, and after she commits an illegal infraction of LipService, Frith is given limited access to unbranded speech while working for copywriters and being used as a neurological test subject. She uses this time to plan a greater rebellion and, with the doctor's assistant, Stillwell, rebrands some patches with literary stories. This causes social chaos and she is arrested. After her trial, she is forbidden access to LipService, but another copywriter arranges for her to work in the archives as her literary patches have sparked new interest in the adaptation of stories for use in branded patches.

Using a women's studies perspective to investigate the selected novels highlights significant aspects of gender and sexuality in the plots and characterisation. The background to this perspective will be provided through bell hooks's definition of feminism before focusing on feminist literary criticism, from Elaine Showalter's early identification of differing modes of criticism to Mary Eagleton's later definitions of the two schools of criticism. Gayle Greene provides observations on feminist fiction, and Dale Spender highlights the patriarchal influence on language which will be especially useful in the analysis of *Selling LipService*. Other important feminist voices, such as Susan Stanford Friedman, Toril Moi, Virginia Woolf, and Audre Lorde, will also be used to add to this women's studies perspective.

bell hooks identifies a problem in feminist discourse as the "inability to agree on upon what feminism is, or accept definition(s) that could serve as points of unification" (1984: 17). In political terms, feminism stresses both collective and individual experience, and should also recognise race and class oppression as having the same relevance as sexism (25). hooks further adds: "When feminism is defined in such a way that it calls attention to the diversity of women's social and political reality, it centralises the experiences of all women, especially the women whose social conditions have been least written about, studied, or changed by political movements" (25). While women have had their precarious situations studied, often their precarity still awaits effective change by political movements. The selected fictional texts all highlight precariousness experienced by women characters in diverse social conditions, and therefore can be regarded as feminist to varying degrees. hooks states that "feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression" (26), not an attempt to benefit or privilege one group of people over others. She further notes that even the most oppressed women,



women like Mother in *For the Mercy of Water*, do still exercise power, and states that a significant form of power is the refusal to be defined by the powerful (90). An example of one other form of power is economic consumption and using boycotts to garner attention. The fact that hooks highlights this power when a common thread among my chosen texts is the excessive presence of advertising or corporate power does, to me, indicate a need to utilise a feminist lens. hooks later defined feminism as a “movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression” (hooks, 2000 quoted in Dudley, 2006: 40).

When it comes to feminist literary criticism, Elaine Showalter offers two distinct modes: the first she refers to as *feminist reading* or *feminist critique* (*écriture féminine*) (1981: 182) while the second she labels “gynocritics” (184). The first is based on “the feminist as reader”, essentially a mode of interpretation, which considers the “images and stereotypes of women in literature, the omissions and misconceptions about women in criticism, and woman-as-sign in semiotic systems” (182). Showalter claims that the second mode, gynocritics, offers many theoretical options as the process focusses on the study of women as writers, including the “history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition” (185). She adds that *écriture féminine* includes the concept of the “the inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text” (185). This form of feminist critique reasserts the value of the feminine. Showalter observed that this early feminist criticism in general differed according to the critic’s country of origin (or study): English stressing oppression, French, repression, and American stressing expression (186). Showalter also adds that an appropriate task for feminist criticism is to focus on women’s access to language, stating that “The problem is not that language is insufficient to express women’s consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism, or circumlocution” (190), which is clearly part of the issue in *Selling LipService* although it affects everyone, not only women. Other theorists, such as Josephine Donovan and Mary Eagleton, have added to her ideas of feminist literary criticism.

Josephine Donovan identifies gynocriticism as focused on women’s art and development of a women’s poetics, and therefore rooted in “cultural feminism” that identifies women as a “separate community, a separate culture, with its own customs, its own epistemology, and, once articulated, its own aesthetics and ethics” (1984: 101). She then lists the six structural

conditions that she sees as having shaped traditional women's experience and practice in most cultures. 1. Women share a condition of oppression/otherness imposed by patriarchal or androcentric ideologies. 2. Women have often been relegated to the domestic/private sphere with repetitive, static labour. 3. Household women have created objects for use, not exchange (for monetary value). 4. Women's shared physiological experiences (menstruation, childbirth, breast-feeding) often add to the sense of being bound to physical events outside of the self, as well as to repetition and having one's projects interrupted. 5. Childcare is perceived as a role of women. 6. Differing psychological maturation processes result in women being prepared for a reproductive role, particularly mothering, while men are enabled to function in the world of production (101-105). As these all impact on the female experience, one can see how it has been a historical fact that women have often been silenced in favour of men. Donovan quotes Lawrence Lipking's suggestion that "few male theorists have ever had to confront the possibility of ever having been empowered to speak" (108), but the creation of gynocriticism helps enable previously silenced voices to be heard, as it names and identifies that which hasn't been labelled or seen before, but also enables women "to see, to express, to name, their own truths" (108).

Mary Eagleton builds on both Elaine Showalter and Toril Moi in identifying two schools of criticism: Anglo-American, and French (1991: 6). She describes the gynocritic as the dominant Anglo-American critic who attempts to discover an understanding of female identity in authors and characters, with an essential struggle "towards a coherent identity, a realisation of selfhood and autonomy" (9). Within this paradigm, the author, character(s), and readers can unite in exploring what it means to be female, and the reader "is gratified by having her anger, experience, or hopes confirmed by the narrative" (9). The French approach, labelled "gynesis" by Alice Jardine, focuses on woman as a process intrinsic to the condition of modernity. This French effect focuses not on woman as a person (or women as the group) but on 'woman' as a writing effect, with 'feminine' as a "mode of writing which unsettles fixed meanings" rather than patriarchally-approved behaviour for women (9-10).

Gynocriticism believes in the author's control while gynesis focuses on textual meaning unbound by authorial intention or critical analysis (10). Eagleton then adds that Showalter's implied definition of effective feminist writing is that which expresses a personal experience in a social framework, with the reader's experience of the authenticity of that experience granting value to the work (40). While this can add to a reading of female-authored writing, this is not the only requirement of feminist writing and contributes to why Eagleton seems to

want more from feminist criticism, as others such as Julia Kristeva and Gayle Greene then further add to ideas of feminist analysis.

Julia Kristeva (in Eagleton 1991) focuses on the subject position of a person rather than their biological sex, rejecting biologism and essentialism. She views the feminist struggle as three tiered: 1. The demand for equality, linked with liberal feminism 2. Women's rejection of the male symbolic order, extolling femininity, and linked to radical feminism. 3. The rejection of the dichotomy between masculine and feminine, which ultimately challenges the notion of identity (46). Eagleton also quotes Hélène Cixous's apparent agreement with this: "One never reads except by identification [...] Inhabiting someone, at that moment I can feel myself traversed by that person's initiatives and actions" (121). This identification is especially important when it comes to works of fiction.

Gayle Greene notes that "feminist fiction is not the same as 'women's fiction' or fiction by women" but that a novel may be "feminist" for the analysis of socially constructed gender; this provides the idea that it may therefore be reconstructed, or more relevant to my chosen texts, "for its understanding that change is possible and that narrative can play a part in it" (1991: 2). She states that the enabling realism that feminist writers use also constrains them and results in a sense of both identifying with and being alienated from the tradition (6). This relation to realism as alienating can provide an understanding of why some feminist writing is dystopian in nature. While the open ending of the critical dystopia is not a new feature of dystopias alone, Greene quotes Alan Friedman as claiming the open end "as true to the contemporary sense of life" (13), which does grant a closer link to the initial realism. Greene again suggests a link between the issues of power in contemporary women's fiction with questions of language (17). It is interesting to see that she that claims remaining mute (as the outsider society in *Selling LipService* does) "is to abandon the possibility of challenging [patriarchal] ideology". Cixous and Luce Irigaray then suggest that an alternative discourse deriving from the female body is necessary, with Cixous defining *l'écriture féminine* as "writing the female body" as part of a subversion of cultural structures (20). While it is helpful to recognise that the French idea of feminist criticism and gynesis highlights that texts can conceal assumptions that affirm traditional knowledge paradigms that feminism should challenge, my study follows a gynocritical lens in reading the women writers in relation to each other.

Susan Stanford Friedman argues for a move away from gynocriticism and gynesia and claims that both terms “have shared an emphasis on sexual difference and a privileging of gender as constituent of identity” (1996: 14). I believe that this privileging of gender occurs in my texts and therefore that these terms of analysis remain useful. Friedman argues that the discourses of “multiple oppression; multiple subject positions; contradictory subject positions; rationality; situationality; and hybridity” complicate the original formulations of gynocriticism and gynesia (16), which is why I will also look at intersectionality (to be discussed below). Rationality, or positionality, stresses the shifting nature of identity and situationality examines how different aspects of subjectivity become foregrounded in different locations (19-20). Friedman does however note that the historical factors that led to the rise of gynocriticism and gynesia still exist, granting continued legitimacy and urgency, and therefore these discourses will remain imperative until the feminine is no longer threatened by erasure or appropriation. She observes that the attention paid to gender by women’s studies and feminist criticism ensures the continuation of feminism as a cultural and political set of related and diverse projects (29-30). Friedman wants gynocritical and gynetic projects to interrogate and consider “how gender interacts with other constituents of identity” (31) as I will do. Friedman concludes by stating the importance of feminist criticism surviving as a distinct voice while still aiding the formation of new, “complex geographies of identity and subjectivity” (32).

Toril Moi claims that the impact of feminist criticism is found at a political level rather than theoretical or methodological, as feminists have politicised existing methods or approaches (2002: 86), which results in the aid of general feminist statements when analysing texts. Moi quotes Simone de Beauvoir as saying feminists are those who attempt to “change women’s condition, in association with the class struggle, but independently of it as well, without making the changes they strive for dependent on changing society as a whole” (90).

This desire to make changes to society can also be suggested by Dale Spender’s view of “man-made language” (1990). Spender states that “While the power structure of the patriarchy remains undisturbed, there is little space and even less credibility granted to the specific experience of women” (1). She then observes that a patriarchal society results in learning to “classify and manage the world in accordance with patriarchal order,” which may preclude possibilities of alternative ways to view the world (3). Spender labels language as a “human product” which has been made by, and therefore can be modified by humans (3). She

believes that because men are in control of language and meaning, women are muted because their knowledge falls outside of this control (77). An awareness of limitations inherent in language as well as to falseness and distortions is a beginning from which women's meanings can grow (183).

Ildney Cavalcanti states that “futuristic dystopias are stories about language” and that feminist dystopias use language as an “instrument of both (men's) domination and (women's) liberation (2000: 152). She discusses “verbal hygiene”, which is “basic to the use of language in the sense that human beings not only use language, but comment on the language they use, either in order to maintain certain habits or to transform them” (154). Cavalcanti argues that in “The Cure” by Lisa Tuttle (1987), language is linked to the confining dystopic structure and this verbal language possesses an “oppressive, colonising ability” (157). This is linked to feminist fiction due to the “representation of women's cultural silence” (158). She also notes that “language is often shown as a means by which social control is communicated and maintained” in many literary dystopias (166). She further argues that feminist dystopias such as *The Handmaid's Tale* (by Margaret Atwood, 1985) expose gender ideologies that underlie linguistic contestations (168). Fran Desmet's analysis of how women were kept in subordinate positions through the use of language also provides the suggestion of the precarious situations women are often in, both in fiction and real life.

Virginia Woolf notes that women need “a room of one's own” in order to write, as they need the financial support to focus on writing rather than something else, as well as the space in which to not be interrupted – by men, husbands, or even their children (1929). This focus on money and space automatically privileges some women over others, others whose stories are equally as important, and that connects to the importance of intersectionality and raising the voices of the oppressed or underprivileged.

Rachel Dudley looks at the legacy of Audre Lorde's introduction of the concept of “intersectionality” to feminist organisations and theory, defining it at the most basic level as the “multidimensionality of women's lives” (2006: 37). Lorde “articulated an experience of overlapping oppressions [...] [and] called for a multi-issued feminist movement” (37). Lorde's identity as a Black, lesbian, feminist, mother, poet-warrior resulted in her refusal to live a single-issue life due to the ways these identities overlap. Dudley also quotes Kimberlé Crenshaw's definition of intersectionality as “a means of capturing both the structural and

dynamic (e.g. active) aspects of multiple discrimination, thus affecting both theory and practice” (38). An example of the ways in which discrimination can overlap is highlighted in the term “misogynoir” coined by Moira Bailey in 2010, that describes the misogyny specifically experienced by black women. The idea of intersectionality is linked to second wave feminism which was frequently seen as a suburban white woman’s movement while simultaneous movements by women of colour received less attention, as white women paid less attention to issues like race, class, and sexual orientation (Dudley, 2006: 38). Audre Lorde’s status of being marginalised in various ways led to her theory that “explains a celebration of difference as necessary for a healthy society” (39).

Using this women’s studies perspective will add to analyses of gender within the plots of the selected novels. This analysis of gender will also reveal a connection to precarity as the characters in the texts who experience precarity are primarily women. This discussion of precarity will begin with Judith Butler’s definition of precarity as a political concept. Thereafter, Susan Banki and Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter extend ideas of precarity to other sources and experiences. The difference between precarity and precariousness is highlighted by Sharryn Kashmir’s definition before providing a discussion of precariousness, as it is also present in the chosen texts.

Judith Butler (2009a: ii) refers to precarity as a

politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death [...] [It] also characterizes that politically induced condition of maximised vulnerability and exposure for populations exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states.

This definition of precarity refers to the ways in which people live, and Butler gives two examples of precarious existence: a population near (or suffering from) starvation, as well as sex workers who face both street violence and police harassment (ii). This definition of precarity can therefore be seen as applicable to Tendeka in *Moxyland*, the mute society in *Selling LipService*, and if one extends Butler’s definition to include non-governmental powerful organisations like the water company in *For the Mercy of Water* then one can argue, as I shall, that both the villagers (Mother, and Eve) as well as the narrator (as a member of

critical media) do experience precarity. Butler links precarity with gender norms as those who are perceived as not following gender norms are at heightened risks for harassment and violence. These kinds of norms show instances of power and who has it, which results in Butler's argument that performativity is linked with precarity based on the question of who counts as a subject. She raises this issue because power relies on mechanisms that can go awry, undo the strategies of power, and even produce new or subversive effects (iii). The question of subjecthood can then link performativity with precarity. This becomes clear with Frith in *Selling LipService*: when she attempts to perform as a "normal" person within society, she experiences the standard protection everyone receives; however, once her synaesthesia is discovered, her performance fails and she is given the option between exploitation on behalf of the copywriters, or medical exploitation while doctors attempt to recreate her experience to become part of the LipService patches. Butler quotes Hannah Arendt's observation that the "true exercise of our freedom does not follow from our individual personhood, but rather from social conditions such as place and political belonging" (vi), which can be reflected in Kendra, Tendeka, Frith, and the unnamed focaliser of *For the Mercy of Water*. While Butler links performativity with who can be a recognised subject – one who is living, worthy of sheltering, and worth grieving – precarious life "characterises such lives who do not qualify as recognisable, readable, or grievable" therefore bringing together "women, queers, transgender people, the poor, and the stateless" (xii-xiii). The questions Butler raises in summing up this link are: "How does the unspeakable population speak and makes its claims? What kind of disruption is this within the field of power? And how can such populations lay claim to what they require?" (xiii). These searching questions will be seen to apply to the chosen texts. Interestingly, her earlier *Precarious Life* notes that "there is the fact as well that women and minorities, including sexual minorities, are, as a community, subjected to violence, exposed to its possibility if not its realization" (2004: 20).

Butler's *Frames of War* (2009b) adds to these concepts of precarity, and she claims that precarious populations often must "appeal to the state for protection, but the state is precisely that from which they require protection" (26). This behaviour is clearly visible in *For the Mercy of Water* where communities near water sources lack water, and are punished for collecting it themselves by both the water company's violence and governmental lack of protection. Butler also notes that "Such populations are 'lose-able,' or can be forfeited, precisely because they are framed as being already lost or forfeited; they are cast as threats to

human life as we know it” (31). This threat to “life as we know it” can also be extended to the mute community in *Selling LipService*. One may argue that the rural communities in *For the Mercy of Water* and the mute community in *Selling LipService* have gone through, or are going through, a process of “precaritization.” In *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2015), Butler identifies this process as “acclimatiz[ing] populations over time to insecurity and hopelessness” (15). This occurs in the texts through the lack of governmental (or other) support.

Susan Banki’s paper “Precarity of Place: A Complement to the Growing Precariat Literature” describes Butler’s definition as an existential one as opposed to economical or intersubjective (2013: 2). She adds that Laura Fantone’s (2007) writing reminds us that while precariousness is inherently part of capitalism, the hyperexploitation of women’s labour has always been a norm in colonial cities. While this may not necessarily be relevant to the chosen texts, the link of the exploitation of women being in a more precarious situation due to their gender is. Banki identifies two main types of precarity – labour precarity, and precarity of place – which share four elements. The sources of both types of precarity stem from the colonial legacy, and neoliberal economic forces (2012: 5). A second element is the associated anxiety: “precarity is the condition of ‘not quite, not yet.’ That is, not quite poverty-stricken, [...] not quite homeless, not yet deported or detained” (5). She states that this condition has both practical and psychological implications, including the difficulty of planning one’s future, a difficulty that is faced particularly by the narrator of *For the Mercy of Water*. The third similarity is the difficulty to identify members of the precarious classes based on existing traditional understandings of class/status. The final similarity is the “increasing recognition that social networks can serve to mitigate both labour precarity and ‘precarity of place’” (6). One of the examples given is that of how migrants’ protection against removal and detention is “the knowledge and assistance of informal community networks” (6), implying that effective responses to protecting populations experiencing precarity requires both connections and creativity. Although not well-intentioned, Tendeka receives aid from \*skyward, someone he met in an online community, in his attempts to better both his personal and his community’s experience of precarity. Kendra also finds that she relies on others for aid at times – Toby, and Damian, another Ghost sponsor, and his girlfriend. Banki identifies precarity of place as focusing “on the existential and practical challenges of being noncitizens and the tightrope quality of noncitizen life” (7), rather than a manifestation within the workplace. Noncitizen



life is experienced even by minor characters in the selected texts. This definition of a precarity of place further notes the “basic quality of life issues associated with permission to reside” as well as realising that the potential exists for the development of a “‘class’ of individuals, whose needs and goals could directly challenge [a state’s] sovereign power” (7), as occurs in *For the Mercy of Water*, and to a lesser extent in *Moxyland* and *Selling LipService*.

Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter’s article, “Precarity as a Political Concept, or Fordism as Exception” further highlights the *experience* of precarity rather than precarity as a stable, contained empirical object (2008: 63). The authors do however focus on the labour aspect, and state that “not only the disappearance of stable jobs but also the questions of housing, debt, welfare provision and the availability of time for building affective personal relations would become aspects of precarity” (52).

It is important to differentiate between the concepts of precarity and precariousness, as both are present in the selected texts; in this regard, I follow Sharryn Kasmir (2018).

Precariousness indicates a vulnerable existence, due to human interdependence, and therefore it is clear that all characters will experience this. Precarity, as stated, above, is a political situation where marginalised, poor, or disenfranchised people are exposed to economic insecurity, injury, violence, and forced migration. Precarity therefore can be seen as linked to a state’s support of its people, and can include arbitrary state violence, as is primarily experienced by Tendeka. Nancy Ettliger’s “Precarity Unbound” (2007) by this definition discusses both precarity and precariousness, and while Ettliger only uses the term “precarity”, where applicable, I will instead use the term “precariousness.”

Ettliger highlights the fact that “precarity lies in the unpredictability of terror, which can emanate from a wide range of contexts”: domestic and gang violence, authoritarianism in the workplace, surveillance within production *and* consumer spaces, as well as social chaos caused by environmental disasters (2007: 321-322). Although Ettliger uses the term “precarity”, this can be seen as “precariousness” when using Kasmir’s definition. This *precariousness* “spares no one, haunting even privileged persons who, like everyone else, cannot escape the terror of disease” (322). The “terror of disease” can be linked to *Moxyland*’s rural “outbreaks” of disease which are mentioned fearfully and only in passing, as well as with the Marburg virus Kendra, Toby, and Tendeka are infected with. The

repressive surveillance that Ettlenger also mentions is a common aspect of dystopian texts – present clearly in the police Aitos in *Moxyland*, the censorship attempts in *For the Mercy of Water*, and the control of language in *Selling LipService*.

Ettlenger repeats what Butler has already stated, namely that otherness, based on gender, race, citizenship, and even age, and exclusion from privilege plays out differently in different contexts (322), but also adds that the “everydayness” of precariousness “holds clues as to how people routinely, if implicitly, develop strategies that permit feelings of certainty and uncertainty” (325). She suggests three main avenues to withstand the stress of precarity (or precariousness as the case may be): classification, homogenisation, and legitimisation. Classification focuses on the differences between groups while homogenisation focuses on the similarities within groups. Legitimation then justifies and institutionalises the identities and power relations created by classification and homogenisation (326). I argue that this behaviour is shown through the privileging of certain people/corporations in *Moxyland* and *For the Mercy of Water*, as well as through the language patches in *Selling LipService*. Ettlenger claims that biopower, “the governance and regulation of a population, takes shape via classification, homogenisation, and legitimisation” (326), and while governmentality encompasses biopower, the two are not synonymous. She states that “governmentality pertains to governance as an art because people are free agents and can resist regulatory norms” as Lerato and Frith do – Lerato through transferring to new companies and allowing herself to be headhunted, Frith through her attempts to “misuse” language and the joy she experiences from these attempts.

Ettlenger continues to say that the distribution of resources within groups can offer relief from the precarity (or precariousness) of life that may be caused by the constraints created by both “apparently fixed, hierarchical power relations”, and by the constant potential changes of the “social, cultural, economic, political, and physical environments” (333). Social transformation to overcome this precariousness depends on “collective oppositional consciousness” as well as requiring “individual performances of difference” (333), to become overt and enable connection – which is a “situation that requires opportunities to negotiate” (333), as seen by Tendeka’s demonstration at the art gallery. Although he does garner attention, he is unable to connect fully to his audience who initially believe the act is part of the gallery exhibition.

