

Johannesburg as Dystopia: South African Science Fiction as Political Criticism

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

at

Rhodes University

by

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18k3649

November 2019

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Acknowledgement

This project would not have been