Mark Fisher's "Precarious Dystopias: *The Hunger Games*, *In Time*, and *Never Let Me Go*" (2012) focuses on precariousness as an inherent part of dystopian films, though some of his statements are also true for dystopian novels. He highlights that in these films, precariousness is not a natural state that the rich overcome but is "deliberately imposed on the poor as a means of controlling and subduing them" (1); however, I will argue that it is a mixture of imposed and natural in *Moxyland* due to both the prevalence of disease and the way in which corporations have power. In *For the Mercy of Water* this precariousness is semi-imposed due to "the company" being in control of the water supply. Fisher then states that in these dystopian worlds experiencing total domination, "where power has unquestioned dominion over life and death, then the last recourse for the oppressed [the precarious] is to die on their own terms, to use their deaths as – symbolic as well as literal – weapons" (30). Although he is discussing *The Hunger Games*, this can be extended to Tendeka's last request for Toby to broadcast his death. Kendra is unable to die on her own terms as she is effectively euthanised by Inatech Biologica.

While this link between precarity and dystopia is helpful in the forthcoming analysis of the selected texts, dystopia as a literary genre stems from ideas of 'Utopia'. Lyman Tower Sargent offers some useful definitions:

Utopia: a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space.

Eutopia or positive Utopia: a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably better than the society in which that reader lived.

Dystopia or negative Utopia: a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived.

(1994: 9)

Sargent, quoted in Cheryl Stobie (2012: 368), adds to his definition of dystopia to conceptualise a critical dystopia as a dystopia that "includes at least one eutopian enclave or holds out hope that the dystopia can be overcome, and replaced with a eutopia." I believe that this can be applied to each of the three texts in different ways to show that they are critical dystopias. It is interesting to note that Elana Gomel believes that both utopia and dystopia

“share a dynamic future-oriented modality involving a meaningful change” which can be either positive or negative (2018: 2).

Peter Fitting’s “A Short History of Utopian Studies” claims that there are evident links between science fiction and utopia and tracks the emergence of utopia as a genre (2009: 121, 124). Fitting offers Darko Suvin’s definition of utopia as “the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author’s community” (125). He then notes that the “dystopian turn” dominated the first half of the twentieth century, but highlights a renewed interest in the 1980s with a “strong pessimistic current in science fiction” (127). The reason for the mentioning of the links with science fiction is that some critics have described *Moxyland* as a cyberpunk novel – a kind of science fiction. Fitting also notes that a famous critique of cyberpunk is that it uses a dystopian background simply as a setting, and these types of dystopian texts should be differentiated from the dystopias which display “some critical awareness of the present, as they attempt to explain how this dystopia came about” (in Moylan and Baccolini, 2007, 261).

This identification of “the dystopian turn” is first raised by Thomas Moylan’s *Scraps of the Untainted Sky* (2000). While all dystopian texts offer “a detailed and pessimistic presentation of the very worst of social alternatives, some affiliate with a utopian tendency as they maintain a horizon of hope (or at least invite readings that do)” (147). These that affiliate with a utopian tendency are developed in later criticism as the idea of the critical dystopia. Moylan also notes the typical narrative structure of the dystopia – an alienated character’s refusal of the dominant society – but describes a counter narrative’s development as the “‘dystopian citizen’ moves from apparent contentment into an experience of alienation that is followed by growing awareness and then action that leads to a climatic event” that may or may not change society (147-148). While Frith and Tendeka both follow the first narrative structure, Toby and, to a certain extent, Kendra and the unnamed narrator, arguably follow the counter narrative structure, to differing degrees. Moylan then notes Antonio Gramsci’s observation that the official hegemonic order of most dystopias rests on coercion and consensus. While the material force of the economy and the disciplinary apparatuses control society, discursive power resting in “the reproduction of meaning and interpellation of subjects is a parallel and necessary force” (148). Moylan additionally states that words are often reduced to propaganda tools, and the dystopian protagonist is generally prohibited from

using language (149) – something exceedingly clear in *Selling LipService*, but also apparent in the censorship within *For the Mercy of Water*. Something that Moylan notes which again is clear in *Selling LipService* is that “by re-gaining language they also recover the ability to draw on the alternative truths of the past and ‘speak back’ to hegemonic power” (149), although Frith is not completely successful in her attempts. These attempts to “speak back” are also noted by Raffaella Baccolini as existing in dystopias.

Baccolini observes that in many dystopian novels, the recovery of history, literacy, and memory (both individual and collective) are instrumental tools of resistance (2004: 520). She highlights that critical dystopias show that “a culture of memory [...] is part of a social project of hope” (521). She continues, saying that even if there is a Utopian hope present, it does not make a happy ending as “awareness and responsibility are the conditions of a critical dystopia” (521), conditions I will argue are present in my chosen texts. The open ending of a dystopia leaves the characters “to deal with their choices and responsibilities” (521).

Thomas Moylan and Raffaella Baccolini (2007: 14) note that “the new critical dystopias preserve hope *inside* their pages” (emphasis in original) due to “ambiguous open endings that resist closure” – this is especially true in *Selling LipService*. Baccolini later states that the critical dystopia “opens a space of contestation and opposition for those groups – women and other ‘ex-centric’ subjects” (166). These subjects are those whose position “is not contemplated by hegemonic discourse” (166), which forms a link to Judith Butler’s question of who counts as a subject. In the same text, Phillip Wegner claims that narrative utopias offer sites for people to think of themselves as communities in new ways (2007: 119), and although my texts are dystopias, the importance of creating or finding one’s community is clear: Tendeka’s attempts to guide the children in his area, Frith finding (and leaving) the mute community, the village in *For the Mercy of Water*, while Kendra’s and Lerato’s lack of community leaves them more vulnerable. It is also interesting to note Naomi Jacobs’s suggestion that standard, rational language “replicates and reinforces the discursive status quo”; when we ‘derange’ language it “becomes an act of resistance [...] a tool for utopian transformation” (in Moylan and Baccolini, 2007: 237), as it is the same process that Frith discovers and attempts to replicate.

Fredric Jameson, while discussing Utopias, notes that they do not have to enforce work as ostracism and ecological crisis are enough (2005: 149). Although my selected texts are

dystopian, the threats of ostracism and ecological crisis do keep the general population in line, following the dominant order, while protagonists faced with the same threats do still oppose social norms in some way. Jameson then labels critical dystopia as “a negative cousin of the Utopia proper” (198), as the politically enabling stance derives from Utopian ideals. Interestingly, he believes that critical dystopias are driven by monetary fears and passions, as well as affiliated with feminist and ecological concerns, which ties into my analysis of the novels through a feminist lens, while the concern about money can be linked to the commercialism. Finally, he notes that science fiction, and arguably critical dystopias, do not grant an image of the future but function to “defamiliarize and restructure our own present”, and do so distinctly from any other form of defamiliarisation (286).

Peter Seyferth, agreeing with Moylan and Baccolini, also claims that the critical dystopia is more hopeful than the classical dystopia because it shows “that there is a glimpse of hope at the end of the dystopian century” (2018: 1). Seyferth focuses on differing phases of dystopian fiction, identifying the critical dystopia as the fifth phase. The previous phases, in order, are utopias of “distant fictitious countries”; utopias where the location is a future time, so the good future is a possibility; and the third kind then becomes the classical dystopia, described by an inhabitant of, not a visitor to, the society in question. Seyferth identifies the fourth phase as critical utopia acknowledging pitfalls of classical utopia, leading to the fifth phase of critical dystopia as mentioned.

Michael Titlestad then offers a South African look at dystopias through a focus on apocalyptic fiction (2015). He notes that South African dystopian fiction proliferated in two periods before 1990 – immediately before the National Party was elected into power in 1948 for approximately a decade, and then again during the militant resistance to apartheid from the 1970s to 1990. A third period then began in 1994 as both English and Afrikaans dystopian novels predicted “the collapse of the post-apartheid state and, in most instances, the dramatic reversal of fortunes of white South Africans” (34). This third period often includes reflections on the decline of South Africa led by a corrupt, nepotistic government, with two of Titlestad’s three example texts raising the issue of AIDS deaths and denialism (36). This mention of disease as an issue is also raised in *Moxyland*, through Lerato’s “Aidsbaby” status and the rural “outbreaks”, as well as the weaponised Marburg virus. Titlestad then identifies speculative cautionary dystopias as presenting worst-case scenarios, so the readers may reflect on consequences of current actions and possibly address them (37). I think this best

fits *For the Mercy of Water*, due to the extreme lack of water, given only by the company, as well as the generally-unchecked violence against women. While I do not contest Titlestad's claim that "dystopian South African literature generally reiterates a pessimistic shibboleth; the illusion of state collapse and black retribution" (38), my texts, even the clearly South African setting of *Moxyland*, do not deal with this. Even state collapse is an exaggeration, as though there is no clear government in any of the chosen novels, the state does generally function. However, as my texts were written more than a decade after the end of apartheid, the fears of that period may no longer exist in the same sense for the writers, though Lauren Beukes has described an apartheid element to *Moxyland*. The fact that all three of my texts are by white South Africans endorses Titlestad's suggestion that apocalyptic, and therefore somewhat dystopian fiction "is a literature of *white* South African fear" (39, emphasis in original), but as my focus is primarily on dystopian fiction, not apocalyptic, this claim may not be fully true. It is interesting that these white women authors have not written novels that have a clear influence of race, despite the remaining (underlying) influence of race and racial thinking on South African society. Indeed, although no *Moxyland* character is explicitly stated to be members of any racial group, their names and descriptions can lead one to guess. Neither *For the Mercy of Water* or *Selling LipService* describes protagonists in a way that enables any racial guesses.

Fran Desmet also highlights the increased focus on the position of women in society in the dystopias that critique and reflect on the social and political realities (2010: 5). She further links feminine writing with the dystopian novel due to the disruptive element of the focaliser who "pushes boundaries and who seeks to exist outside the dominant system" (41).

These definitions of dystopia, and particularly critical dystopia, can be clearly seen to be applicable to the texts I have chosen to focus on. None of the societies in the texts are suggested to show a "better" society but instead show societies that have some kind of negative situation: *Moxyland* has the constant threat of 'defusing' or cell phone disconnection and being relegated to "Rural" status; in *For the Mercy of Water*, the unnamed narrator shares stories of gender-based violence and limited access to water; in *Selling LipService*, Frith cannot even speak using her own language, but instead has to remain silent or use language created by copywriters that creates another "You" in her head. Thomas Moylan (2000: 147) also notes that typically dystopian texts include the "presentation of an alienated character's refusal of the dominant society." This is especially true for Frith and Tendeka, but all the

characters are to some extent alienated within their society. While these definitions of dystopia and critical dystopia have been applied to *Moxyland* by other writers, *For the Mercy of Water* and *Selling LipService*, due to the lack of academic critique, have only been broadly grouped as dystopian. My analysis will show that they can be regarded as examples of critical dystopias. One of the features of these texts that I argue is linked to the dystopian aspect is the commercialism, branding, and marketing that is clearly apparent in the texts, and in discussing this I will be using Naomi Klein's ideas from *No Logo* (2000).

The idea that sparked *No Logo* was the hypothesis "that as more people discover the brand-name secrets of the global logo web, their outrage will fuel the next big political movement, a vast wave of opposition squarely targeting transnational corporations, particularly those with very high name-brand recognition" (2000: 16). Much like this, Frith and the mute society attempt to boycott the branded LipService patches. Klein's introduction also reveals students' concern that "institutional priority shifted to those programs most conducive to private sector partnership" (16) This is reflected in the schools mentioned in both *For the Mercy of Water* and *Selling LipService*. Klein's book is then divided into four main sections: "No Space" which "examines the surrender of culture and education to marketing"; "No Choice" about how mergers, franchising, and corporate censorship betrayed the promise of an increased array of cultural choice; "No Jobs" examining the trends that result in tenuous employment relationships for many; and "No Logo" an activism attempting to offer genuine alternatives to corporate rule that has risen due to the interplay and collusion of the forces discussed in the previous three sections (18).

Klein writes that it was only in the mid-1980s that the idea that successful corporations produce brands, not products, took root. Before this idea, the production of goods took priority, though ensuring the brand was well received was also important (20). She claims that "many of today's best-known manufacturers no longer produce products and advertise them, but rather buy products and 'brand' them" (21), and this therefore results in a "corporate obsession with brand identity [that] is waging a war on public and individual space: on public institutions such as schools, on youthful identities, on the concept of nationality and on the possibilities for unmarketed space" (21). This impact on identity, nationality, and unmarketed space can be clearly seen in *Moxyland*, *For the Mercy of Water*, and especially *Selling LipService*. Advertising, as it first appeared in mass market campaigns, differs from today's understanding of advertising and branding, as now, often the name of a



product makes it more desirable. First advertising efforts were to draw attention to new products, not differing brands/producers of products, after all, “within a context of manufactured sameness; image-based difference had to be manufactured along with the product” (22).

In 1998, the United Nations Human Development Report identified the growth in global advertising spending as outpacing the growth of the world economy by one-third (24). This extreme spending on advertising can be reflected in the sheer presence, both in our society, and the fictional societies of *Moxyland* and *Selling LipService*. Advertisements appear on billboards, TVs, newspapers, but also in grocery stores, on sports teams, in public toilets, and in schools. This leads Klein to declare “that we live a sponsored life is now a truism” and that as this spending continues to rise, it will become increasingly difficult to “muster even an ounce of outrage” (24-25). Interestingly, Starbucks vice president Scott Bedbury was quoted as saying that brands must “establish emotional ties” with customers in order to retain them, as because products are no longer seen as vastly different, the in-store experience, or use of the product needs to be differentiated in some way (31). These emotional ties are also experienced in *Selling LipService* with the importance of having brand loyalty to one’s patches.

Klein differentiates between branding and advertising. Advertising is “about hawking product. Branding, in its truest and most advanced incarnations, is about corporate transcendence” (31). Richard Branson of the Virgin Group is identified as epitomising this branding theory for the way in which the Virgin Group has joint ventures in a variety of industries – gyms, airlines, music, financial services and more. This builds off the idea of building brands around reputation rather than products in a way in which Klein labels “attribute brands” relating to a set of values rather than a single product. *Moxyland* shows some of this use when Kendra and other art scene youth are hired by Inatec Biologica, which has an interest in the medical developments which created the nanotech that then enables the living sponsorship/advertisement of the Ghost soft drink.

This increased importance placed on brands rather than products meant companies would then take branding to the next level, using culture to add value to their brands, through normal corporate sponsorship of events but also applying branding to “cityscapes, music, art, films, community events, magazines, sports and schools [...] [making] the logo the central

focus of everything it touches [... ,] the main attraction” (37). The effect of this advanced branding is to make the brand the focus, nudging the hosting culture into the background (38). This clearly happens in *Selling LipService* due to the necessity of LipService patches for adult speech, but one can argue that the Ghost sponsorship is taking these steps within *Moxyland* too.

It then becomes interesting to note how peer pressure subsequently becomes a market force – almost the same marketing force that Ghost advertisers are hoping to coax into being through using trendy young people as their ‘sponsor babies’. Elise Decoteau is quoted by Klein as noting that “If you sell to one [teen], you sell to everyone in their class and everyone in their school” (64). However, this is reliant on brand identities resonating with the youth. These corporate missions to discover and use whatever is “cool” then leads to brand-based activism, as illustrated in *Moxyland* by Tendeka’s attempts to “un-brand” space and reclaim it from the corporate world (73).

Schools are also directly affected by this impact, not just through the peer pressure to buy the same things but through schools partnering with the private sector to help finance sports programmes or technology updates. These companies don’t just sponsor items and leave logos but fight to be included in the curriculum, through reading and writing about the companies/brands, and they even come up with mock advertising campaigns (78). This is done in both *Moxyland* and *Selling LipService* with Lerato having attended an “Eskom school” and then transferring to different secondary schools as she shifted brands/companies. Frith’s schooling was also partially controlled by branding, illustrated with the class exercise teaching that knockoffs of brand-name products are not acceptable. Klein identifies schools and universities as “our culture’s most tangible embodiment of public space and collective responsibility” (89), so the insidious presence of advertising reveals that this branding is inescapable.

The chapters grouped together as “No Choice” open with the proliferation of franchises with stores as the beginning phase of “an evolution from experiential shopping to living the branded experience” (121). This is interesting to note as the experiential shopping can be loosely seen as present in the advertising in *Moxyland* – the Ghost tattoos to influence others to both buy Ghost and possibly also buy the addiction-creating tattoos, as well as the “talking” advertisements creating an inescapable clamour at the market. Klein then further

describes “the assault on choice” as having moved “beyond predatory retail and monopolistic synergy schemes [to] become [...] straightforward censorship” (130). This is what can then be applied to *For the Mercy of Water*, as Klein argues that the definition of censorship “as a restriction of content imposed by governments or other state institutions, or instigated [...] by pressure groups for political or religious reasons” is becoming outdated (130). Corporate censorship ultimately limits what is available, as the private decisions of large-scale companies start “affecting what is readily available at the local big box but what gets produced in the first place” (130). Klein highlights that “when retailers dominate the market to the extent these chains do today, their actions can’t help raising questions about the effect on civil liberties and public life” (132), and in some towns, mass merchandisers stock the only available options as smaller private businesses can’t compete or remain open. This is the basic situation in *For the Mercy of Water* – the company has such control over the water supply that there are no competing suppliers and the influence the company exerts on society is extreme, to the point that the narrator struggles to interview people for her article as they fear the backlash of speaking against the company in any way. The company in *For the Mercy of Water* is so powerful that it no longer needs to advertise, and indeed goes unnamed, which does differ from the importance of brand names that Klein discusses, but I argue that this further emphasises the power of the company in this dystopian environment, and therefore Klein’s arguments can still be used to a certain extent. She further notes that while everyone has a “brand code” we understand, it cannot be equally used by artists and activists who can be charged with violating trademarks, copyright, libel, or brand disparagement laws – statutes that protect brands rather than people, “allowing it to brand us, but prohibiting us from so much as scuffing it” (138). The mute society in *Selling LipService* cuts up branded items to make their own clothing and are outcasts for doing so.

“No Jobs” is the least helpful segment of Klein’s *No Logo* in my analysis of the texts. It looks at some of the ways in which factory workers are exploited in third world countries where companies have outsourced production in order to keep production costs low and therefore increase profit. There is the idea of the brand as opposed to the products on sale, as “a product is something that is made in a factory; a brand is something that is bought by a customer” (149). The real youth become a disposable workforce and struggle to generate their own wealth. This idea of a disposable workforce is reflected to a lesser extent in Frith and Kendra’s experiences: Frith works for the copywriters in order to escape medical testing,

and Kendra is discarded as soon as her infection potentially endangers the nanotechnology experiment, even though she appears to have been healed by the tech.

The final section of the text focuses on movements, resistance, and protest against brands and marketing. This makes it most relevant to Frith, and to *Moxyland*'s Tendeka, though some aspects will still be relevant to other characters. One of these protest tactics is “culture jamming” – “the practise of parodying advertisements and hijacking billboards in order to drastically alter their messages” (205). These ‘adbusters’ argue that streets are public spaces and if residents cannot afford to purchase their own ads to counter the corporate invasion, they should at least be able to ‘talk back’ to images they never requested.. Adding to the urgency of this cause is the belief that “the concentration of media ownership has devalued the right to free speech by severing it from the right to be heard” (205). These culture jammers reject the idea that marketing is a one-way information flow, and hack corporate communications (like billboards) to create counter-messages to what was originally intended. Culture jamming is not just graffitiing billboards to change the message but can include theatre and activism. For some, culture jamming is “anything that mixes art, media, parody and the outsider stance” (207), but within this exists tension between “pranksters” and revolutionaries – a tension visible between Toby and Tendeka during the billboard escapade. What most culture jammers are attempting to fight against is the society that Frith experiences – absolute prevalence of advertisements in one’s speech that cannot be escaped, and indeed, when given Frith’s literature-inspired patches, devolve into chaos.

This indicates that due to the way brands communicate the good in our culture, it becomes harder to accuse them of wrongdoing, as many people who inhabit this branded world feel complicit in the wrongs committed. The connection between brand and people has become volatile in that brand managers attempt to create a sense of intimacy and knowledge of the customer while enforcing a more casual role with the workforce. Klein then recognises that corporations, while purveying products people want, are also a powerful political force (as is clear in *Moxyland*, and less obvious in *For the Mercy of Water* and *Selling LipService*). This corporate hijacking of political power, with the inescapable presence of advertising in any environment, has sown the seeds of discontent and corporate censorship that, if unchecked, could possibly lead to the dystopian futures shown by *Moxyland*, *For the Mercy of Water* and *Selling LipService*.

Some links between the selected texts have therefore been uncovered through this discussion of the theoretical frameworks which will be used in the textual analysis. As a women's studies perspective will be important in this analysis, a background to feminism and feminist literary criticism has been explored. Concepts of both precarity and precariousness, as well as dystopia have also been considered for the analysis of the texts. Elements of critical dystopias have been found in the novels. Finally, the overview of Naomi Klein's *No Logo* can be seen to aid in the forthcoming examination of the influence of branding, commercialism, and advertising that are present in the selected texts.

The link between precarity and commercialism has not yet been a subject of study for any of the selected texts and this dissertation will therefore build on other discussions of precarity and commercialism. Indeed, at the time of writing, no academic articles on *Selling LipService* have been published, while *For the Mercy of Water* has only two: one by Ewald Mengel (2018), and one by Emma Dunn (2016) which also discusses *The Water Man's Daughter* (2011). This will consequently contribute to the knowledge gap surrounding these texts. The best method for this study is therefore qualitative research through textual analysis. Catherine Belsey writes that "textual analysis as a research method involves a close encounter with the work itself, an examination of the details without bringing to them more presuppositions than we can help" (2005: 160). This will involve close readings of the selected texts, focusing on plot and on characters' actions. Characters' experiences of precarity will be explored and linked to the commercially dystopian aspects of the texts.

The selected texts will be analysed individually in order of publication: *Moxyland* (2008), *For the Mercy of Water* (2012), then *Selling LipService* (2017). The chapter on *Moxyland* will provide more of a focus on commercialism following Naomi Klein's research. The analysis of *For the Mercy of Water* will reveal an emphasis on gender-based violence, and therefore on precarity and dystopia; while the discussion on *Selling LipService* will highlight the dystopian control of language through a women's studies perspective. While each of these novels do highlight one aspect of the theoretical framework, they also possess important elements of all frameworks. Finally, the conclusion will tie all three texts together and emphasise similarities and differences in how the concepts of precarity, dystopia, and commercialism have been used.

## Chapter 1: “Blaring logos and adboards”: *Moxyland* by Lauren Beukes and inescapable commercialism

*I take a shortcut through Little Angola, which I only realise is a terrible mistake when I'm hit a double blow by the smell of assorted loxion delicacies and the chatter of warez in the overbridge tunnel makt.* (Beukes, 2008: 10)

The summary of Lauren Beukes's *Moxyland* (2008) with which this chapter begins reveals the four main characters who, in this text, suffer from precarity linked to the corporate control of the dystopian future Beukes imagines. A distinction between precarity and precariousness is important to bear in mind, as while every person experiences vulnerability in their existence, not every person experiences it as linked to their gender. A feminist influence on the text will be revealed through this discussion of precarity. Thereafter, the dystopian aspects will be discussed, followed by the influence of branding and advertising. This influence is found primarily through the power possessed by the corporations in *Moxyland*.

*Moxyland*, described as a “dystopian corporate-apartheid political thriller” (Alexander, 2015: 156), follows four characters: Kendra, Tendeka, Toby, and Lerato. Kendra becomes a “sponsorbaby” for the soft drink Ghost when injected with nanotechnology that causes the pale green logo to appear on her wrist, and has possibly changed her eye colour to match that. These nanobots attach to her cells, preventing disease but also creating an addiction to the drink. Tendeka is described by Toby as a “Mr Steve Biko-wannabe” (Beukes, 2008: 17) due to his activist tendencies. Tendeka runs a football club with his partner, Ashraf, to give underprivileged children something safe and legal to do. He also organises protests against corporate power. Toby comes from a rich family, but has been cut off due to his drug habit and unwillingness to find employment outside of gaming and the occasional DJ gig. He is also the common link between the other characters: he is friends with Lerato, becomes friends with Kendra, and films Tendeka's exploits to be shared online. His relationship with Lerato at times enables Tendeka's vandalism as she turns off the security on the adboards (large, often electronic, billboards visible while driving). Lerato is, in her own words, an “Aidsbaby” (132), with two sisters. She grew up in various trade school orphanages, which gave her a “kickstart into corporate life” (100) that she has made the most of.

Kendra, the Ghost sponsorbaby, is preparing for her first photography exhibit, which Toby is a reporter at. Tendeka organises a protest at this exhibit, and hacks apart another exhibitor's semi-living display. Lerato works for a media and communications corporation, dealing with advertising technology, but also acts to undermine her company when aiding Tendeka's protests. Toby is part of a real-world mission for an online game when Tendeka's anti-cell phone pass march interrupts it and results in a police crackdown. Kendra, passing through the station, is then also affected by the release of the virus. The Marburg virus is released by the police in order to end the protest, offering free treatment which will enable them to arrest protesters at a later stage. Both Kendra and Tendeka die because of the virus, though Toby survives, presumably due to the sexual transmission of Kendra's nanotechnology. This virus also results in a media crackdown organised by Lerato's company, and during this time, her subterfuge is revealed, and she is given the options of death via "suicide" or becoming a rebel/terrorist inciter on behalf of the corporates.

Naomi Klein's ideas of a corporate invasion into all aspects of (what should be) private life through an advertising bombardment into all spaces will be revealed as having been realised in *Moxyland*. Indeed, Cheryl Stobie observes that this advertising bombardment is intended to keep citizens distracted and desiring expensive commodities (2012: 372). The overexposure of advertising lends itself to Fredric Jameson's idea of critical dystopias as functioning to defamiliarise our present. This distracts many citizens from becoming aware of their precarious experiences. Judith Butler's *Precarious Life* (2004) reveals a concept of precarity linked to which lives are considered grievable, and it will become apparent that the two characters who die (Kendra and Tendeka) are not considered grievable by their authorities: Tendeka due to his activism/terrorism and Kendra due to her role as a product not a person. The class distinctions between the characters like Tendeka and Kendra, as well as Toby and Lerato reveal an intimately South African impact of precarity. Lauren Beukes is a South African white woman who has not focused on racial issues, but those of class. However, in this post-apartheid era, class issues are still influenced by the legacy of apartheid, so it is interesting that while no character's race is explicitly mentioned, Tendeka, who has a Shona name and dreadlocks, lives in a township, and Lerato, who has a Sotho name, is an Aids orphan.

All four of the characters' endings, death or other, reveal their experiences of precarity. Judith Butler's definition of precarity refers primarily to the ways in which people live, as it

is a politically induced condition whereby populations lack effective social and economic support networks and are vulnerable to “arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states” (2009a: ii). This dissertation will show that Tendeka and Kendra are the characters who suffer from precarity, while Lerato and Toby experience it to a lesser extent. When it comes to the concepts of precarity and precariousness, it is much easier to see the impact of precariousness as affecting anyone and everyone within a society, following Sharryn Kasmir’s (2018) definition as indicating a “vulnerable existence” due to human interdependence. Due to the broad application of this definition, this section of the dissertation will focus first on precariousness, and then follow that with the more focused look at the precarity, the politically induced condition, experienced within the text. Precarity, and precariousness, in *Moxylant* are partially caused by the underlying threat of disease, as well as the power that the corporates have, a power which has resulted in a class divide between “corporati” and citizens.

Of the four main characters in *Moxylant*, Lerato is seemingly the least affected by precarity, as she works for a powerful company; however, part of her experience of precarity is suggested by her losing her parents to Aids as a child, and her memories of classmates selling themselves for tuck money while at the Eskom trade school. She uses the power of the corporates to her advantage, and her first textual use of this power happens with her introduction as a character. Returning from Gaborone, Lerato is stopped at Customs under suspicion of illness, as she has a mild chest infection. When she uses her corporate ID, she brags about “*my company do[ing] regular, Health-Dept approved screenings*” (46, emphasis in original). Lerato then suggests to Mpho, her colleague, that flights should also be segregated “like they do on the underway” (46). This highlights the power divide within *Moxylant*’s society. The “superdemic” (75) is implied to have killed many people, and still threatens society. When Lerato is called into the office unexpectedly, she comments that, “It better be a new outbreak of the superdemic to force me into the office on the weekend” (231), implying that only such a major threat is worth giving up her free time. The threat level of disease, due to this superdemic fear, is also illustrated in Kendra’s reaction when Mr Muller accuses her of being sick: “The word strikes me like an accusation. It’s not only the *associations of the superdemic*; it feels like a personal attack on my genetic potential, the dark rotting tumour waiting to flower in my gut, like my father” (255, emphasis mine).



Using Butler's (2009a) definition of precarity, the Rurals, and people like Tendeka who live in the slums, can be seen as experiencing precarity due to the lack of government support in creating better living conditions and in the response to the threat of disease. The division between corporate and other citizens will be discussed in greater depth later, but the "politically induced" condition of precarity is further hinted at when Kendra describes Dr Precious as one of the corporate privileged who is "not worn hollow from the public sector, new outbreaks, new strains" (Beukes, 2008: 6). While this does imply that the government funds doctors working in the Rural, these public doctors are likely as overworked as present health care providers in rural areas of South Africa. Tendeka is the main, if not only, character who mentions the Rural, as with his criminal record and previous disconnects, he faces the possibility of permanent disconnect, "relegated to homeless, out of society, cut from the commerce loop" (85) if caught breaking the law again. When talking about the township where he lives, Tendeka also notes that it's "all the same shit they've been promising to fix since the 1955 Freedom Charter or whatever it was" (35). His irritation is due to the government's inability to, and perceived indifference towards completing, a "fix" of the area that is characterised by "drop toilets and spiderwebs of illegal electricity connections" (36). The entrance area to Tendeka and Ashraf's "suburb" in the township is at the "massive and so very conspicuous SAPS station" (36). The visible presence of police services in an area that otherwise lacks sufficient service delivery indicates a vulnerable population group that is possibly overly punished for misdemeanours, due to the perceived link between poverty and crime. The population in this area lacks government support *except for* these police services which could possibly expose them to the arbitrary state violence of precarity. This could be considered as part of a process of "precaritization" whereby populations are acclimatised "over time to insecurity and hopelessness," which Butler views as "structured into the institutions of temporary labour and decimated social services" (2015: 15). Tendeka notes that the outbreaks of disease brought by people escaping the Rural leads to "crackdowns, just as bad as those bad old days when police came storming in to quarantine and deport whole neighbourhoods" (Beukes, 2008: 36). Another complaint he has is "the system's egregious failings" in supplying RDP housing to those in need, with a backlog of more than one million legal applicants, which excludes African refugees and the "rurals coming in under the radar, the ones who can't afford to wait around for the proper health clearances" (110), which is indicative of a further divide between rural and city, as well as corporate and citizen, healthy and sick. Mark Fisher notes that precariousness (here also referring to precarity) is not necessarily a "natural state which the rich are fortunate enough to rise above; on the contrary,

precariousness is deliberately imposed on the poor as a means of controlling and subduing them” (2012: 27). The pre-existing shortages of health services can “provide the pretext for deliberately depriving the subjugated class” (27), which is suggestive of this created precarity.

Kendra’s experience of precarity is linked to her gender as a woman. Butler links precarity with gender norms due to the heightened risk of harassment and violence that those who do not follow gender norms experience. This is also true for Tendeka as a gay man. Kendra experiences precarity when she becomes seen as a product, rather than a person, endorsing the Ghost soft drink. Jennifer Schmidt (2014: 9) observes Kendra’s “increasing discomfort as a Sponsorbabe”, which results in her attempted rejection of the technology, asking for it to be removed when she returns to Inatec Biologica for a check-up after contracting the Marburg virus. This discomfort comes with her increasing dependence on Ghost, as well as her connections to the Aitos, the genetically engineered police dogs, and can therefore be seen as coming with her increased difference to other people as a product that has been engineered. Butler’s (2009a: iv) argument concerning precarity’s link with performativity is extended with the question of subjecthood. Who counts as a subject and who does not can be applied to Kendra, as once she receives the nanotechnology, she becomes part of the proprietary technology that belongs to Inatec Biologica, like the Aitos. As Dr Precious says, “It’s our intellectual property. It’s very closely guarded. They put the dogs down” (285), and it is implied that they treat Kendra in the same way due to her exposure to the Marburg virus possibly risking the nature or performance of her nanotech. While performativity raises the questions of who is produced as a recognisable subject, precarious life characterises those unrecognisable, unreadable, ungrieveable lives and thereby brings together “women, queers, transgender people, the poor, and the stateless” (xii – xiii).

The underlying threat of disease is realised through the use of the M7N1 virus, also referred to as the Marburg virus, as a bioweapon against protesters at the train station, which also affects others in the area: normal passengers, such as Kendra, as well as the gamers participating in a “FallenCity realspace mission”, including Toby. This bioweapon is legally justified as “due to an attempted insurrection by terrorists using banned technology, the SAPS have had no alternative but to make use of statute 41b, Extreme Measures, of the National Security Act” (Beukes, 2008: 206.) Butler’s definition of precarity as a politically induced condition includes the “maximised vulnerability and exposure [...] to arbitrary state

violence” (2009a: ii), which the release of the virus arguably is. The announcement continues, stating that “this statute [has been] activated for your protection, [and] you have all been exposed to the M7N1 virus, a lab-coded variation of the Marburg strain” (Beukes, 2008: 207). This virus is only non-fatal when the infected present themselves for a vaccination at a government clinic, “a free service offered by the South African Police Services” (207). The symptoms will result in death within 50 to 60 hours, and the SAPS offers free treatment, obviously so they can arrest the protesters. Treatment “provided in the interests of public health and safety” (208) rings false considering that those offering treatment are the same as those who have caused the need for it. While it is justified by the police as a response to terrorist action, the scale of those affected indicates an experience of precarity for everyone present. Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter (2008: 63) highlight precarity as an experience rather than a stable, contained empirical object, and it can therefore be argued that the passengers and players experience precarity on this occasion. Susan Banki’s discussion of the elements of precarity can also add to this argument, especially her identification of a source of precarity as stemming from “the colonial legacy, and neoliberal economic forces” (2012: 5). One could argue that within South Africa, the idea of a colonial legacy is linked to the experience and legacy of apartheid, and therefore the harsh police response to the “terrorism” of a pass protest may be seen as a partial source of the precarity of the situation. Banki’s explanation of the similarities between precarity of labour and of place also links the element of anxiety, describing precarity as a “condition of ‘not quite, not yet’” (5). The phoneless who protest are struggling in their attempts to be a part of society, but are at least within the city and not the rural, so while they have escaped some limits, they are not quite considered on par with the city’s citizens. Banki finally notes that social networks can act to mitigate precarity (6). This is illustrated by the way Toby teaming up with Tendeka in protests helps them combat the precarity Tendeka experiences. Tendeka allies with skyward\* through the social network, PlusLife, though he does not know that skyward\* is a corporate plant meant to incite activists into terrorist acts. Kendra also relies on others, friendships from her greater social circle, when she is in a precarious situation. Kendra enters an experience of precarity as soon as she becomes a “sponsor baby” for the Ghost soft drink, and this is compounded by her infection with the Marburg virus.

Kendra is the first character introduced in *Moxyland* when she travels on the corporate line to Vukani Media for the injection of “three million designer robotic microbes” (Beukes, 2008: 7). She meets Toby on the train and he cautions her against photography, as “They’re

sensitive around these parts. All the proprietary tech” (2), which is a category that will now include Kendra herself. When Kendra arrives at Vukani Media, she is asked to hand over recording devices, and is informed that “they’ve got app blockers in place to prevent unauthorised activity” (3) on her cell phone. This is indicative of Kendra’s treatment as something to be controlled. Butler notes that “a life can be accorded a value only on the condition that it is perceivable as a life” (2009b: 51). As a receptacle of proprietary technology, Kendra becomes something more than human, but also somehow less than a citizen, illustrated most clearly with her implied euthanasia by the company that owns her. This raises Butler’s question of who counts as a subject and is indicative of Kendra’s experience of precarity. Nancy Ettliger highlights that precarity stems from unpredictability, specifically the unpredictability of terror which has a variety of contexts: violence, authoritarianism, surveillance, social chaos, and environmental disasters (2007: 321-322). Kendra’s precarity therefore can originate with the authority that Ghost and the related companies have over her due to their technology becoming part of her body. Ken Barris (2017: 137) notes the “ambiguity of ‘branding’ not only in marketing terms, but as the indelible brand of slavery” due to the Ghost brand that appears on her skin. When Kendra implicitly signs away her rights to complete bodily autonomy, Dr Precious and Andile can decide that she should be euthanised due to her exposure to the Marburg virus.

When Kendra becomes a “Ghost girl” (186) she becomes part of a small segment of the population group (the sponsor babes) who are more vulnerable to “other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states” (Butler, 2009a: ii). Kendra also experiences a lack of support networks as her older boyfriend, Jonathan, seems to be distancing himself from her, though he does still financially support her; and Mr Muller, her mentor, disapproves of her Ghost sponsorship. When she is sick, Mr Muller wants her to leave and threatens to call the authorities (Beukes 2008: 255). Kendra doesn’t appear to have other close friends, though she does befriend Damian, another sponsorbabe, and Toby. This lack of support is noted as forming part of precarity by Butler (2009a: ii), while Banki (2013: 6) suggests that social networks can mitigate experiences of precarity. The group that has power over Kendra is not the government, but the group of corporate companies listed when she signs the contract. This power to then own Kendra is also indicative of the dystopian aspect of the text. Kendra is affected by the precarity, dystopia, and branding influences in the text as she is different from truly human due to the nanotechnology and the logo that appears within her skin.

Kendra's becoming other than human also adds to the dystopian aspects of the novel as this creates a cyborg, often a character in sci-fi and cyberpunk texts. Robyn Wilkinson and Cheryl Stobie's discussion identifies *Moxyland* as typically cyberpunk due to its "straddling of the line between reality and fantasy, and in the centrality of technology in the narrative" (2017: 62), as well as clearly dystopian due to the exaggerated social issues of the present.

Wilkinson and Stobie further note that Kendra becomes a cyborgic character due to the nanotechnology combining biology and technology within her body (70). Other cyborgic creations within the text are the genetically adapted Aitos that Kendra experiences a weird connection with. The first instance of this connection is with a police Aito at a shoplifter's defusing, where Kendra feels "compelled" to gawk at the sight and attempt to interact with the woman. The connection only vanishes once the Aito runs down the street, chasing the woman. Another sponsorbabe, Damian, never experiences this odd connection to the Aitos, but is also less addicted to Ghost than Kendra, who drinks almost twice as much as him per day. Kendra also possibly senses the presence of Aitos at Toby's apartment when she wakes in a panic and they discover a public service announcement outside his building's entrance. Her final interaction with an Aito is with that belonging to Inatec Biologica's security guard. The dog jumps at the car window violently as opposed to the first calm interaction at the defuse. This could be due to her exposure to both the Marburg virus and the chem spray at the train station. This connection with Aitos is further suggested by her own comparison to the dogs. When she requests the removal of the nanotechnology, she discovers that hers is different as it attaches to her own cells, while in the dogs it wears off before they are put down in order to protect the intellectual property of Inatec Biologica (285). Deirdre Byrne and David Levey note that Kendra "does not coincide with the identity that the company has forced on her. She is of no more use: under the guise of pacifying her, she is killed, exactly like an Aito or mutant dog" (2015: 78). Kendra's connection to the Aitos is a marker of her otherness, adding to the technologically dystopian aspect, while her addiction to Ghost adds to her precarity.

These kinds of cyborgic aspects are often present in dystopian texts. Lyman Tower Sargent defines "dystopia" as "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which the reader lived" (1994: 9). The control of Kendra is therefore an example of something a reader can see as a futuristic possibility in society, but also illustrates the negatives of present society. She becomes one of the group to

advertise Ghost, and very soon after this sponsorship becomes known she receives criticism. Curiously, Helen Kapstein notes that “South African fiction anticipates the branding of South Africa as both opportunity and calamity” (2007: 112), which also functions on the individual level for Kendra. Tendeka, whom she’d never met before, yells at Kendra after seeing the Ghost wrist branding, calling her a sell-out and a “corporate bitchmonkey” (Beukes 2008: 20), and Toby’s interview teaser also suggests she is a sell-out (177). Fredric Jameson (2005: 149) identifies that utopias, out of which dystopias developed, need only the threats of ostracism and ecological crisis to enforce work. In *Moxyland*, these can be identified as the threats of disconnect and disease, both the superdemic and the M7N1 variation of the Marburg strain. Clearly, the creation of precarity can therefore be linked to the dystopian aspects of the text. Jameson also notes that science fiction, and arguably critical dystopias, do not grant an image of the future but function to “defamiliarize and restructure our own present” (286), and do so distinctly from any other form of defamiliarisation. The end of the novel is suggestive of a critical dystopia, a dystopia that “allow[s] for some hope, or ‘social dreaming’ within the reader” (Stobie, 2012: 368).

Wilkinson and Stobie suggest that dystopian texts extrapolate and exaggerate present social issues to imagined extremes (2017: 62) which can be stretched to include the dependence of technology, specifically one’s cell phone. In *Moxyland*, everyone is dependent on their phone’s SIM ID for daily survival as it functions as wallet, keys, and proof of identity. There is a suggestion that one’s phone will only work for its legal owner when Kendra comments that a borrowed phone would not be “any use to [her] without [the owner’s] unique bio-sig” (Beukes, 2008: 261). Kendra’s bioID is verified by a scan of her phone, which grants her a “temporary access pass” to the corporate zone for her to receive her injection. The dystopian aspect to this sectioning and access to limited areas is further highlighted when Kendra’s temporary access “isn’t valid for walking rights” and so she is chauffeured the six blocks to Vukani Media, as it is within “the eastern seaboard executive zone, which is strictly corporati only” (17). Cell phones also have in-built defusers, which enable authorities to administer electrical shocks through the phone. Toby notes that it is a disconnect offence to tamper with one’s defuser, concluding “no phone. No service. No life” (21). After Toby’s and Kendra’s phones are damaged by a high intensity defuse, they struggle to enter Toby’s apartment. Kendra also must request entry to Mr Muller’s house when she had previously been automatically allowed in with SIM ID recognition. Tendeka’s temporary disconnect locks

him out of his phone functions and Ashraf has to bribe a taxi driver before Tendeka can board the transport home.

Tendeka disapproves of how easily police can defuse citizens, especially considering “the tech was only approved, what, 18 months ago” (34), as he regards it as akin to shock therapy, to create “unquestioning, unresisting obedient model fucking zombie puppydog citizens” (34). This use of defuse technology is used alarmingly often when one considers its recent development in the text. Lerato’s trip to Botswana is also revealed to have been due to an issue with Bula Metallo’s push advertisements that used a channel “identical to within a digit of the Botswana police authority’s defuse signals” (45), resulting in customers being literally shocked by the advertising. Kendra also sees a shop owner who is “logging one crisp every coupla days” (127), and pays extra for going over the allowed limit. Kendra even mentions how “normally [she] wouldn’t pay much attention to a defuse [...] [as she’s] seen plenty of defusings” (128), indicating the prevalence of this relatively new technology. Another interestingly authoritarian aspect to this society is that one is “not supposed to photograph police procedurals without a media permit” (128). Kendra fears trouble for taking the photos, but the policeman tells her: “I’m not going to take your camera or even put a log on your unauthorised activity. This time. But I’ll be watching out for you” (129). Kendra briefly thinks that the policeman will want a kiss from her, which indicates her vulnerability as a woman within this society, suggestive of her precarity.

This issue of segregation also reveals how the “corporati” receive better quality and better treatment as already shown when Lerato is fast-tracked through customs, as well as the better-maintained corporate train line. Toby meets with Tendeka to plan their adboard activism at Stones, a pool bar that is “one of the few places in Long Street that’s still general access. No corporati pass or proof of income required” (13). Indeed, this access issue forms the basis of the pass protest that results in the release of the Marburg virus because Tendeka wants “to demonstrate the divides in our society between the Emmies and the Zukos and the corporati with their goldplated all-access passes and the things they do to keep us in our place” (173). Emmie is the Malawian refugee whom Tendeka married, and whose baby he intends to adopt with his actual partner, Ashraf. Zuko is one of the underprivileged children Tendeka and Ash work with, and who can be seen as Tendeka’s protégée. Tendeka organises the graffiti projects, as well as the art gallery and pass protests, all the while receiving

encouragement and support online from other activists, notably skyward\*, who is secretly an undercover corporate agent.

Toby is willing to film Tendeka's death caused by the virus because he does not believe Tendeka is dying, due to his own recovery, and rather callously, thinks, "it's always good to catch humiliating moments live" (277). Tendeka asks Toby to record and livestream his last moments as he believes his speech and death will reveal the grotesque human rights abuse of the Marburg virus to everyone. Tendeka is unaware that, despite being filmed, nothing is broadcast, and after his death, Toby is left with the power to determine Tendeka's legacy: "I have the total sony exclusive on the untimely and grotesque death of a terrorist. Or a martyr. Depends on who's paying" (289). Mark Fisher notes that in dystopian worlds with total domination, "the last recourse for the oppressed is to die on their own terms, to use their deaths as – symbolic as well as literal – weapons" (2012: 30) as Tendeka attempts to do. Stobie suggests that "conflicts in critical dystopias enable social critique and the seeds of hope for a more just, progressive society" (2012: 369), and that they do not have fully closed endings but suggest certain possibilities for some of the individuals. Toby's power to determine Tendeka's legacy gives the reader the hope that portraying him as a martyr will lead to some change within the society. Beukes herself also sees the possibility of a critical dystopia created through Toby's textual future. His habit of casual sex could result in further transmission of Kendra's nanotechnology, thereby gifting "the disenfranchised with the technology that was manufactured for the Corporates, and the physical benefits that go with it" (Wilkinson & Stobie, 2017: 68). However, this is beyond the novel's scope and remains a single possibility among many due to the open ending.

The extent of media control by the corporates and the government indicates both the dystopian authoritarian aspect, as well as the power of the branding/corporate agencies which will also be investigated. This media control is highlighted after the release of the Marburg virus, when Lerato is called into work over the weekend to aid the damage control efforts. Part of this is spinning the story, as is revealed by Mr Muller when Kendra seeks his aid. Kendra, who was present at the protest, describes what happened as "a complete over-reaction to a peaceful protest" while Mr Muller fears her involvement with the "terrorists" because "those kids had weapons. They *showed* it. Hacking up the dogs. People were next" (Beukes, 2008: 255, emphasis in original). When mentioning that his infraction at Stones was already visible on the SAPS website, Tendeka notes that "transparency only works as a



policy if you can still find a way to make the stuff you don't want people to see invisible – especially when it's out in the open" (234), and this power is also shown. Butler comments that "the public sphere is constituted in part by what cannot be said and what cannot be shown. The limits of the sayable, the limits of what can appear, circumscribe the domain in which political speech operates and certain kinds of actors appear as viable actors" (2004: xvii). Tendeka cannot truly effectively share his experience of precarity except through louder violent actions, which results in his branding as a criminal. Tendeka's actual acts of terrorism, the bombings, result in Communique working on behalf of the government, because "There's no way to contain this one, only spin it. We're shutting down large parts of the network with service errors to try and keep it contained" (238). This clearly works as Toby blames his building's lack of connection on old cabling when he cannot contact Lerato for help after losing his phone to the defuse at the train station. When she arrives at the office, Lerato describes it as busy, as

there are 23 people crammed in with their laptops, all monitoring the datalines, killing the most damaging of the commentary before it gets out, because anything is allowable when it comes to national security, and govt is a big Communique contract. (237)

In terms of press coverage, it is also interesting to consider Kendra's conversation with Damian and Vix about the virus, in which she attempts to convince them it is not infectious because "it would be crazy to unleash an infectious disease. They'd never recover from the bad press" (263).

The branding and advertising present in the text link to the corporate presence and power within *Moxyland* as an extension of the corporates. In this section, I will deploy Naomi Klein's *No Logo* (2000), which analyses branding and advertising with regard to major businesses, particularly Nike, from the late 1990s to the early 2000s. The prevalence of branding and advertising within the text will be identified, and comparisons will be made with Klein's investigations where possible. An interesting observation to take note of is that "Advertising is about hawking product. Branding, in its truest and most advanced incarnations, is about corporate transcendence" (31).

The presence of advertising is raised on the very first page of *Moxyland* where Kendra notes the differences between taking the corporate line as opposed to the standard line, with one of the key differences being the lack of “blaring adboards” (Beukes, 2008: 1). Kendra’s introduction includes her injection with the nanobots to become the “Art school dropout reinvented as shiny brand ambassador. Sponsor baby. Ghost girl” (1). Kendra herself becomes a literal symbol of the prevalence of branding due to the appearance of the Ghost logo “shin[ing] luminously from cells designer-spliced by the nanotech she’s signed up for” (19). Klein’s research into branding and advertising reveals similar sponsorship tactics used by record labels like BMG, who hire “street crews” “of urban black youth to talk up hip-hop albums in their communities” (2000: 68). This is because peer pressure among teens is a major market force as they attempt to fit in with each other and appear “cool” (64;73). This interest in what others do and buy is revealed to be successful at Stones, when “one of the oldtimers orders a Ghost. Just to see” (Beukes, 2008: 25). The reception office of Vukani Media is also the home to awards received, including Loeries. The Loerie Awards recognise creative brilliance and are amongst the most prestigious design/art awards in Africa, and so for Vukani Media to have multiple Loeries suggests that their media and advertising campaigns are well designed (The Loerie Awards 2019) as well as signifying the importance of their previous advertising campaign designs.

As has already been introduced in the previous sections on precarity and dystopia, the class division in the text is along the lines of corporate or civilian, with the corporati as the privileged class. Toby’s loss of the “Communique Preferred Visitor’s card” when he visits Lerato means he is “lumped in with the civilian dregs again” even though he is technically one of the civilian dregs (Beukes, 2008: 50). Toby shares a “prickly antipathy” with Lerato’s roommate Jane, that “she flat out refuses to admit [is] because he’s not corporate. She’s internalised enough feel-good talkshows to know you should never confess to being a bigot” (49). Toby’s visit includes a brief mockery of Tendeka’s anti-corporate protests, and Byrne and Levey note that “Though Communique is apparently a private entity, it has extensive government contracts and may be viewed as an extension of the government, particularly in terms of the surveillance of citizens” (2015: 81). On her date with Stefan Thuys, a potential head-hunter from a rival corporation, Lerato goes to Gravity, a bar where “entry is strictly corporate pass, so you don’t have to deal with pleb civilians” (Beukes, 2008: 142).

Lerato has been consistently surrounded by the power of corporations as she was raised in “the Eskom orphanage” (132) after her parents’ death. She then went to Pfizer SA Primary and New Mutua Secondary schools. The issue of education is raised by Klein in a chapter titled “The Branding of Learning”, in which she notes that while companies are helping fund schools, they come with “an educational agenda of their own” (2000: 78). Klein’s observation that these companies “are fighting for their brands to become not the add-on but the subject of education, not an elective but the core curriculum” (78) clearly happens in *Moxyland*, where Lerato remembers story sums switching from wattage to medication doses (Beukes, 2008: 134).

Lerato’s recent work with Communique includes the already mentioned push adverts conflicting with defuser signals, resulting in “ads or social control. Your choice” (51). The fact that this is, to Lerato, a difficult decision to make, is indicative of the power of companies who create the adverts and products. The question of ads or social control is also suggested by Mr Muller, after he hears about the bombs, when he asks, “What are they protesting anyway? Capitalism? As if there’s an alternative. Where do they think their fancy technology comes from?” (253). As Cheryl Stobie observes, this technology is “used to bombard hapless citizens with advertising” (2012: 371). Klein notes anti-advertising protests as being against the invasive, inescapable advertising and the companies who invade all aspects of life, which coincides with Tendeka’s opinions. The question of protest suggests that the advertising has become such a part of life that the power of the companies is unquestioned. When offered “ads or social control”, Mr Muller has accepted the ads, alongside the social control, in favour of his perception of a safer society (Beukes, 2008: 253-254). The closeness of the ideas of advertisements and the world changing does imply some connection between the two, possibly partially due to the corporate power. Klein also notes that when retailers dominate the markets, “their actions can’t help raising questions about the effect on civil liberties and public life” (2000: 132).

The extreme advertising that happens is also experienced by both Toby and Tendeka in their daily lives, through both Toby’s visit to the makt, and his slang, as well as Tendeka’s billboard protests. This is apparent in Klein’s first section, “No Space”, where she investigates the “surrender of culture and education to marketing” (2000: 18). Toby is “hit a double blow by the smell of assorted loxion delicacies and the chatter of warez” (Beukes, 2008: 10) when he walks through Little Angola. While it is illegal for appliances to be audio

chipped, “the cops have better shit to worry about, especially when it doesn’t impact the corporati” (10). Toby’s slang also links to the language issue in *Selling LipService* due to the level of branded speech. Examples include the following: attempts to hack one’s defuser could “crisp you KFC” (21); “everything’s sony” (23) when he’s reassuring the bartender at Stones; a party is “going to be Toyota” (56) when he attempts to convince Lerato to come; when he’s told to stop picking on Twitch, he responds, “Okay. Kit kat!” (192), not quite apologising but accepting he is in the wrong; “everything’s sony” (197) again when he tries to calm a cashier at the train station; “almost none of the protesters are KFC” (202) because they don’t have phones and are therefore unaffected by the police defusing; and Toby has the “total sony exclusive” (289) on Tendeka’s death. Kendra also uses “it’s coke” (225), as in Coca Cola, to say that she agrees to not use a condom because her nanobots should kill any sexual diseases Toby may pass on to her. Klein observes that “Verbal or visual references to sitcoms, movie characters, advertising slogans and corporate logos have become the most effective tool we have to communicate across cultures” and that in the controversial case of a school textbook filled with brand-name products, the references were “*an attempt to speak to students with their own references and in their own language – to speak to them, in other words, in brands*” (2000: 137, emphasis mine).

Tendeka is perhaps the character best suited to highlighting the corporate influence in *Moxyland*, and the protests he organises can be linked to Klein’s chapter grouping, “No Logo”. The first chapter that Tendeka narrates opens with a copy of his criminal record, including the new log of activity that has just gone live on the SAPS website. Interestingly, in 2017, he defaced corporate property and received a defuse, 24 hour disconnect, and 16 days of *corporate* service (Beukes 2008: 30, emphasis mine): a punishment one would expect to see as *community* service, even when corporate property is damaged. When Tendeka and Ashraf walk down Adderley Street, he specifically notes the “blaring logos and adboards squatting on the façade of the old library like parasites” (32) because that should have been part of their failed “Streets Back” project. Tendeka also notes that “the kids are overloaded with all the slick clubvertising on Long Street” (153). He is initially vehemently against corporate sponsorship, because they’re trying to “give the kids a voice, not the corporates [who] have adboards and push media to your phone and into your fucking home. The kids have got nothing. They’re totally disenfranchised” (86). This sentiment agrees with the adbusters who believe that if people cannot afford to purchase their own ads to counter the corporate invasion, they should at least be able to ‘talk back’ to images they never requested

(Klein, 2000: 205). It is skyward\* who pushes Tendeka into accepting the sponsorship, encouraging Tendeka to “step it up if we wanna be taken seriously” (Beukes 2008: 38). Tendeka is convinced to use corporate money to “fight the corporates on their own terms” (119) when skyward\* illustrates how his protests cannot compare to the corporate influence on life:

Corrupting govts with their own agendas, politicians on their payroll, exacerbating the economic gaps. building social controls and access passes and electroshock pacifiers into the very technology we need to function day to day, so you’ve no choice but to accept the defuser in your phone or being barred from certain parts of the city because you don’t have clearance. you tell me how that compares to you hacking an adboard.  
(119)

It is important to note that this agreement only comes after other, successful protests, that skyward\* had influenced. Tony Clark (quoted in Klein 2000: 245) argues that “citizens must go after corporations [...] because corporations have become the ruling political bodies of our era”, which is an argument Tendeka seems to follow as he attempts to challenge corporations.

The first protest in the text is billboard defacing using technology received from skyward\*, which would be identified by Klein as an act of “culture jamming.” This is the “practice of parodying advertisements and hijacking billboards in order to drastically alter their message” (Klein, 2000: 205). The TSR-3 signal delay device they use was “invented in America to try and shut down streamcasters who were getting too vocal in criticising the administration” (Beukes, 2008: 90), so Tendeka enjoys the irony of using it against the corporates. This shows a perceived link between advertising and authority. The effect of this smear will make all the models and celebrities in the adverts appear “somehow wrong” (92) in a way similar to “skulling” by adbusters. “Skulling” distorts fashion models’ faces by blacking out the eyes, and drawing a zipper over the mouth, which when combined with their already hollowed out faces, creates a skull-like appearance which highlights “the cultural poverty of the sponsored life” (Klein, 2000: 209).

skyward\* then convinces Tendeka to accept corporate sponsorship of an initiative to get street children to be productive by painting a logo rather than graffitiing walls. The sponsorship enables the use of magnetic paint to attach LEDs to the wall that could embed lights in the

shape of the Chase Standard logo but also enables the embedding of “other things” – the bombs that go off after the release of Marburg virus when people seek aid. This is an example of a more sophisticated culture jam because the sponsorship “forces the company to foot the bill for its own subversion” (Klein, 2000: 206), and intercepts the corporation’s methods of communication to send a message that vastly differs from what the company intends.

Tendeka’s next protest action is at Kendra’s exhibition opening. Wearing smear masks and armed with pangas, a group invades the gallery and one yells, “Death to corporate art” (Beukes, 2008: 166), which suggests that it is a protest against corporations’ infiltration of all aspects of life. Although initially taken as a performance art piece, their motivations are revealed when they begin destroying the semi-living *Woof & Tweet* exhibit, which dies still recreating the noise of the room through its speakers, “like it’s screaming through our voices, the background noise, the context” (167) and with blood spatter also affecting Kendra’s photos. This protest incorporates both theatre and activism, like the Guerrilla Girls, who highlighted the exclusion of female artists through demonstrations outside the Whitney Museum while wearing gorilla masks (Klein, 2000: 207).

The pass protest is the final project, “to demonstrate the divides in our society between the Emmies and the Zukos and the corporati with their goldplated all-access passes and the things they do to keep us in our place” (Beukes, 2008: 173), and results in the release of the Marburg virus. Butler claims that:

when bodies gather gather as they do to express their indignation and to enact their plural existence in public space, they are also making broader demands: they are demanding to be recognized, to be values, they are exercising a right to appear, to exercise freedom, and they are demanding a livable life. (2015:26)

It is therefore clear that their attempts to combat precarity is part of the reason for their protest. Ashraf recognises that their actions have gone too far and takes most of the children to a vaccination centre, but Tendeka is initially pleased, believing they’ve succeeded in “pushing the corporates and the cops so far over the line there’s no coming back for them” (Beukes, 2008: 228). skyward\* encourages Tendeka that it is now time to set off the lightbombs planted in the sponsored graffiti, and hit the vaccine centres. Tendeka initially thinks that no one will get seriously hurt by the lightbombs but also detonates the bomb Zuko

kicked into a centre and walks away without looking for Zuko. This change from his initial compassion to a cold-hearted disregard for Zuko's well-being indicates his possible denial about the impact of the bombs. Tendeka hopes the "the bombs will focus attention on this thing. It'll stop people getting the vaccine. They'll die. In the limelight" (260), which suits his plan as he is willing to die to expose the truth. Tendeka thinks that if only he and a few others die, it will be easily covered up by the government.

Shortly before Tendeka's death, the reader discovers that skyward\* is an online persona used by Jane, Lerato's housemate, and other corporate employees, to incite and organise terrorist action online, because "Defusers just aren't enough anymore [...] But any action is justified in a state under terrorist threat" (282). This requires only the creation of that threat for the corporates to maintain their power and influence. Lerato understands this as "the process has to be managed. Fear has to be managed. Fear has to be controlled. Like people" (282).

A final example of the importance of branding and advertising is the Hope Modise story that Toby and Tendeka share before the billboard graffiti protest. Hope hacked a company's computer servers with a bug confessing a crush on her teacher which "Hit half the world in four days. They estimated the loss in productivity at something like 6.3 billion [dollars] while they tried to sort it out" (84). The authorities used the teacher to lure her out and her sentence *should have* been 20 years disconnect, but Sonica cut a deal. She had three years juvenile detention, then at sixteen, started working for them in their security systems. The true commercialism aspect of this story was that Sonica Wireless used it as a PR stunt using a non-contagious form of her video in an advertising campaign. Tendeka labels it "Subvertising. Like what Levi's did when those kids in Brazil hacked their storefronts. Turned it into a challenge, a hack-sibition, appropriating the street culture for their own twisted purposes" (85).

Having analysed both the presence of advertising within *Moxyland* and the protests against it using comparisons to Naomi Klein's *No Logo*, it is clear that this branding and advertising adds to both the precarious experience of characters as well as to the dystopian aspect of the text. The power in *Moxyland* is demonstrated as not belonging to the government, but to the corporates who are the privileged of society. This power is illustrated through the corporate development of security policies such as the Aitos and the defuse technology, and through the influence of the corporate media in controlling the information flow after the release of the

Marburg virus. Ken Barris notes that “corporate citizenship is the criterion of political empowerment” and that this societal power is “comprehensive and ruthlessly maintained by the technological means” of disconnect, defuse, and media control (2017: 138). Stobie (2012: 373) suggests that Tendeka’s and Kendra’s deaths reveal the power of both state and corporation as acting without regard to laws or human rights, which is a further indicator to their precarious states. Tendeka’s precarious experience is compounded by his poverty, protests, and sexuality, while Kendra’s is created by her role as a vulnerable woman initially dependent on her boyfriend and then as proprietary technology as a sponsor babe. Kendra’s photography also puts her in a vulnerable situation when she thinks a policeman is going to kiss her, therefore suggesting that being a woman contributes to her precarity. Lerato is “dominated by the alliance between state and corporate power” (Byrne & Levey, 2015: 85), but her use of this corporate power places her in a privileged position. In this corporate position, Lerato becomes ruthlessly competitive and rather self-serving, which reduces the effect being a woman has on her already limited experience of precarity. Toby is left in the best position at the end of the novel, leaving the reader hopeful yet sceptical that social change may occur, suggesting that *Moxyland* can be considered a critical dystopia.

This chapter has highlighted the ways in which concepts of precarity, dystopia, and commercialism and branding are interlinked in *Moxyland* and how these concepts impact on the characters. The influence of the nanotechnology makes Kendra different from fully human and leads to her addiction to Ghost. As she becomes proprietary technology, she is made vulnerable to the decisions of the owners of that technology. Representatives of the company decide to kill her after her exposure to the Marburg virus, which highlights both her precarious experience and the power of corporations to make these decisions. Tendeka’s rebellion against the inescapable advertising and corporate control also leads to his death, and he desires to become a martyr for further rebellion. Toby can control the presentation of Tendeka’s death due to having filmed Tendeka’s final moments, while Lerato becomes an inciter of corporate terrorists online as a result of her failure to hide her participation in Tendeka’s protests. This extreme corporate control clearly results in some experiences of precarity, and the fear of disease that is an undercurrent to the text further creates a dystopian climate. The use of Naomi Klein’s research reveals similarities to present society’s corporate influence that have been exaggerated to create this dystopian vision.



## **Chapter 2: “Ghosts in their histories”: *For the Mercy of Water* by Karen Jayes and violence inflicted through corporate control**

*The extermination of the will of the grandmothers was written into company policy long ago, the will to collect water against the company rules, the will to fight.* (Jayes, 2012: 13).

*For the Mercy of Water* by Karen Jayes (2012) does not name any character, place, or company, because the focaliser of the novel, a young female writer, has promised not to use names in her story of what has happened in the valley where the water was found. Most characters are referred to by a title, based on their roles: Mother, because she looks after the girls in the valley, the journalist, the old aid worker, the young aid worker, the PR man, and the principal, to name a few. The only character given a name within the text is Eve, and this highlights her importance to the narrator. Although the writer only meets Eve near the end of the second part (of three) in the novel, she decides Eve’s importance after hearing Mother’s story in part one and resolves to find Eve and return her to the valley. In this novel, all members of society experience differing levels of precarity due to the drought and limited availability of water. This feeds into heightened risk of disease and starvation. The power of the water company also adds a level of gender-based violence due to the actions taken by company men while collecting and delivering water, as well as protecting water sources. This extreme power and influence of a non-governmental organisation creates a dystopian element to the text. Jayes draws on her experience as an editor on *The Middle East Times*, a newspaper focusing on news from an NGO/activist perspective, as well as her experiences working and lecturing on journalism in South Africa, creating an African *Zeitgeist* in *For the Mercy of Water*. This background could possibly feed into the lack of governmental support and protection that the rural communities receive. The drought that has gripped the unnamed country adds a dystopian effect to the text, but the analytical focus will be on the precarity created by this environment, especially the inescapable gender-based violence. The influence of the water company adds to both the precarity and dystopia, as it privatises the water supply. Examining the gender-based violence throughout the text reveals it as a source of precarity for the women of this dystopian society ruled by the extreme control of the water company. The hopeful ending of the novel will reveal it to be a critical dystopia.

Judith Butler claims that “If violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated” (2004: 33). In *Frames of War*, she also notes that these precarious populations “appeal to the state for protection, but the state is precisely that from which they require protection” (2009b: 26). In *For the Mercy of Water*, the state supports the powerful water company even when the company is actively harming citizens like Mother, Eve, and the narrator. This power is an insidious exaggeration of what Naomi Klein perceives as the goal of corporations in *No Logo* (2000). Klein’s research, though focusing on the inescapable presence of companies is useful, because in this society, the water company has achieved an immense level of power and can therefore operate in the background, subtly influencing the government, rather than obviously influencing sports and other events through obnoxious branding.

The narrator’s journey is split into three parts in the novel. Part I describes her trip to the town in the valley and Mother’s stories of what has happened there. Part II sees the narrator’s return to her apartment in the city, and her attempts to find Eve. In part III, she has found Eve and they plan both Eve’s revenge on the company man, and Eve’s return to Mother in the town in the valley. The text opens with the narrator’s attempts to hitchhike to the valley with a water company delivery truck, immediately suggesting the importance of water, and hinting at the company’s power within society. She comments that “there were not many ordinary people who could afford to drive, and those who did not work had nowhere far to go, so the road was empty” (2012: 4). She bribes the driver for the lift by paying for his petrol, promising to double that amount when they reach the valley. The effect of the text’s lack of naming starts here too, as the narrator “told him the name of the town in the news report [... and] mentioned the name of the NGO in the news report” (4). The driver is initially hesitant, asking if she is “trying to get the company in trouble” (5), to which she responds that she is writing a book for foreign publishers and “there won’t be any names” (5). This is the first example of other people’s fear of speaking out against the company, even after reassurance of anonymity and a foreign audience. While the narrator’s interest in writing this book was piqued by the report of the woman, as “what she had said about the water, and what the company was doing to secure it, had affected me” (5), the driver, a company guard, claims that “even though there has been rain, the people ... We have made sure they are all gone” (6), suggesting that there is violence within the narrative, implying the precarious experience of some characters even before the reader meets them.

Susan Banki suggests that precarity “describes the condition of being vulnerable to exploitation because of a lack of security. Precarity suggests the *potential* for exploitation and abuse, but not its certain presence” (2013: 2, emphasis in original). Judith Butler states that precarious populations are “exposed to arbitrary state violence and to other forms of aggression that are not enacted by states and against which *states do not offer adequate protection*” (2009a: ii, my emphasis). *For the Mercy of Water* shows precarity primarily through the gender-based violence, particularly rape, and the lack of state protection for the citizens of both towns and cities. The European Institute for Gender Equality states that gender-based violence is “rooted in gender inequality, and continues to be one of the most notable human rights violations within all societies” and that using “gender-based” “highlights the fact that many forms of violence against women are rooted in power inequalities between women and men” (2019). The precarity in the text is further suggested by the idea of the war over water as the root of this violence, and a feminist influence is revealed through the support networks created by women.

The issue of access to water that forms the underpinnings of the novel is the first indicator of precarity. The state does not offer adequate protection to the citizens hurt in the process of attempts to access water, as the water company owns all water, and therefore has power over the government. It is also stated that the governmental corruption is so bad that it

is simply incapable of providing its people with adequate safe water. The company has stepped in to do so, with the backing of an esteemed group of international conglomerates who are well versed in delivering these services to the poor of the world. (Jayes, 2012: 122-123)

The violence used by the company to ensure and maintain its control of the water supply is intentionally ignored by some citizens, who do not want to feel complicit in this violence through their use of the water.

The narrator’s observation of the market and the food stalls reveal precarity in terms of the threat of disease and starvation. She claims that fresh produce is only sold on the wealthier side of town “where houses still boasted gardens” (154), and so the only food items for sale in the food shop are long-life milk, bread, tinned food, and state-brand cereals. Indeed, the

precarity and poverty in this area are such that there is a line at the counter where discounted food tins are sold past their sell-by date, and the people in this line count their loose change to afford the food (154). She also sees children with buckets “on the hunt for water, a hunt that might take them to the tall glass buildings downtown [...] Or they would run further, to the suburbs, to the wealthy people, where they would simper and smile and oblige their strange requests” (188). This identifies a divide between rich and poor, and highlights the precarity experienced by the poor. Interestingly, Nancy Ettliger claims that the “distribution of resources within groups offers relief” (2007: 333) from precarity, yet this is clearly not done within this society. When the narrator uses a payphone, she notes that “the street lamps had not been working for some time” (Jayes, 2012: 203) as city management no longer replaced stolen or damaged parts. Even the hospital reveals the condition of poverty as the main doors do not work, and people must enter through the emergency exit, held open by a brick and watched by a security guard. Within the wards, beds are left in corridors and the hospital is drastically understaffed and underfunded. The conditions of the prison visiting room also suggests that the prison may be overcrowded.

Butler identifies that populations experiencing precarity are at “heightened risk of disease, poverty, starvation, displacement, and of exposure to violence without protection” (2009a: ii). In line with Butler’s identification, Eve’s arrival in the city reveals another group of people experiencing precarity. When she finally reached the city, she met a homeless boy who lived in a dried-up drain, and the food he gave her made her sick. After he had taken her to the hospital, she left with a foreign aid worker because she was afraid of “the boys and the begging and of the things that had to be done for bread” (Jayes, 2012: 354). In other words, she was afraid of that precarious existence, as the experience of precarity differed from that at her home in the valley, congruent with Brett Neilson and Ned Rossiter’s idea of precarity as an experience rather than a stable constant (2008: 63). Butler also states that “vulnerability, however, becomes highly exacerbated under certain social and political conditions, especially those in which violence is a way of life and the means to secure self-defense are limited” (2004: 29). Eve has no interest in living this vulnerable life, though her attempts to find a better life ultimately results in her return to the valley, under a (conditional) promise of protection.

The primary example of gender-based violence in the text that is suggestive of precarity is the rape of women. This is revealed by the Lost Girls NGO and the use of rape as a tactic in the

“water war.” While searching for traces of Eve, the narrator finds a market stall for an NGO for lost girls. These “lost girls” are “orphaned girls who have been recently discovered in areas affected by lack of water [who] are usually traumatised and in need of special care” (Jayes, 2012: 155). The stallholder recognises the girls as a “relatively new phenomenon” (155) because their existence in their villages went unknown until they arrived in the city after walking through the desert, as Eve also does. The NGO house was only set up after the rains that had also sparked the article on Mother and the narrator’s interest in this research. This aligns with Butler’s question about whether the violence done to those who are unrecognised is truly perceived as violence from the perspective of those inflicting it (2004: 33). Although the NGO is recently created, Eve and Mother seemed resigned to what had happened and to the ideas of company men or soldiers inflicting violence on rural women and children (2004: 33). The principal of the NGO enables the narrator to find Eve and helps her visit Eve in prison. Both Eve and the narrator identify a problem with the NGO as adoptions of the lost girls can unintentionally place them in further danger through becoming servants to the families that adopt them, or being sold as child brides or to Madams “who made them do more terrible things” (354). Eve does say that some girls “did not mind – because at least they had water” (355), but she still did not want to be adopted due to this danger, and so later accepted the narrator’s aid in returning to Mother.

While the Lost Girls NGO does help the narrator to find Eve, part of her determination to find Eve and return her to the valley is her perceived connection to Eve due to both of them having been raped by company men. The narrator is raped by one of the company men she bribed into transporting her to the valley. She becomes aware of the danger when she leaves the overnight hut to join them around the fire and one man put on cologne and brushed his teeth. Although she attempts to lock them out of the room, he forces his way in and overpowers her attempts to defend herself. Emma Dunn notes that “*For the Mercy of Water* avoids revictimizing survivors of sexual violence [...] Jayes refrains from sexualizing or sensationalizing the act of rape; instead, she focuses on its raw and violent underpinnings, and in so doing, undercuts prevailing rape scripts that objectify the female body” (2016: 89). In this rape of the narrator, her focus on the body parts that “give her personal and physical agency – her head and face, and legs and arms, respectively – works to frame her rape as a loss of power instead of a sexualized experience” (89). The narrator’s response to her rape is the attempt to “separate her inner self from her outer shell” through controlling and restricting her food intake (92), as well as her water use. While the narrator does not regard these

restrictions as unusual after her experiences, the limitations of water and food that she imposes on herself can suggest her attempts to regain sole control over her body, and possibly reduce the effect of the water company's control. When the narrator writes to the journalist before taking Eve to the valley, she says that "the apex of the crime [of rape] is uncertain [...] But I wish I could cut it out of me and have it burnt" (291). While the narrator likes seeing her own bones, even before the reader is aware of her food issues, she focuses on the body parts of others she is close to. While writing in the journalist's tent, she "watched his hands, the tendons swelling up under the skin and the wrist bone at the end, so smooth and perfect" (84), which then makes her think about the bloody handprints in the classroom, clearly linking bodily focus with potential or experienced violence. She is still traumatised at this time, and remains so throughout the novel, though it is never the focus, as when they fall asleep alongside each other, she "tried to feel close to him, but I saw myself below, way below us, half in a darkness hidden" (88), similar to her physical dissociation during her rape. After the journalist leaves while she is on the mountain, she worries about losing the evidence collected on the recorder, and identifies this fear as "born of the old mistrust I had for anyone I did not know very well, a trait that is neither good nor bad but is only an indifferent fact" (119). This mistrust is influenced by a society in which she cannot feel truly safe due to her womanhood and the threat of gender-based violence. This ever-present threat is also indicated by the PR man's implied desire to watch her bathe at the river near the village without her knowledge or permission.

Eve also experiences a mind-body separation during her rape, as when she recounts it to the narrator, she says that "You have to take yourself away from what is happening [...] You ask God to separate your heart from your body if you are to live" (305). Eve has been a victim of sexual assault multiple times in the text, all linked to the issue of access to water because the perpetrators of this violence were company men. Eve explains that even when the village was more populated, after some company men discovered the wells where girls stole water, they would wait for the girls and demand sex in exchange for allowing them to steal the water. These guards were referred to as "ants", and Eve retains this idea of them. When the guards came to the classroom, in the story that Mother tries to share, the leader "asked for water and he asked for girls" (306). The younger girls who tried to escape were shot while some older girls submitted. Eve also tried to run, and was caught by the leader, who left her to be tied down and gang-raped by seven of his men. Eve experiences nightmares that these "ants" still live in her chest. This dissociation appears to confirm Mother's idea that "the acts on their

bodies that have happened here will push them far from me” (77) when she tells the story of Eve and the other girls to the writer, journalist, doctor, and aid workers.

While Eve is jailed, the narrator requests the removal of the rope binding her hands and “hated the way the warden referred to her as not a child, as if the crimes on her body that made her old were a simple fact and without shame” (268). When the narrator thinks of these crimes on Eve’s body, she believes that she is “about to meet a wound in my own self” (291) and when she remembered her own rape, she recalls that she “had not bled but the wound was still there” (185). The narrator’s email to the journalist that offers her perspective of her connection to Eve ends with the comment that she “must tell [Eve’s] story; in tiny fragments it is also mine” (293), and mentions her plan to return Eve to Mother in order to lighten the burden on Eve. This plan also results in further violence, as the pilot who flies them into the valley knows the illegality of what the narrator is doing and therefore coerces her into agreeing to sex. The narrator agrees to this, even though she hates it, because “to seal the heart from the flesh that holds it for a little while for the sake of a little girl is not so hard” (378). The pilot dies after the crash and the narrator is relieved to not have to fulfil the deal, especially as she had considered killing him herself, using Eve’s knife. The implied inescapability of sexual violence contributes greatly to the narrator’s and Eve’s experiences of precarity.

This presence of rape as a daily threat is also indicative of the suggested war for water, as during turmoil, women and children are often victims of both soldiers and others who take advantage of their precarious situations. An explicit connection is made between the water company guards and soldiers by the narrator, Eve, and Mother. The guard on the water truck worked for the army before he joined the company; and Eve used both “company guards” and “soldiers” interchangeably when referring to the men who assaulted her. The PR man who questions Mother specifically asks if she is certain it was a company man, and not an army soldier, who entered the village, and was left in the cave where he had raped and killed Noni. When she reveals how she found the guard in the cave, she observes that “we are busy down here fighting a war over our bodies. We are fighting a war over every piece of life in all of us. It is down to this last thing, and it will consume us. We will consume us” (110). She then explains how she would fix the girls in the cellar, suggestive of multiple rapes having occurred, because “This is what it is, to be living inside the circles of this war. We are always repeating” (120). When the narrator searches for news on the guard after her return to the

city, many of the reports on the valley have been removed, so her search results in “a kind of ‘biography of the water war’ mostly from the company’s perspective, since the websites that were commonly used and accepted appeared sooner in searches” (158). Ewald Mengel views this “water war” as “a civil war [...] between city-based and state-supported paramilitary troops of this water company, which tries to uphold control over the water resources, and country-based rebels who fight for free access to clean water” (2018: 107).

The hearing of the guard also supports the idea of this war. When speaking about the girls in general, he states, “They tell you all the time you can do what you like with them ... It’s ... part of it” (Jayes, 2012: 180), which suggests that sexual abuse is condoned, and may be endorsed by their superiors within the company and possibly also the government. He continues to say that when they went to villages without food or money to pay for stolen water, if there were no weapons, they would “take this. It’s not a question of enjoying. It’s a question of ... defeating” (180). He also says that they no longer saw their victims as girls but as “targets – like in a game ... We used them to get the grandmothers to tell us where the water was, the water they’d collected and taken” (180). Butler suggests that these ungrievable populations “are ‘lose-able,’ [...] they are framed as being already lost or forfeited; they are cast as threats to human life” (2009b: 31). This threat, as it is perceived by the company, comes from stealing water. The guard claims that “there is no other way” (180), and that they learn this behaviour from each other and “through cruelty and discipline and the might of the ... company” (180). During Eve’s revenge on the guard, she rejects his claims of war. She slices at him with her knife, and says, “You are speaking about men come together to hunt women *and children* because of this thing you are calling a war, when it is not a war at all but *an invasion, a theft*” (339, emphasis in original). Eve’s experiences during this “war” give her nightmares as already mentioned, but the extremity of the impact on her lead the narrator to observe that, after a nightmare, “[Eve’s] eyes were the emptiest I had ever seen, round and dark, as if some demon had come and taken the child in them, the love in them, and left only shame and anger and a vested sort of hate” (319). While Eve takes her revenge against the company man, “her eyes passed over [the narrator] as if she did not recognise me. There was something else directing her acts, something that lived in memory and in dreams and in the vast plural spaces of the future” (336). Eve notes that the man is blind, and lost and shivering within his home, but he is “not as lost as [the girls] are” (336), implying that despite his own suffering, he can never understand the suffering he caused.



This inability of men in the text to relate to the trauma of rape and sexual violence that the women and girls experience highlights the failing social networks of support within *For the Mercy of Water*. The women's attempts to aid in each other's healing processes is suggestive of Banki's identification of social networks' ability to mitigate precarity (2013: 6). Indeed, Butler also suggests the links between people in *Frames of War*:

Precariousness implies living socially, that is, the fact that one's life is always in some sense in the hands of the other. It implies exposure both to those we know and to those we do not know; a dependency on people we know, or barely know, or know not at all. Reciprocally, it implies being impinged upon by the exposure and dependency of others, most of whom remain anonymous (2009b: 14).

In the text, this support network is primarily made up of women, though men who attempt to understand are not excluded, which is suggestive of a feminist influence. This is apparent through Mother's storytelling. When the narrator arrives in the valley, she meets the male journalist who originally broke the story, as well as the two aid workers, and the female doctor. When Mother first starts talking, the male aid worker suggests using a tranquiliser after the doctor is concerned about Mother over-exerting herself. Although no evidence of Mother's story had been found yet, his suggestion could be indicative of male attempts to silence a woman speaking against other men, and about her experiences. The male aid worker also suggests that the narrator should "try and live well within" (Jayes, 2012: 103) the company version of the truth, but the narrator feels a connection to what Mother says. Mother includes her in the story by asking if she can see what Eve and Mother see, despite addressing no other audience member, which indicates the connectedness of female vulnerability in their society. Later, the young female aid worker listens to Mother's stories and appears to sympathise in a way the older male worker cannot. When Mother says, "I must speak of the classroom" (75) the young aid worker is the first and only person to respond verbally, and she appears to be embarrassed by this. On the last day of her storytelling, Mother attracts a larger crowd, despite the PR man and old aid worker's attempts to disperse the crowd, and implied attempts to further silence her. Only after the narrator sneaks into the medical tent does she hear the end of Mother's story. bell hooks claims that feminism stresses both collective and individual experience and that when feminism is defined in ways calling attention to the diversity of social and political reality, "it centralises the experiences of all women, especially the women whose social conditions have been least written about, studied, or

changed by political movements” (1984: 25). hooks also notes that “feminist activists must emphasise the forms of power these women exercise and show ways they can be used for their benefit” (92). In this case, the sharing of her story is how Mother tries to exercise power, and the narrator’s attempts to record it endorse this.

The importance of female connections is also created by the narrator’s relationship with the young aid worker. After bathing in the river, the narrator agrees to drink coffee with the young aid worker because she “wanted to be normal for her, to act normal and do normal things in a place like this. I kept thinking of her nails, all bitten away, and I could see she was enjoying the small easy talk” (Jays, 2012: 90), which is suggestive of women working together to comfort and possibly protect each other. When the narrator and journalist smuggle in the tape recorder to the company interview of Mother, the young aid worker sees, but does not report it, instead hiding a smile, and showing “a shining gladness in her eyes, more than the moment deemed necessary” (104). She then offers to share a tent with the narrator after the journalist leaves and promises not to mention the tape recorder to anyone.

When the narrator asks Mother if she had also been raped, she neither confirms nor denies, but comments that “when they rape one, they rape us all” (131), suggesting that this is the connection between women. Mother keeps the guard’s hair, a marker of Eve’s attack on him, between her breasts because “this is where a grandmother keeps her most valuable things [...] In here where it is safe” (137) which suggests that women can offer safety, even if minimally. Despite their inability to actively combat the threat of violence, safe space may be found with other women, which is somewhat confirmed by the narrator’s protection of Eve. When Mother is taken by helicopter to the city for medical attention, she tells the narrator, “These people [...] don’t see us. They do not see the girls. They do not believe there is one that remains. They do not see. And because of this they will make us ghosts in their histories” (139). After this lament, Mother asks the narrator to find Eve.

In her attempts to find Eve, the narrator is primarily helped by other women: the hospital intern who tells her about the guard; and the principal of the Lost Girls NGO, who helps her visit the prison and offers advice. She seems to become friendly with the principal, who despite the danger from the water company, does want to hear about Eve’s return to the valley. After she tells the journalist that she had been to the hospital, the narrator “felt a great distance open up between us, a distance of a man and a woman and our understanding of war

and the acts of the people who are caught up in it” (202), because the journalist seems to sympathise with the guard. This disappointment is exacerbated by the journalist’s presence at the guard’s trial, in a room “full of the voices of men” (176), which suggests that no women were present at the hearing of crimes against women. Even Mother is not at the hearing caused by her allegations. That no women are present further suggests the precarity of their position within society. In this hearing, the company appears to have all the power.

Noam Chomsky (2015) notes that decisions determining the functioning of society are in the hands of a network of major corporations and conglomerates who control resources and need to satisfy their own interests. He also states that some of these major networks own the media, and that for example, the *New York Times* “creates history” through what is saved in their archives. The major corporations then sell advertisers and other businesses as their product, resulting in institutions that can sell privileged audiences to other businesses, creating a perception of the world that satisfies buyers, sellers and the products. This power of the media control is so clear in *For the Mercy of Water* that it becomes dystopian. Butler comments that the media has the power to allow us to see, or prevent us from seeing, precarious lives, which is a problem because “a life can be accorded a value only on the condition that it is perceivable as a life, but it is only on the condition of certain embedded evaluative structures that a life becomes perceivable at all” (2009b: 51). In this novel, the censorship can prevent citizens perceiving their own or others precariousness, which works alongside wilful denial to keep the water company powerful.

In a novel that refuses to name almost every character, as well as any businesses or organisations, the presence of branding and corporate control is hinted at rather than obviously visible; however, Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* still offers insight into the corporate behaviour of the water company. Klein notes that when companies or organisations work with schools (or in *For the Mercy of Water*, with the government) they retain their own agendas, and can overwhelm their host (2000: 78). This is suggested in *For the Mercy of Water* through the appearance of both the water company and Department of Water Affairs logos in the letter to the narrator. Klein identifies this as a problem with schools and universities as people then lose “our culture’s most tangible embodiment of public space and collective responsibility” (89). The use of the Department of Water Affairs suggests that there is a collective responsibility within society to use water responsibly, and for the water company, a private multinational, to be so clearly running things as to have their logo appear

with official governmental communication indicates the loss of the idea of individual and public responsibility. Klein observes that “the assault on choice has moved beyond predatory retail and monopolistic synergy schemes and become what can only be described as straightforward censorship: the active elimination and suppression of material” (130). This censorship is no longer about what items are available for purchase, but also the censoring of information. When the narrator meets the company PR man in the valley, he claims that he can and will force her to leave. Her only protection is that her international publisher could damage the company’s reputation overseas if she disappears. The censorship is also revealed by the official report written using “approved facts” (Jayes, 2012: 174) by someone the journalist knew, as he could not bring himself to lie for the sake of the company. The narrator sees this as him having been “silenced by [his] own knowledge” (174).

Interestingly, Klein claims that “when retailers dominate the market to the extent that these chains do today, their actions can’t help raising questions about the effect on civil liberties and public life” (2000: 132). In the valley, the narrator wonders “what they might be offering Mother in return for her silence” (Jayes, 2012: 105), and also realises that the company PR team is struggling to answer the queries from the international media. Market domination is clear in the PR man’s claim that “the water services in this valley are the property of the company and the people simply must pay” (123). When listening to the radio, the narrator discovers that the water company, discussing a new project between illegal water-collecting grandmothers and the company, mentions “several minor but controversial stories that are doing damage to the company’s image abroad” (125), claiming that these stories are based on hearsay and used by rival companies to attack the company. The couching of this news in an interview about positive future products is suggestive of a damage-control attempt.

Klein observes that multinational companies like “Nike, Microsoft and Starbucks have sought to become the chief communicators of all that is good and cherished in our culture” (2000: 241) through both sponsorships of sporting and cultural events, and how they advertise their products; however, this results in increased vulnerability for the companies as, “if brands are indeed intimately entangled with our culture and our identities, when they do wrong, [...] many of the people who inhabit their branded worlds feel complicit in their wrongs, both guilty and connected” (241). This idea of complicity is clearly apparent in *For the Mercy of Water* through statements from both the old aid worker and the doctor, and the principal of

the Lost Girls NGO. When the narrator tries to talk about the girls in the classroom, the doctor tells her,

You drink the water from the company and you bath in it and you flush your toilet with it [...] You're part of this. And your life of cleanliness and your satisfied thirst comes down to this. It is what it is. It's the best we can do. Can't you see? [...] There is nothing better than this. We are humans. We are thirsty. We do what we have to do to drink. (Jayes 2012, 67-68)

The old aid worker tells her later to “take it easy. Try not to feel too guilty. Who in their right mind wants to feel guilty for drinking the water? You will end up isolated” (103). The narrator then tells Mother that the people both within their country and overseas who are also thirsty “don't want to know about the ways the water is taken” (132), because they do not want to feel guilty for their use of the water. The company also does not want to expose itself to this potential criticism, especially when it was “under pressure from their foreign parent to bury the whole sorry incident” (212). This aligns with Klein's suggestion that the “size, political clout, and lack of transparency” of global organisations, when combined with “the corporate hijacking of political power” and “brands' cultural looting of public and mental space” (2000: 245) creates a bad consumer mood whereby people become slowly angrier about corporate actions and become more willing to protest these actions and behaviours. This negative mood then also becomes part of the dissatisfaction with society present in a dystopia.

As previously noted, a dystopia describes a text where the non-existent society is intended to be viewed as considerably worse than the reader's society (Sargent, 1994: 9). *For the Mercy of Water* is clearly worse than a modern African society as the threat of drought faced by many communities has been realised across the textual country. Mengel also notes that Jayes's

dystopian view builds on the fact that not all the states in our world are able or willing to guarantee this human right and provide potable water for their population. For financial reasons, some of them have authorized private companies to handle this difficult task, but the privatization of water is a highly complex and controversially discussed political issue. (2018: 110).

In the novel, the drought has resulted in the company's rise to power based on the ability to provide water countrywide, but this power becomes dystopian due to the violence that enables and enforces it. The linkage of the water company and the government is noteworthy as the company appears to have power over the government, indicated in the trial of the blinded company guardsman, and the letter the narrator receives. The company also has some control over the media and retains this power through the threat and use of the media tribunal.

According to Sargent, the dystopia "says if you behave thus and so, this is how you will be punished" (1994: 8), in other words, "stating that things could get worse unless we act" (26). The creation of the drought as means of indicating a dystopian aspect is suggestive of the water crisis South Africa has experienced and is experiencing. The "Day Zero" predictions and restrictions in Cape Town have been realised countrywide in *For the Mercy of Water* where they experience rationed water allowances. ("Day Zero" referred to the predicted day that the water supply in Cape Town would end, and taps run dry due to the drought conditions at the time.) Thomas Moylan notes that dystopian texts often open "in the midst of a social 'elsewhere' that appears to be far worse than any in the 'real' world" (2000: xiii). The novel opens with a discussion about the transport of water, and the difficulty of finding transport, which suggests that the drought has had a great impact on the whole society of the text, and therefore Moylan's observation illuminates the dystopian effect. Moylan then states that the hegemonic order of most dystopias rests "on both coercion and consensus" (148). This is clearly indicated by the company's behaviour throughout the text, where people fear speaking against the company's actions.

Sargent suggests that dystopian texts raise the question of whether people can make correct choices, and identifies that in the warnings created by dystopias, choice and therefore hope are still possible (1994: 26). Interestingly, when discussing Mother's tale, the doctor denies the possible existence of the girls in the classroom. She clings to the idea that Mother is delusional and attempts to implicate the narrator in complicity as well. When the narrator attempts to discuss the girls, she is cut off by the doctor and told "don't think" (Jayes, 2012: 72). The doctor also tells the narrator that "the company will send in people who will write more accurately about what's going on" (73). This desire to not think about the water and Mother's story is indicative of wilful blindness to the negative aspects of the company, and

possibly to a fear of criticising the company, a choice that reduces other people's hope for truth and equality. Criticism of the company by journalists can lead to media tribunals.

The threat of a media tribunal is first raised in the valley. The journalist describes it as set up by the government "to discipline recalcitrant media people [...] who scratch too close to the truth. They arrest us because we use anonymous sources. But sources like Mother won't go on record out of fear for their lives" (107). This risk of a media tribunal when combined with the threat of indigence ensures that journalists cannot speak against the "government and company line" (107). The power of the company is such that after the narrator finds the Lost Girls NGO, she fears the company and notes that she "preferred payphones, and Internet cafés, because they were hard to trace. I didn't know if my fears were founded on much, but I liked to feel safe" (157). She then discovers that websites she had used when researching her story are now blocked, and the implication is that it is because these sites criticised the company. This potential surveillance and unpredictability of terror further contribute to the narrator's precarity (Ettlinger, 2007: 321). After leaving the internet café, she receives a letter at her home from both the government and company that demands she stop her investigation, and warns that if she meets with either Mother or the company employee accused, "the government shall view this as a threat to the security of our water programmes and you shall be called before a media tribunal" (Jayes, 2012: 160). This letter claims that the company man will have to answer to Mother's accusations after the government has investigated the claims. That the letter is marked by both governmental and the company's logos suggests that they are equally powerful.

The hearing of the guard further proves the company's power as equivalent to, or greater than, governmental power. While the letter the narrator receives suggests that the guard will receive an official legal/judicial hearing, the company has the power to decide upon the observers and Mother, the accuser, is not present. Those who are present also must sign confidentiality agreements and the "records from his testimony and the events in the valley are classified, protected by the secrecy act. The order goes all the way down to the man who handles the photocopies" (262). Rebecca Solnit's observation that "In patriarchy no one can hear you scream" (2019) highlights the ways in which society protects the privileged and ignores or silences victims. Although she discusses the rape culture prevalent in American society through the examples of Jeffery Epstein, Harvey Weinstein and others, the idea of "might is right" which enables their power is also visible in the social power of the

corporations in this text. The hospital intern also comments on the company's power, saying that the company

tells the government how to do everything to secure and distribute the water to their paying clients [...] [yet] they're doing nothing about the diseases, nothing about the malnutrition, and the hunger and the thirst. Even though these things are all to some extent a consequence of their actions. (196)

This control of information may then be suggestive of a critical dystopia. Raffaella Baccolini notes that while classical dystopia often has memory trapped "in an individual and regressive nostalgia", critical dystopias reveal that "a culture of memory [...] is part of a social project of hope" (2004: 521). The narrator's desire to write about Mother, Eve, and the valley points to the beginning of this creation of memory and the desire to share stories.

A critical dystopia has been described as a dystopia that retains the hope that it may "be overcome and replaced with a eutopia" (Sargent, 2001: 222). In *For the Mercy of Water*, these symbols of hope are on a smaller scale, and result in the potentially more eutopian endings for the narrator and Eve rather than the whole society. The novel ends with the beginnings of a eutopian enclave as the narrator returns Eve to Mother and the valley, where the company has promised not to return, while still providing water. This promise, if kept, ensures Mother and Eve will no longer experience the gender-based violence endorsed by the company, and implicitly endorsed by the government. Other signs of hope in the novel include the onset of Eve's menstruation before she takes her revenge upon the guard; and the narrator's implied rescue after the plane crash. This hope is also suggested by the novel's title used in the text, "for the mercy of water the life is still here" (Jayes, 2012: 378), as even after violent acts, death, and destruction, there is the potential for new, better life, and water allows this life to grow. Mengel observes that hope comes through this regenerative power of nature as well as "in the conviction that it is important to listen to these individual testimonies. For the testimonies keep the truth alive, even if those in charge are desperately bent on stifling it and cynically construct a different tale" (2018: 107).

Chronologically, the first sign of hope in the novel may be Mother's prevention of the guard's drowning. Even though he has attacked the girls and killed Noni, he identifies Mother as having saved his life. Her refusal to continue the cycle of violence differs from Eve's



response of violence and revenge. Mother's aid may have contributed to the guard's desire to leave the company and stop participating in these acts of violence, indicating that there may be hope for the betterment of the society. While the text focuses on the women who have experienced violence as those with the hope for the future, the company man's change of heart after his eye surgery is suggestive of the chance for redemption that a critical dystopia can create. While the possibility of new eyes impacting his outlook on life is raised by the narrator, and denied by the nurse in the text, to have this change of heart does suggest that symbolically, his surgery and, perhaps, the trauma he went through, has led to a changed perspective on his past behaviour. When Eve has finished revealing the scars of what his men did to her, the narrator realises that

he had been one of those men who had once mistaken a nirvana in the glimpse of light that followed cruelty [...] But there, in that room, I saw him realise that this light had been a trick, and it had left him with nothing, not even a will to act. (Jayes, 2012: 341)

This, combined with the guard's recognition of Mother saving his life and his resignation from the company, suggests that while he cannot correct his violent past, he will not again inflict violence, implying that company men are capable of recognising their own evil, and changing for the better.

The next, more obvious, sign of hope and change is Eve's menstruation after her release from prison. This is also linked closely with water as Eve sees her menstrual blood while bathing at the narrator's apartment. The narrator reassures her, calling it "good blood" (316), offering a contrast to the blood that had run down her legs after Eve's sexual assault. After scooping up and smelling this "good blood" Eve reveals "a small smile that lifted the edges of her eyes" (317). Eve is pleased at the idea that she may one day have children, as doctors she saw in the city had suggested that after her trauma in the valley, she may be "too broken inside to ever have a baby" (317). She watches the narrator closely to learn how to put on a pad and underwear "as if the whole ritual was of life-threatening importance" (318), which is also indicative of her youth. After this experience, Eve's nightmares change to something more hopeful: she is pregnant with a human baby and given a weapon by Mother to destroy the dam wall. When the water gushes out "it was a strange colour. It was dark brown and in some places it looked red. It flooded the valley. It carried the ants [company men] away. It made a new river and the new river led to a town" (323). The dark brown and red could be indicative

of (dried) blood as water has been associated with violence, and after this has been washed away with the ants who commit this violence, the new river and new town can become an eutopian enclave. Eve interprets this dream as a sign that Mother needs her to live, creating her own hope for the future. While she does take her revenge on the company man, this does not reduce the hope in the critical dystopia as critical dystopias do not require a happy ending, and often “a sense of sadness accompanies the awareness and knowledge that the protagonist has attained” (Baccolini, 2004: 521)

After the plane crashes entering the valley, Eve leaves while the narrator is unconscious to find Mother in the village. The narrator injured her leg in the crash and so is limping as she sets off to ensure Eve did join Mother, which echoes Eve’s limp leaving the valley and leaving prison, after injury at the hands of the company men. The narrator stops several meters short of Eve and Mother, wanting to tell Mother about Eve’s healing and nightmares, about the guard, and about mercy and hope, “but [she] realised Mother knew all of it already, and Eve could speak for herself” (377). Although she says nothing aloud, she feels that Eve and Mother understand what she doesn’t say before Eve bids her farewell, and the narrator then returns to the airstrip and downed airplane. Baccolini suggests that “awareness and responsibility are the conditions of the critical dystopia’s citizens” (2004: 521). The narrator knows she cannot stay in this eutopian enclave because she has the responsibility to protect it, to use her story as a voice to prevent future company violence.

While the narrator walks back to the airstrip, she fears that, as per their deal, the time waiting for rescue will be filled with her rape by the pilot. This deal was part of her attempts to protect both the valley and prevent the pilot from raping Eve and subjecting her to a repeat of sexual trauma. This becomes a sign of a critical dystopia when the narrator discovers that the pilot has died of his wounds, before she felt compelled to kill him (with Eve’s knife) to protect herself. The radio signal is poor when she calls for help, but she makes out the phrase “following the water” (Jays, 2012: 381), again linking water with mercy, and the hope for rescue. The hope behind this phrase is that her journalist friend had flown “following the water” on an assignment and she thinks that he is in the plane that will help her. She goes to the river to send up flares to signal her location and runs back to the airstrip when she hears and sees a plane coming into the valley. The novel ends on this hopeful note with her running “because I wanted to heal. I had escaped the men and the company and the bargains over water” (382). She thinks that somewhere inside herself, during this whole journey,

a little lamp had been lit without my knowing it, and its glow was a promise, a small circle of love, and I was following it. So I put my head down and I let it lead. I put my head down, and I felt myself free. (382)

This light is indicative of her freedom and her hope for the future and therefore symbolic of the critical dystopian aspect to the text. I believe that her reference to “little” lamp is also suggestive of the fragility of this hope, and this “small circle of love”. It has been lit without her knowing because it results from her helping Eve return home, and begins the path to true recovery from her trauma. I believe that it reflects the narrator’s new willingness to open herself to trusting others like Eve, with whom she has shared experiences, and the journalist who is willing to support and attempts to understand her.

It is therefore clear that the critical dystopia is created by the response of the characters to their precarious situation. The narrator refuses to allow Eve’s story, both as she heard it from Mother and having heard Eve’s own version, to be silenced by the power of the water company. While it is initially the male journalist who reports on Mother’s claims of what happened in the valley, he drops the story when faced with the might of the company, and suggests that the narrator should too, though he does support her and offers aid when there is less risk to himself. Both the narrator and Eve experience precarity as directly linked to their gender as they face gender-based violence at the hands of both company guards and men in their society who are more peripherally linked to the company, such as the pilot. In the company’s attempts to retain control of water, women and girls are still the main targets of the violence used. Women therefore begin to work together to reduce the impact of this precarity by creating their own support networks, such as the female audience for Mother’s story in the valley, and the principal’s aiding of the narrator’s visit to Eve. The company’s power in society is great enough that they can, to a certain extent, censor stories that portray them in a negative light, as the narrator discovers when she can no longer find the journalist’s original story and only accesses the sanitised report written with “approved facts” (174). The potential to combat this power is suggested by the narrator’s attempts to write her story on what has happened in the valley, backed by an international publisher who can support and defend her. While *For the Mercy of Water* reveals a dystopian future rife with gender-based violence, hope remains in support networks and the narrator’s refusal to allow Mother and Eve’s story to go unheard, even if it will not be told in her own country.

### Chapter 3: “The same words become new”: *Selling LipService* by Tammy Baikie and the commercial control of speech

*Ovid writes that Juno punished Echo for chattering to her on the mountainside and giving the other nymphs who had entwined their limbs with Jupiter a chance to escape. The goddess says, “I shall curtail the powers of that tongue which has tricked me: you will have only the briefest possible use of your voice.” From then on, Echo could only repeat the last words another had spoken – like anyone come of haemorrhage. (Baikie, 2017: 42)*

*Selling LipService* (2017) by Tammy Baikie won the 2015/2016 Dinaane Debut Fiction award, for publication in 2017. The judges’ decision was unanimous, which suggests that the novel is worthy of the critical attention that it is, thus far, lacking. Baikie is a qualified translator and a love of language is reflected by Frith in the text. The title, *Selling LipService*, suggests the purchasing of both language as well as sentiments that are not backed by one’s actions. This implicit falseness runs through the novel as people’s words, sponsored by companies, do not necessarily reflect the meanings they wish to convey, which is referred to in the text as “LipService drift.” Frith, as well as other characters, will be shown to experience precarity due to this commercial influence on language, and due to the dystopian elements of the text. The issue of language will be linked to a facet of feminism present, before the discussion of the branding and commercialism intrinsically part of the society of *Selling LipService*. The LipService patches contribute to characters’ experiences of precarity as well as to the creation of the dystopia.

Judith Butler notes that the “violence that we inflict on others is only – and always – selectively brought into public view” (2004: 39). This means that the violence inflicted on certain citizens may not be seen, and they are therefore not perceived as living grievable lives, a key aspect of precarity. In *Selling LipService*, due to the speech patches, these populations are unable to find the words to share their experiences with other members of society. The greater part of society appears to happily live their branded lives, though the speech provided by advertising catchphrases suggests a corporate invasion, an exaggeration of the corporate influence revealed by Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* (2000). Klein observed major companies as attempting to become the providers of good in the world. Corporate schools in *Selling LipService* reveal an exaggeration of the sponsorship that Klein’s research highlights. The

society of *Selling LipService* can be perceived as having realised the fears of a corporate colonisation that is feared by both Klein and characters in *Moxyland*.

In the world of *Selling LipService*, everyone experiences a stroke around 18 years of age which ends their speech capabilities, referred to as coming of haemorrh-age. After this haemorrhage, LipService patches grant the ability to speak, but as they are programmed by copywriters, patches available to the general public are branded. Frith swaps between brands, using speech referencing toothpaste, coffee, skin care and more, while others, like her mother, are “brand-loyal” and use only one company’s patches, such as Frisson Froufrou, a lingerie company. Only the “unbled”, who are usually children, and copywriters can speak without branded patches. Frith’s father worked in the archives containing the unbranded narratives that few can access, and Frith’s exposure to this literature gives her a love of language. This results in Frith feeling stifled by the pre-written language of the patches which is compounded by her synaesthesia, her ability to “taste” textures, which she refers to as her “tastures.” Frith cannot use pre-programmed language to convey her own experiences because her synaesthesia makes her unique. After her tastures are discovered, Frith becomes involved in medical research, vulnerable to both Dr Bromide and the copywriter Wordini. All those within society who experience discomfort with LipService experience precarity as well, particularly Frith’s father, and the mute society living in the industrial district. Frith’s act of rebellion through programming patches with literary works such as Herman Melville’s *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (2004), results in her arrest and a trial which highlights the power of the medical and copywriting organisations as well as Frith’s lack of power. While her ending is bleak, there is a hopeful note as she begins working in the archives, which is suggestive of a critical dystopia.

Written by a woman, and with a female focaliser who struggles with the presence of a socially conforming split personality, *Selling LipService* implicitly embeds a feminist ideology. Frith identifies a “You” in her head who endorses the commercialism created by LipService. With language controlled and provided on a limited basis, it is interesting that of the four named copywriters, two are men, one a woman, and one of unknown gender (and indeed only mentioned as a memory from childhood). Ildney Cavalcanti highlights that the “the interweaving of linguistic manipulation and dominant patriarchal ideologies in the dystopic spaces” (2000: 152) imbues certain texts with “feminist ideological hues” (152) due to the possible interpretations of the historical silencing of women.

Elaine Showalter's ideas of "gynocriticism" will therefore be useful, as Josephine Donovan identifies it as focussed on women's art and the development of a women's poetics, something that Frith attempts to do in *Selling LipService*. Donovan sees this as rooted in a cultural feminism which identifies women as a separate community (1984: 101). Indeed, she believes six structural conditions have shaped traditional women's experience in most cultures, the first of which is sharing a condition of oppression or otherness imposed by patriarchal or andocentric ideologies (101). Frith is a woman in this society who is othered by those in power due to her tastes. Donovan also claims that, based on her identified structural conditions, it is a historical fact that women have often been silenced in favour of men (108). This idea of linguistic manipulation leads one to consider the implications of language, especially as it is controlled by companies in *Selling LipService*.

Dale Spender notes that "language helps form the limits of our reality [...] [and] also has the capacity to restrict our world" (1990: 3). Spender states that "having learnt the language of a patriarchal society we have also learnt to classify and manage the world in accordance with the patriarchal order and to preclude many possibilities for alternative ways of making sense of the world" (3). She discusses the patriarchal and sexist influences on language; but the ways in which language influences society present in *Selling LipService* comes through a commercial aspect rather than patriarchal. Stillwell comments that his interest in Frith's "authorgraphs" of made up words is "because it's idiopathic language – without any known commercial aetiology" (Baikie, 2017: 116). Language's influence on their society is also reflected by Avery's death, and connects to the precarity experienced by the mute society. Avery, a member of the silents, left their group for medical care after he came of haemorrhage. He died after eating mothballs he thought were sweets due to the language on the packaging which read "pop mothballs in, and forget the gnawing worries" (96). As an outsider to branded language, Avery did not understand this use of language and died as a result. This language cannot be used by Avery, and indeed, Frith has her own issues with the provided speech options.

Frith attempts to create her own language multiple times: in school with Wardsback, later with "LitService", and finally with her private language after her trial. Her interest in language was sparked by her time in the archives with her father, and she retains this interest due to her inability to verbalise her tastes under LipService. Spender offers pertinent observations

there are fundamental problems with the creation of new words because while they are also subjected to the existing semantic rule that male is positive and minus male is negative, there is reason to believe that when consigned to negative semantic space they too will become perjured and sexist. *It is the semantic rule which needs to change, not the words themselves.* (1990: 29-30, my emphasis)

This observation proves true in *Selling LipService* where Frith's new words make no difference to society as people cannot understand the change. Stillwell's desire to change language, to place word choice in the hands of the speakers rather than the patches and copywriters, would do more to change their society if realised, as it would provide speakers with word options they are sorely lacking.

The issue of language, of who can speak, raises questions of agency. Gayle Greene suggests that "issues of power in contemporary women's fiction centre on questions of language" (1991: 17). For men to possess this power in *Selling LipService*, while Frith and the mute community rebel against this control, is evocative of a feminist influence on the text. It is therefore pertinent that most of the named members of the mute community are also women. The question of who in this society is heard is also linked to precarity. After Frith's trial, Verbociter, a female copywriter, arranges for Frith's release and employment at the archives to enable "revived interest in leveraging book resources for brand differentiation" (Baikie 2017: 171). Frith refuses to, and physically cannot, share her newly created private language because she does not want others to abuse it or use her language against her. Greene suggests that "to remain mute, to abandon language because it inscribes patriarchal ideology, is to abandon the possibility of challenging that ideology. Another kind of speaking and writing is required" (1991: 20). Viewed through this lens, Frith's new private language then challenges the patriarchy and oppression in *Selling LipService*. However, she does think of Stillwell and "how he would tell me a language that isn't shared isn't a language at all. But what have I ever gained from sharing?" (Baikie, 2017: 174). Cavalcanti quotes Deborah Cameron, who notes that "in feminist utopias [...] there is often some attempt at a modified language" (2000: 153), which further contributes to the idea of feminist influence in *Selling LipService*. The need for this attempt to modify language is in line with Elaine Showalter's observation that "male-centered categorizations predominate in American English and subtly shape our

understanding and perception of reality” (1981: 190). While feminist criticism has advanced since the 1980s, at the time, Showalter identified a task for feminist criticism to

concentrate on women’s access to language, on the available lexical range from which words can be selected, on the ideological and cultural determinants of expression. The problem is not that language is insufficient to express women’s consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism, or circumlocution. (193)

This notion is dramatised by Tammy Baikie in showing how Frith reacts to the provision of language in *Selling LipService*. Showalter’s ideas of the “gynocritic” also reveal a concern with “woman as writer, the producer of textual meaning, with the history, themes, genres, and structures of women” (1979: 23). For Frith to create her own language could be argued to be an attempt at fulfilling some ideas of the gynocritic.

Interestingly, Elaine Showalter also notes that a familiar feature in feminist quest fictions is that “the writer/heroine, often guided by another woman, travels to the ‘mother country’ of liberated desire and female authenticity; crossing to the other side of the mirror, like Alice in Wonderland, is often a symbol of the passage” (201). This does not fully come to fruition in *Selling LipService*, but these elements are present in the silent community. Frith finds it through Poppy’s help; Gudrun uses a healing touch on Frith (and initiates the communal “scold-shoulder” after Frith transgresses by creating a new hand sign); and Oona acts as her guide within the community. Frith however sees this community as a false refuge due to their unwillingness to adapt and learn more, and leaves them to find something better suited to herself.

The mute community holds themselves outside of branded and commercialised life. Branding and advertising are ever-present in *Selling LipService* due to the provision of speech through the use of branded transdermals. Copywriters create LipService, which ensures that all language may be used as advertising. Even greeting others reveals which brand of LipService one uses: Frith hears a vacuum cleaner brand greeting, and doctors have two EmPath options, one for patients and another for colleagues. Frith uses headphones to mute others’ speech, and her thoughts reveal that people in her society listen to jingles, not music. Naomi Klein’s *No Logo* (2000) aids in the illumination of the pervasiveness of this branding beyond speech,



as it has infiltrated all aspects of this society. The power of the branding and advertising is introduced to members of *Selling LipService* society beginning at schools, although “everybody knows it’s the parents’ role to pass on by word of mouth the values and LipService of their corporate tribe” (Baikie, 2017: 21). Frith remembers having attended two schools in her youth: the privileged corporate endorsed school and the generic, public school.

The corporate school is sponsored by BMG Textile and Clothing and only employees with brand loyalty, like Frith’s mother, can send their children to this school. Klein observes that as companies start to fund schools, “they carry with them an educational agenda of their own. As with all branding projects, it is never enough to tag the schools with a few logos” (2000: 78). After Frith reveals her tastes during a brand lesson on the differences between Selkie and real silk, she is bullied by other students and eventually removed from the school. Frith recalls that her “‘poor fit with the corporate identity’ was undermining brand integrity in the classroom, and the administration could not accept responsibility for my safety” (Baikie, 2017: 21). This chimes with Klein’s research, which suggests that corporations appear to believe that “teaching students and building brand awareness [...] can be two aspects of the same project” (2000: 78). Lacking a second family brand affiliation, Frith entered “the ‘no-name’ school” (Baikie, 2017: 21) that offered “no focused brand identification courses, no corporate mascots at sports events and little prospect of internships or admission to the corporate universities” (21). Klein observes that companies are “fighting for their brands to become not the add-on but the subject of education, not an elective but the core curriculum” (2000: 78). This has been realised in *Selling LipService*. Interestingly, before she leaves the corporate school, Principal Launder suggests the creation of Faith, who would follow the status quo, and Frith thinks that “I didn’t like being Frith anymore. I wished I were Faith. Principal Launder trusted her to be a good consumer” (Baikie, 2017: 20). This chimes with the idea of gynocriticism as critics who attempt to discover an understanding of female identity in both authors and characters, with an essential struggle “towards a coherent identity, a realisation of selfhood and autonomy” (Eagleton, 1991: 9).

Frith internalises and accepts the creation of Faith in the sense of a separate personality that lives within her and endorses consumerism, leading to her later struggle to create a coherent, singular, identity. Mary Eagleton also suggests that Showalter’s implied definition of effective feminist writing is that which expresses a personal experience in a social framework (40). This is successful in *Selling LipService* because the reader follows Frith’s experience

and feels the authenticity of her society, despite its extreme exaggeration of our own. Faith later becomes You. Faith wishes for Frith to ignore her tastes, or only think of them as linked to brands. Faith is also in control of Wardsback, Frith's language business at school, selling classmates new words. This business gets the whole school literally silenced as it goes against LipService for someone to sell new language. The discovery of these word-selling businesses comes about because other students started their own businesses too, and "there were so many new words and so many kids using them that the teachers realised what was going on" (28). Faith blames Frith for the competing business of other students, as she refused to punish those who misused Wardsback. Faith declares that Frith "couldn't handle the business behind branding" (29), which introduces the controlling measures of branding within their society. Klein observes that "Verbal or visual references to sitcoms, movie characters, advertising slogans and corporate logos have become the most effective tool we have to communicate across cultures – an easy and instant 'click'" (2000: 137). Following this, LipService as the provision of speech only works when both speaker and listener are familiar with the brand and can therefore decipher the LipService drift. This is initially raised by Frith's Wardsback, as one of the first words she sold was "'ox parade' (from paradox) for when a grown up's LipService seemed to say one thing but you were pretty sure they meant another" (Baikie, 2017: 25). When with the mutes, Oona tells Frith: "I grew up here [with the mutes]. I know the words but not your meaning" (90), because Frith's question about what they do when people reach haemorrhage comes out as "What surge protection do you have for when you start to flicker?" (90). Klein further states that we have this history which creates "a sort of global pop-cultural Morse code. But there is just one catch: while we may all have the code implanted in our brains, we're not really allowed to use it" (2000: 137). This behaviour and knowledge is reflected in *Selling LipService*, where people need to be familiar with the brands in order to understand the LipService drift, but may not recreate language themselves, and, as demonstrated by Wardsback, are punished if they misuse language. Brand blackout is also punished if discovered, as is Frith's double up misuse. Dr Bromide's creation of Censory LipService also endorses this idea, as those who "misuse" their LipService are punished with an inescapable bad taste.

Frith also recalls a copywriter who had name recognition that competed with the brand they worked for. After the Great Dictator "dropped out of speech, with only a vague mention in an uncharacteristically subdued press release" (Baikie, 2017: 62), Frith's Mother said that the copywriter "got too big for her brand" (62). Indeed, Klein notes that

In the name of protecting the brand from dilution, artists and activists who try to engage with the brand as equal partners in their “relationships” are routinely dragged into court for violating trademark, copyright, libel or “brand disparagement” laws – easily abused statutes that form an airtight protective seal around the brand, allowing it to brand us, but prohibiting us from so much as scuffing it. (2000: 137-8)

This adds a layer of interest to the Great Dictator’s story: despite creating the language, as soon as her personal brand became perceived as equally noteworthy, she disappears. It also suggests a reason for the school-wide punishment for creating language. Emphasis on branding within language is also created by Frith’s reaction to a copywriter who visits Lost Property. She is surprised by the copywriter’s neutral statement because she “had almost forgotten how cutting a statement without brand alerts could be” (Baikie, 2017: 67).

Shortly after this interaction, Frith attempts to forcibly change her LipService options, trying to change the brand phrase to something with a similar sound but different meaning. Twisting advertising messages is identified by Klein as “subvertising”, a common part of anti-corporate or anti-consumerism tactics. It is usually used to reflect the negatives, or unsavoury truths about the company. Frith identifies her own behaviour as “smack[ing] of insincerity, of subvertising” (51-52) when she needs her Mother’s help to buy Eternal Flame LipService. Her use of Spruce gum, a “corner-store LipService brand with all the cachet of stale chocolate bars” (51), means that her mother does all the talking in the purchase of the “gilt-edged LipService” (51) provided by Eternal Flame. The saleswoman needs convincing by Mother because “being able to pay the high price that premium LipService commands isn’t enough; you also have to be the right fit with the brand” (54). Frith’s purchase of the Eternal Flame patch highlights the importance of matching one’s brand in all aspects, and this issue is raised again when she begins to work for Wordini. Frith’s clothing and shorn head do not match the expected copywriter appearance and the unbranded patch is given to her reluctantly, before Wordini tells her to use an advance on her wage to ensure she is not “always hung by [her] threads” (113). Interestingly, Klein’s research reveals that companies, starting in the 1990s, needed to do more than simply market their products, but “needed to fashion brand identities that would resonate with this new culture [...] [to] remake themselves in the image of nineties cool: its music, styles and politics” (2000: 64). Frith is perceived as being unworthy of both the Eternal Flame and the unbranded patches because

she does not resonate with their brand identities. Her mother, on the other hand, literally remakes herself with cosmetic surgery to become the perfect Frisson Froufrou woman. The importance of being the right fit with the brand also leads to the dumping, rather than donation, of excess stock. Frith again subvertises when she stays with the silent community. They take the clothing from landfills and create fabric patches, which are then used to make their own clothing. Frith chooses to work on the patch-making because it was “one of the only jobs [...] that has a residual attachment to language” (Baikie, 2017: 93). Using stitches to obscure the brand names, Prince coffee becomes Price coffee, and Eternal Flame becomes Eternal lame. Klein comments that “anytime people mess with a logo they are tapping into the vast resources spent to make that logo meaningful” (2000: 206).

Branding is intended to promote consumerism, and in this society, it is encouraged through not only the branded speech but also through the importance given to shopping. Frith reads Declamartiste’s plan for a Smite-M advert based on Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* in which a young girl’s brother becomes a cockroach. Despite initially caring for him, disgust overwhelms the family and they kill him using Smite-M. Even though they have lost a family member, there is still a ‘happy’ ending in the family going to the mall and the parents’ realisation that their daughter has “become a consumer in her own right, brand empowered” (65). The idea that shopping leads to happiness is also suggested to Frith by Wordini. When she is feeling “empty and dead” (131) from burnout at the copywriter offices, Wordini “prescribes a ‘mall’ – [Frith] must ‘regain purchase on materialism’” (131) and prove that she has indulged in the “‘spend-swift’ ways of his staff” (131) by presenting the receipts of expensive goods. This emphasis on shopping reflects the consumerist society. Frith then realises she has not written an authorgraph in weeks due to her focus on work, on “writing commercenary rhymes” (133), which is suggestive of the brand and consumerism taking over the individual.

Frith’s trial further reveals the commercialism of their society. At the start of the trial, one of the audience members shouts about keeping their “souvenir scalpel” (Baikie, 2017: 160). The scalpel is due to the link between the medical and legal professions, and Frith’s trial is held in the Ether Jar, a surgical amphitheatre. The shouter, wearing a “huge purple top hat with a sign above saying SUE-VENIRS” (160), reveals the extreme commercialism in their society, even as he is forcibly removed by an orderly after the judge announces that “*Commercial actio is prohibeo* in the Ether Jar” (160). Both Wordini and Dr Bromide use their time on the

witness stand to advertise Censory LipService, though only Wordini is physically removed from the court. Significantly, Klein observes that

Something not far from the surface of the public psyche is delighted to see the icons of corporate power subverted and mocked. There is, in short, a market for it. With commercialism able to overpower the traditional authority of religion, politics and schools, corporations have emerged as the natural targets for all sorts of free-floating rage and rebellion. (2000: 210)

In *Selling LipService*, the audience of the trial clearly delight in Frith's rebellion and punishment, though the corporate power has reached a level where her punishment is more entertaining than her rebellion. Klein also notes that corporations are the "most powerful political forces of our time" (245). This statement appears to be true of *Selling LipService* as well, especially as the rights of the corporation are prioritised over the rights of the individual.

Klein's research reveals that "the assault on choice has moved beyond predatory retail and monopolistic synergy schemes and become what can only be described as straightforward censorship: the active elimination and suppression of material" (130). Frith's language challenges this censorship, and when it goes public, Stillwell recognises the damage and threat level. While Frith is pleased with her literary LipService, Stillwell asks "Why can't we be the story [...], whichever people talk to each other" (Baikie, 2017: 152), because people's private narratives matter to themselves "more than a brand narrative or a law scrivener story" (152). Klein observes that the market domination of retailers means that "their actions can't help raising questions about the effect on civil liberties and public life" (2000: 132). It seems as though Stillwell wishes to regain unbranded, unforced language, while Frith wants to open the provider of LipService to include other non-commercial narratives. Here, Stillwell may be the true revolutionary. No one knows Frith's stories, so they struggle with communication, and "the copywriters want an interlocutor to push them to unexpected answers, hoping to piece together the brand narrative from the LipService drift. They can't imagine that the language isn't based on a brand identity" (Baikie, 2017: 153). This censorship and corporate power add to the experience of precarity within the text.

Frith, as focaliser of *Selling LipService*, experiences the bulk of visible precarity in the text. Nancy Ettliger states that “Precarity lies in the unpredictability of terror, which can emanate from a wide range of contexts” (2007: 321-322). While she notes that terrorism is often understood as organised global events, Ettliger states that it “can be expanded if we interpret it broadly as physical and nonphysical violence that invokes fear” (321). She further claims that terrorism can be present in “social, political, cultural, and economic frictions, and uneven power relations that occur in households, neighbourhoods, shopping malls, workplaces, and nodes in cyberspace” (321). Frith’s fear of the discovery of her synaesthesia therefore contributes to her experience of precarity even before her tastes are revealed. The fact that language is both created and provided by those who have more power than the potential speakers is suggestive of Judith Butler’s observations that the “subject” she speaks of is

a socially produced ‘agent’ and ‘deliberator’ whose agency and thought is made possible by a language that precedes that ‘I’. In this sense, the ‘I’ is produced through power, though not the deterministic effect of power. Power relies on a mechanism of reproduction that can and does go awry, undo the strategies of animating power, and produce new and even subversive effects. (2009a: iii)

An example in *Selling LipService* of this reproduction of power going awry is when Frith attempts to reprogramme LipService patches and distribute them to an oblivious public. Frith’s initial experience of precarity is through her synaesthesia and her attempts to keep it a secret, as she dreads discovery. Marc Botha observes of other precarity texts that “a fragile existence is one which is susceptible to change [...]. Fragility exposes a field of anticipation” (2014: 3).

These LipService patches last only three days before being metabolised, and “deliberately depleting LipService to the point of brand blackout is a punishable offence” (Baikie, 2017: 49). Frith, however, waits until her patches are depleted before replacing, because she hopes to find the balance between speech capabilities and the ability to use her own words, but “no sound comes out at all except for a clicking at the back of my throat like the phone being put down” (49). This suggests that even if Frith had been able to say anything through the chemical dregs, there is no one who wants to hear it, except herself. Part of Butler’s discussion of precarity includes the questions: “How does the unspeakable population speak and makes its claims? What kind of disruption is this within the field of power? And how can

such populations lay claim to what they require?” (2009a: xiii). These questions can also be raised with regard to the mute enclave. Frith also wishes that she could go a full day “without You”, the brand induced persona that endorses LipService, thinking “I could inhabit my body and mind, not having to share accommodations with You or worry about the impropriety of wandering naked through my interiors. [...] And You couldn’t ruin it with your antiseptic odour of disapproval” (Baikie 2017, 50). The tasures that “You” disapproves of add to Frith’s experience of precarity after they are discovered by Dr Bromide. Frith was born with tasures, and is punished and removed from the school when she reveals them, as they mark her inability to fit in with others at school, and indeed, society.

An additional cause of precarity in this society is that LipService needs to be bought by the user. Some patches are limited in who can use them: either through profession or presentation. Only copywriters may legally use unbranded LipService, and only medical professionals use EmPath. Frith’s mother, as a Frisson Froufrou employee *must* use those branded patches while working. Frith notes that her own responsibilities at the hospital Lost Property counter “are so far removed from the gravitational pull of any corporate identity that no LipService brand is mandated for my working hours” (57). Frith switches between brands and observes that no words are needed to buy LipService, “especially as people like me, who buy consumer staples patches often don’t receive a supply of LipService from their employer or much more than a minimum wage. When the money is gone, so is their voice” (52). This suggests that while “brand blackout” may be “contraindicated”, it may be part of life for some. Those who have the “lesser” jobs need to use some of their limited income in order to have access to speech, and once they have lost speech, they are no longer considered important members of society. Interestingly, Susan Banki notes that “precariousness is an inherent feature of capitalism” (2013: 2). The power of capitalism in the novel’s society is first indicated through the branded speech, but is also present throughout the text.

This power of capitalism is also indicated by the control of books and the rewriting of literature to be about brand narratives, as well as the control of citizens’ bodies. Before his stroke, Frith’s father was compiling a book for her, adding pages from other books and blacking out text to give it his own meaning. His commentary next to the history of clerical physicians and surgeons compares them to copywriters and doctors, who have “authority over the word and the meat” (Baikie, 2017: 41). Indeed, Dr Bromide reveals that

“Patients suffer from collective amnesia about the ownership of their bodies. We, the syndicated medical professions, [...] *own* the physical human apparatus – it is merely leased via a client consciousness to the corporates, until on death it reverts to us. As a shareholder in this carcass [...] I am entitled to dispose of its physiological anomalies to the syndicate’s advantage.” (109-110)

This is indicative of the power doctors believe they are entitled to have over ordinary citizens. They work with copywriters in order to maintain this power. Martin Jørgensen and Carl-Ulrick Schierup observe that necropolitics is “not just about killing but rather about who is left to die through decisions taken by the state” (2016: 952). Frith’s father and members of the mute enclave are both allowed to die by those in power due to their nonconformity. One of Butler’s questions when it comes to precarity is “who will have medical benefits before the law?” (2015: 35), and clearly here, nonconformers do not have these benefits.

After his stroke, Frith’s father is denied care due to his “high-risk lifestyle” (Baikie, 2017: 38) and because he “failed to undergo the required six-monthly post-CVA angiograms, cognitive, psychological and acculturation testing” (38). His “high-risk lifestyle” refers to the archives as there is allegedly danger of “deadly library mould” (30) which led to the sequestration of all books. While Mother’s “brand status entitles [them] to use a departure lounge” (38), Frith’s attempts to speak to the doctor are rejected as only those who have haemorrh-aged are considered adults and “No LipService patch, no debate” (39). The mute community also struggles with medical care. When they come of haemorrh-age, they travel to the hospital for care but otherwise the only mention of healthcare is Gudrun’s “healing hands” which help Frith after she faints. When Frith learns that Avery died due to misunderstanding mothball packaging, she thinks that

With every generation, more of them will come of haemorrh-age only to eat mothballs and stick their fingers in electric sockets when forced to step out into the consumerist world. Perhaps the doctors and copywriters are counting on that, together with untreated second haemorrhages and disease. (97)

This lack of healthcare (disease and second strokes) is a further indication of the precarity experienced by the mutes as the state implicitly lets them die. Butler observes that precarious life “characterizes such lives who do not qualify as recognizable, readable, or grievable”



(2009a: xii-xiii). These ungrievable lives form populations that “are “lose-able,” or can be forfeited, precisely because they are framed as being already lost or forfeited” (2009b: 31). In this society, Avery’s death was grieved only by his fellow mutes, and Wordini’s observation of the group as a potential fad suggests that he does not see them as subjects who are “recognizable, readable, or grievable.”

After Frith leaves the silents, she uses two LipService patches simultaneously in an attempt to gain control over her language. This overwhelms her brain and she wakes in hospital with Wordini and Dr Bromide, without language. The penalty for double-patching is “decommissioning – no more branded patches for you – and refusal of medical care” (Baikie, 2017: 107). Wordini observes that employment without language is limited and she will become a “permanent trial subject” (107) for Dr Bromide unless she chooses to work for him, using unbranded patches when under supervision. However, in order to pay for the care she already received, Dr Bromide insists on implanting electrodes to allow for a continuation of his neurological research. Before this implantation, Wordini reveals that Frith has been under surveillance since her previous round of testing due to the uniqueness of her tastes. Interestingly, this observation can be linked to authoritarianism and therefore extended to dystopia. Ettlenger’s range of contexts which can give rise to terror and therefore precarity includes “repressive surveillance either in authoritarian production or in exclusive consumer spaces” (2007: 321-322). *Selling LipService* does include the idea of “exclusive consumer spaces” if one considers most of the general society is a consumer space through their consumption of language, and the privilege and exclusivity associated with high end LipService provided by companies like Frisson Froufrou and Eternal Flame. Frith’s experience of precarity is tied to the control doctors and copywriters have over her life as both a test subject and employee because they regard her as nothing more than a subject. While without the LipService that is required to “produce language – written and spoken” (Baikie, 2017: 10), she signs what she believes is an employment contract. Stillwell later reveals that the contract was between Wordini and Dr Bromide and detailed Frith’s use: after her tastes deplete while working for Wordini, she would revert to Dr Bromide’s sole control as a test subject. During the implantation of the electrodes, Frith feels like “little more than a specimen in a jar on his desk” (110). During her time creating advertising experiences linking touch and taste, Dr Bromide researches the creation of the chemical link between the two. While no more than a subject for research for Dr Bromide, Frith is also at the mercy of the copywriters as Wordini tells her, “If your coinage is not out there earning interest, you

risk losing currency and ultimately your rights to unbranded LipService” (113). Frith thinks that the doctors and copywriters are “the two powers behind the patch, the two professions that held our tongues” (41). Frith’s tastes leave her vulnerable to both.

The revelation that she was the subject of the contract sparks Frith’s desire to interfere with the LipService patch provision. She programmes literature rather than branding-based speech which leads to social confusion before her arrest and trial. Frith’s lawyer, Petula Ormod, reveals that due to Frith’s “history of language offences” (158) she will not be provided with a LipService patch and that Ormod does not actually need Frith to speak anyway. She ends the only pre-trial meeting with the reminder that “the role of the law is to protect corporate identities from *crimen injuria*” (158) rather than protecting the vulnerable. Frith remains mute throughout the trial until her sentencing. The judge opens the trial by stating Frith’s guilt, before hearing evidence and deciding on the punishment. Interestingly, Butler comments that when the law is suspended for precarious populations, new exercises of state sovereignty can include “an elaboration of administrative bureaucracies in which officials now not only decide who will be tried, and who will be detained, but also have ultimate say over whether someone may be detained indefinitely or not” (2004: 51). The copywriters, not the judge, determine Frith’s (literal) sentence, delivered by Wordini before she too is forced to state it. The sentence is “I pay for Lip Disservice; I hang my tongue in shame” (169). After this trial, Frith returns to her cell, and is only released after another copywriter arranges for her to work, still mute, in the repository to meet the demand for literary LipService that Frith’s illegal patches sparked among certain copywriters.

This interest in new sources for LipService ensures that language remains branded in their society. Cavalcanti identifies “futuristic dystopias [as] stories about language” (2000: 152), and using this idea, it can be seen that the control over language in *Selling LipService* contributes to its dystopian aspect. Cavalcanti suggests that “Linguistic control and the enforcement of strict linguistic normativity symbolically stand in for other forms of social (ideological, political, institutional) control” (152). She further notes that “Contemporary feminist dystopias overtly thematize the linguistic construction of gender domination by telling stories about language as instrument of both (men’s) domination and (women’s) liberation” (152). While in *Selling LipService* language appears to be provided primarily by men, the attempt at liberation remains incomplete. Fran Desmet notes that language may be used to “keep women in their subordinated position. However [...] suppressed individuals

can use language to their advantage just as much as oppressors can” (2010: 6). She also notes that the principal character of dystopias is often one who “who pushes boundaries and who seeks to exist outside of the dominant system”, which can be regarded as “characteristic of both feminine writing and of the dystopian novel” (41). Frith’s inability, and lack of desire, to use branded language at the end of the novel, as well as the silent community’s rejection of this language, is suggestive of a rejection of patriarchal power. bell hooks also notes that feminism “does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives” (1984: 26), as Frith attempted to do with her LitService.

While Elana Gomel remarks that dystopia is often perceived “as a synonym of ‘something bad happening sometime in the future’” (2018: 31), she claims that as a literary genre, dystopia “is not merely that the future is worse than the present. Rather, the future is different” (31). Peter Seyferth observes that the classical dystopia is described by an inhabitant of a society that, despite outward appearances, does not look good from the inside (2018: 2). He views that literary dystopia as emphasising the totalitarian results of implementing utopian ideas (1). The use of Frith as the focaliser reveals her dissatisfaction with the novel’s society, while the way language is provided and the power LipService providers possess mark the world of *Selling LipService* as dystopian. Frith’s father creates a blackout poem using Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and Frith sees that by “Blacking out many of the printed words and leaving only a chosen few, Dad wrote something that defied LipService. He found a way to echo off Ovid and it shorted his neural circuits” (Baikie, 2017: 44). This control of LipService due to its provision of both written and spoken language impacts Frith’s life when she cannot read the contract she signs to work for Wordini as she becomes little more than a test subject. Stillwell also allows her to read her medical records, but as it is intended only for doctors, and other EmPath users, to read, the “trip-wording” in it slows her down. The authority control described by Frith’s father, while symbolic of a precarity-inducing society, is also linked to the authoritarianism often present in dystopian texts. The extreme control of a society is a marker of the negative future offered by the novel. Raffaella Baccolini observes that in many dystopian novels “the recovery of history and literacy [...] becomes an instrumental tool of resistance for their protagonists” (2004: 520). The book repository is therefore an important place for Frith, and her exposure to the books also contributes to her reluctance and inability to accept her society.

Frith's father describes this process of rewriting as "authority control" when Frith visits him at the archives. It is illegal to possess books as there is supposedly a "deadly library mould" (Baikie, 2017: 30); however, Frith visits the archives many times while young, and even when not wearing the hazmat suit, never contracts any illness from the books. This possibly suggests that the mould is a pretext for controlling the available stories and language, especially as only copywriters may visit the archives. Frith's father explains how the digitised copies of texts are not necessarily correct by using the example of Hans Christian Anderson's *The Emperor's New Clothes* and the brand narrative based on it. Frith realises that "the paper book was the same as the BMG corporation's brand narrative, except for the ending" (32). Her father explains this as

"In authority control, multiple writers, here Andersen and his sources, are reduced with controlled vocabulary into a single catalogue access point, the authorised file 'CEO *Sindy's Selkie Suit*, BMG Corp. copyright', which is the only version licensed for electronic publication."

Some of the LipService words he was using were difficult to understand. So I tried to explain it to myself out loud. "Other people never get to read the stories as they are down here." (32)

Another example of a changed text is Declamartiste's advert using *The Metamorphosis*. The companies control narratives and use them to endorse their products, and they change the message of the source text where it suits their product. Baccolini notes that "because it is authoritarian, hegemonic discourse shapes the narrative about the past" (2004: 520). In *Selling LipService*, it is more than just history that is reshaped as stories are rewritten to endorse LipService and become part of the branding. The difference between the endings of *CEO Sindy's Selkie Suit* and *The Emperor's New Clothes* illustrates this: in one, the emperor is noted to have been fooled, in the other, CEO Silkie learns to differentiate the quality material.

Frith attempts to share literature when she sabotages the LipService patches, and this chimes with Baccolini's assertion that recovery of literacy is an important part of the dystopian text (520). Frith's inability to defend herself at her trial adds to the dystopian element of the text

due to the extreme power of the copywriters and doctors, which is also suggested by their surveillance of Frith.

A subset of the dystopia is the critical dystopia, where there exists an enclave of hope. It may also have an open ending, suggesting that there is the potential for change in the future of the text. In *Selling LipService*, the first suggestion of hope is the mute enclave beyond the industrial district. Additionally, I believe that both Frith and Stillwell also offer a suggestion of hope to differing degrees. The mute enclave is effectively a failed attempt at changing the society, but its mere existence reveals the potential for change. The silent refuse to use the branded LipService patches and communicate through hand signs. They grow their own food, and remake clothing taken from landfills. After Frith's arrival at the silent community, she entered brand blackout and was helped by a woman's healing touch, which makes her think that "It might be easier to lie with language but touch is still manipulation – even if it feels as good as this" (Baikie, 2017: 92). This marks Frith's suspicion that the enclave will ultimately not be the community she seeks. The hand signs they use to communicate further add to Frith's disappointment. When she attempts to convey her gratitude through a new hand sign, Frith is shunned at the dinner hall, and learning that she cannot add to the hand signs leads her to "resent them almost as much as the patch" (95). The community's reluctance to add more signs, and their ignorance when it comes to LipService speech, endangers them in their greater society, as suggested by Avery's ingestion of mothballs. Frith wonders "if the mutes' silence is a great unlearning? [...] Perhaps the doctors and copywriters are counting on that, together with untreated second haemorrhages and disease" (97). Their "unlearning" suggests that their society will be unable to progress beyond its present point and may well degenerate, which means that although existing as an enclave of hope, it will ultimately fail in changing society. It also makes little impact on others as Frith had not known of its existence before Avery's death, and Wordini wonders if it could become a trend that he should commodify.

Stillwell is also a character who grants a suggestion of hope for the future of the society. He reveals that, as a child, he had a vocal tic disorder and was nearly expelled from school. Luckily, as his family was in the EmPath community and he had been recently diagnosed, he avoided admittance to "the profane asylum" (123). Cavalcanti observes that "commentators on literary dystopias have remarked that language is often shown as a means by which social control is communicated and maintained" (2000: 166). That *Selling LipService* suggests those who cannot speak "appropriately" are exiled from society, which differs from the willing

exile of the mutes, is further suggestive of the links between language, precarity, and dystopia. Despite his EmPath privilege, Stillwell does see the problems with language and aids Frith's reprogramming rebellion. After he sees the negative sides of the tainted patches, he attempts to break from Frith. In their last conversation, Frith realises that Stillwell "knew this would be [their] bitter unfriending" (Baikie, 2017: 154), but he explains that he aided in her attempt to change language because despite it failing, he believed it worthwhile to show her (and others) "the other ways with words' – what can be done with language free of branding" (149). Stillwell later reveals the location of Frith's book to the authorities before testifying at her trial, but after she is released and returns to her flat, she finds three unbranded patches from him, all with "sorry" written on them. Although he turned against Frith, Stillwell reveals a less radical attempt to change, and a less selfish vision of possibility, though it remains unrealised, and therefore only a hope, within the text.

Frith's individual ending can also be seen as suggestive of a critical dystopia as she is released from jail to work in the repository to deal with the demand for adapted literary brand narratives her patches sparked. Frith effectively receives a reduced punishment, though she is denied access to LipService. She can possibly influence which stories become retold in brand narratives, but she remains unwilling to hear the change. Travelling to and from the repository, she uses earphones to block out the chance of hearing adapted literary LipService. While Frith's failed rebellion does not appear to create further public interest in changing LipService, the unbranded patches left by Stillwell offer a limited chance to communicate with others. Also, her rejection of the rest of the world prevents her from hearing potential positive language changes. Baccolini observes that "awareness and responsibility are the conditions of the critical dystopia's citizens. A sense of sadness accompanies the awareness and knowledge that the protagonist has attained" (2004: 521). This is clear in *Selling LipService* as even Frith's mother does not want to consider her alternatives to LipService patches. Only once the trial is over does Frith accept that she alone would not have the power to change society, but instead of working with a group, she creates her own private language, and attempts to shut herself away from the world. As Sargent observes, a question raised by dystopias is: "can we make correct choices?" (1994: 26). Baccolini states that "the critical dystopia's open ending leaves its character to deal with their choices and responsibilities" (2004: 521), and in *Selling LipService*, Frith must come to terms with both her actions and her inability to change society as an individual.

Kate Sidley observes that language in *Selling LipService* is considered in many forms: “communication, as advertising copy, as art form, as means of control or commerce or human connection” (2017). Language as a form of control grants the copywriters and doctors power over their society, and this power is extended to the companies whose branding creates and is used for language. While the focus on Frith as the main character highlights her experience of precarity, other women are also shown to be vulnerable. Vulnerable women in this society are primarily those in the mute enclave, but as the text reveals that Frith’s mother undergoes a cosmetic surgery to fit her brand aesthetic and this is regarded as normal, and the only physically injured literary LipService victim Frith sees is another woman, Baikie shows that women in this society appear to be more hurt by the language control than men. Frith’s father’s identification of LipService as providing “a sickbed of incoherent narrative” (Baikie, 2017: 36) and his second stroke, as well as Stillwell’s interest in changing language to be about and for people rather than brand narratives, reveals that men do also suffer under the control, but as more named men than women enforce this control, it is suggestive of a patriarchal order. Frith’s ineffective lawyer is the only speaking woman in the trial, as the opposing lawyer and the judge are both male. It is also therefore relevant that the only named female copywriter, Verbociter, is the person to organise Frith’s freedom after her trial, although it is in service of maintaining LipService control. Frith’s release and the unbranded patches from Stillwell do offer a suggestion of hope for change in the future of their society. The control of knowledge through the quarantine of books also contributes to the dystopian aspect of the text, and the precarity of the mute enclave is additionally created by their lack of understanding of LipService drift, as highlighted by Avery’s death.

*Selling LipService* reveals a dystopian society due to the corporate control of language. Frith is not the sole possessor of her body due to her tastes ensuring her awareness of the split personality “You” who endorses the commercialism expected by their society. The focus on language reveals a feminist element to the text due to the question of who controls language and how. As Dale Spender notes, “The group which has the power to ordain the structure of language, thought and reality has the potential to create a world in which they are the central figures, while those who are not of their group are peripheral and therefore may be exploited” (1990: 143). This links to the elements of precarity and commercialism, as well as dystopia. Copywriters control the provision of language, therefore intrinsically tying it to commercialism. This commercial control reflects Klein’s research that corporations are increasingly influencing society, and questions this influence. Frith’s own precarity is due to

her vulnerability to both doctors and copywriters as a result of her tastes. Frith's trial where the corporate rights take precedence over her own reiterate their privilege and are the ultimate reveal of the dystopian influence first suggested by Frith's father's story of authority control and her sabotage of the LipService patches. Frith's rebellion fails due to its small size, and the mute community, while not fully capable of changing their society, emphasises the need for people to work together for change.

The novel as a whole suggests that futuristic dystopias can stem from high levels of commercialism, and indeed, corporate control, which results in precarious experiences for all those who are not part of the controlling class. The importance given to language cannot be underestimated as it enables this control through controlling narratives. Dale Spender's observations of a patriarchal influence on language have therefore been useful in illuminating the power possessed by those who *can* control language, even if, in the case of *Selling LipService*, this power is not definitively patriarchal. The actions of doctors and copywriters reveal their power and this impacts on other characters' experiences of precarity. The dystopian elements of this novel come through the control of LipService and the punishment of those who challenge LipService. I have argued that this novel is an example of a *critical* dystopia due to the enclaves of hope that are present both throughout the novel and in Frith's ending; although these enclaves do suggest varying levels of a power to change their society for the better.



## Conclusion

*Moxyland* (Beukes, 2008), *For the Mercy of Water* (Jayes, 2012), and *Selling LipService* (Baikie, 2017) after analysis suggest similar questions that further focus on the elements of precarity, dystopia, and commercialism. These questions can link all three of these debut works of fiction by female South African authors focussing on women characters in dystopian environments. Firstly, the influence of gender on characters' experiences of precarity and precariousness will be highlighted. The ways in which the women characters of the texts are able to share their voices and experiences within their societies can also be linked to the struggles they experience. The critical dystopian aspects of the texts will then be revealed, followed by the ways in which the corporations have power over their societies and control over knowledge-sharing.

Due to the lingering effects of apartheid, race still has an impact on members of our society. It is therefore noteworthy that race is arguably not an important factor in any of the three texts, especially when one considers that all three of the authors are white women. This dissertation does not focus on race as a factor of these South African dystopias, which leaves an opening for further research into South African (and other African) dystopias by men and by people of colour and the ways that may intersect with race and racial thinking.

While concepts of both precarity and precariousness are present in the selected texts, it is important to remember that precarity refers to the politically induced condition, while precariousness refers to a vulnerable existence due to human interdependence. The focus here will be on the ways characters experience precariousness as linked to their gender before discussing precarity. Precarity is most clearly present in *For the Mercy of Water*, but does also impact characters in *Moxyland* and *Selling LipService*.

In *For the Mercy of Water*, the precarity affected population refers clearly to women and children due to the government's unwillingness or inability to protect them from the violence inflicted by the water company. The prevalence of this Gender Based Violence suggests that precariousness is greatly impacted by gender. Other citizens are unwilling to speak against the might of the water company and so their human interdependence and support networks remain weak and vulnerable, ensuring an additional sense of precariousness.

In *Moxyland*, neither Kendra nor Lerato experience precarity or precariousness as linked to their gender, although both are vulnerable to more powerful men. Lerato's exposure to the state-sanctioned violence of precarity begins with the end of the novel, as she starts to aid in its creation as an activist/terrorist inciter. Toby, though exposed to the state-sanctioned violence at the pass protest as an unwilling bystander, experiences lesser degrees of precariousness or precarity as he has a privileged background. Tendeka on the other hand, though male, experiences precarity and precariousness due to his homosexuality, activism, and domicile. Race is less of a factor in *Moxyland* as privilege centres on the corporate class. Tendeka's poverty also increases the experience of precarity and precariousness, and he challenges this through his activism. A constant threat of disease underpins the novel, and enhances character fear after the release of the Marburg virus, and adds to the sense of precariousness.

As the main character of *Selling LipService*, Frith experiences precariousness due to her unwillingness to fit in and hide her "otherness" caused by her "tastures". The mute society also experiences both precarity and precariousness. This precariousness is shared by all in *Selling LipService* due to the ways in which language is controlled and shared. Although this language is often created by men, gender appears to have little impact on Frith's experiences. The mute enclave highlights how language contributes to precariousness as they have limited understanding of others' language. They also experience precarity due to their lack of governmental or other support: they have no doctors and must grow their own food. After breaking the law, Frith is no longer considered a citizen but relegated to silence and becoming a medical test subject. Her trial also reveals precarity as no protections are in place for her: as the state's law is designed to protect companies rather than individuals.

While all the characters experience varying degrees of precarity and precariousness, only in *For the Mercy of Water* is this precariousness inextricably linked to gender, especially because precariousness stems from human interdependence and vulnerability. Other experiences of precarity and precariousness stem from a lack of social privilege or from being othered in society like Tendeka and Frith.

As feminism has been raised as an underlying aspect of all three novels, the issue of women's ability to share their experience is implicitly raised. In *Moxyland*, this struggle to share and validate one's own experience is shown through Kendra's storyline rather than Lerato's,

although she does experience a somewhat lesser aspect of this. *Selling LipService*'s Frith also experiences this on a personal level, while *For the Mercy of Water* arguably completely revolves around the issue of women's ability to share their experiences in a world that does not want to listen to them.

In *Selling LipService*, Frith struggles not just to find her voice apart from You, but also to share her own speech. The problem with Frith's "LitService" is the same problem she notes the mute community experiencing: while people know the individual words, they don't understand the meaning the phrases convey. Frith's sabotage does become part of an attempt to share her own story but she is forced into silence when one would expect her to be able to defend herself at her trial. Frith's attempts to share her own story and own words meet with failure multiple times, and the novel ends with her creation of a private language that she refuses to share with anyone, experiences she is no longer willing to attempt to share.

*For the Mercy of Water* reveals the narrator's journey while writing a story on how the water company has hurt women and children. The challenges she faces while asking people to speak out against the company is reflective of challenges women face in a patriarchal society and the backlash they face for speaking out against those who have abused them. The narrator's journey is not necessarily the struggle to share her own experience, but to share a female experience in a patriarchal world. Women sharing their experiences can become an act of empowerment, and as Eve reveals her trauma to the narrator, she slowly gains hope for her own future and verbalises her desire to return to Mother in the valley, away from water company men. While Eve's act of sharing her story grants importance to the potential catharsis of having others listen and understand. This act of sharing suggests the #metoo movement that gained popularity in 2017 after Alyssa Milano appropriated Tarana Burke's phrase when referring to sexual abuse allegations against Harvey Weinstein. It spread on social media as other women used the hashtag to reveal that they too had faced sexual abuse or harassment.

In *Moxyland*, this struggle to share one's experience is shared by all four focalisers. Toby uses his livestreamed vlog, *Diary of a Cunt*, while Tendeka resorts to graffiti and activism. However, my focus is on Kendra and Lerato. Kendra's decision to accept the Ghost branding is at least partially influenced by her desire to have an impact on her surroundings. She also uses her photography to share her story and to record the progress of the tattoo growth and

nanobot influence on her body. Due to this branding, her words and actions may not reflect poorly on Ghost and she is ultimately silenced, through her death, due to this. Lerato appears to show no interest in sharing her experience, rather focusing on progressing up the corporate ladder, though her association with Toby and the activists reveal attempts to rebel and a possible desire for true freedom.

While Frith, Eve, and the unnamed narrator are all ultimately able to share their experiences, Kendra and Lerato face difficulties in doing the same. Kendra's death and Lerato's capture ensure that their rebellions and attempts to share themselves are ultimately unsuccessful.

As all of the female protagonists experience difficulties while navigating their societies, there are both similarities and differences in these struggles. While I do regard Kendra as the primary female protagonist of *Moxyland*, Lerato will still be included to a lesser extent in this discussion. All four of these women have some interest in creative pursuits: photography, marketing, writing, and the creation of language.

Perhaps the most obvious connection between protagonists is between Kendra and Frith, who can both be regarded as something other than fully human in their societies. Kendra accepts the Ghost nanobots into her body for all their potential health benefits, while Frith was born with the power of difference through her synaesthesia, and discovers that her mother also experiences these tastes. Frith's tastes mark her as an outcast in society because they ensure her refusal to conform. Frith uses these tastes to enhance marketing campaigns while working for Wordini just as Kendra's self becomes part of the Ghost campaign.

Kendra, Lerato, Frith, and the unnamed narrator are all surrounded by powerful men, who either use or abuse them. Kendra's relationship with Jonathan has become somewhat one-sided though he still controls her art exhibition selections. Mr Muller, her photography and printing mentor, judges Kendra's subject choices and does not allow her to print her photos without his supervision and control. Andile, who arranged the Ghost sponsorship, is another man who has power over Kendra and he agrees to her euthanasia with Dr Precious. Lerato's workplace does not appear to place importance on gender. However, after her sabotage is discovered, Stefan Thuys implicitly threatens her with murder if she does not agree to work as a rebel inciter. Frith becomes Dr Bromide's test subject even while she is vulnerable to Wordini's provision of unbranded speech. It is also revealed that both men had

had Frith under observation since her tastes had been discovered. Frith's male school principal had also suggested the creation of Frith's conforming personality, Faith. *For the Mercy of Water's* unnamed narrator is raped by a company man and cannot speak out against him in a society that fears the potential repercussions of opposing the water company, and faces the threat of rape again by the airline pilot. All of these women characters are vulnerable to actions men take against them and receive limited, if any, protection against these men.

The unnamed narrator and Frith both fight against their silencing by society. The narrator resorts to an international market to tell her story and reveal what happened to Eve in the valley, while Frith attempts to recreate language. Frith's creation of "LitService" comes only after her silencing as a result of double patching, but after her trial and now permanent silence, she creates another private language, without the connection to literature.

After her trial, Frith is also used to adapt her rebellion for controlled public consumption by working in the archives. Lerato experiences a similar punishment as she is forced into posing as an activist/terrorist online in order to control the rebellious movements for the corporations. While Frith and Lerato are punished in-text by those with power, Kendra's euthanasia, while a punishment, is more emblematic of the control the corporations have over her.

Kendra is the only female protagonist to die; and Frith retreats into herself. Her creation of private language and inability to speak, as well as her unwillingness to hear new LipService means she has limited interaction with other members of her society. The change in *For the Mercy of Water's* unnamed narrator is her new-found willingness to trust others, a trust Frith now lacks. While Frith and the unnamed narrator both have some success in sharing their stories, Lerato and Kendra have less success in this endeavour. All of these women have an impact on their society which can highlight the ways in which the texts are critical dystopias, in other words, dystopias that retain an element of hope for social change.

While all three texts contain elements of a critical dystopia, the way it is presented differs. Baccolini observes that "the critical dystopia's open ending leaves its characters to deal with their choices and responsibilities" (2004: 521). *Moxyland* ends on an ambiguous note with a healthy Toby walking away from Tendeka's death scene, while *For the Mercy of Water* is

more hopeful with the narrator running towards an airplane that will rescue her. Frith's ending in *Selling LipService* is more bleak than hopeful, but the influence she has had on her society, through the creation of LitService and the publicity of her trial, ensures an underlying element of hope for change. However, Frith's silencing of her surroundings ensures that if this change does occur, she may be deaf to it.

The glimmer of hope implicit in these dystopian societies is that of people working together to change and improve the world. While there are still social divisions in the South African setting of *Moxyland*, the emphasis is on citizens working together against the controlling class divisions and power granted to private corporations. *For the Mercy of Water* and *Selling LipService* also privilege those who work for companies in charge of water and language respectively and highlight the need for social support to combat this power. The narratives that revolve around women characters in increasingly controlled commercial societies also suggest to me women's reluctance to allow for this control as they are willing to rebel, with varying degrees of success.

As has been discussed in previous chapters, each text reveals corporate power in different ways through the differing appearance of these corporations. While *Moxyland* reveals corporations which are most like those readers are used to, the exaggeration of their power creates a dystopian effect. This corporate power is revealed through its inescapable presence and the pervasiveness of advertising, as well as through the privileging of the corporate class. *For the Mercy of Water*, however, hides the specific corporation but does not attempt to hide its power. The water company has extreme influence and indeed some control over society due to their provision of water. Very few people are willing to go on record as criticising the company, and the company works closely with the government to retain this power. *Selling LipService* transfers power from corporations to copywriters who work *for* these brands, which still reveals a power through presence, a presence that Frith attempts to reject. While the text labels relatively few corporations/companies, the influence on society due to the provision of speech should not be underestimated. Indeed, only after the privileged class of copywriters is affected by Frith's LitService is she arrested, and it is the copywriters who create her sentence, not the judge. Through limiting potential speech, companies take power in society, for how can people rebel without words? The end of the text takes this a step further with the introduction of Censory LipService.

All three texts inextricably link power and privilege through corporate action though the actions they take differ. The ability of those in power to control how knowledge is shared in the selected texts emphasises the dystopias as it enables control of the population. This control comes through the government-corporate alliance and the creation of terrorists who can then be more easily silenced in *Moxyland*, to the censorship and climate of unease in *For the Mercy of Water*, and the literal control of language and books, combined with the development of Censory LipService, in *Selling LipService*. While Frith, the unnamed narrator, Kendra, and other characters oppose this control, it raises the question of how those in precarious positions, particularly women, are able to share their own experiences. The elements of hope in the texts ensure that, despite the bleak aspects of authoritarian control and prevalent Gender-Based Violence, the novels are examples of critical dystopias.

These texts, as examples of speculative fiction, all offer visions of potential, if exaggerated, futures. *Moxyland* was written in 2008, but the emphasis on corporate privilege is still viewed as a potential future, though differing in appearance, in *Selling LipService*. *For the Mercy of Water*, rather than focusing on that privilege, uses the current fears of water crises to portray a vision of a drought-ridden world where privilege is granted to those who are associated with the provision of water. All three of these texts are debut fiction from female South African authors whose speculative fiction is influenced by real fears for the future of the country. Both *Moxyland* and *Selling LipService* show a future with extreme corporate control, though the appearance of the control differs. *For the Mercy of Water* uses current fears of water crises and shows a country under drought. Titlestad suggests that speculative cautionary dystopias enable readers to reflect on, and possibly address, consequences of current actions (2015: 37). These actions may be the importance given to cellular devices; ignoring or disregarding the abuse of women; and the creeping influence of corporations on our culture, respectively. The use of female focalisers suggests a centring of women and highlights their precarity. While neither *For the Mercy of Water* or *Selling LipService* name their geographic setting, the authors grant them an African *Zeitgeist*.

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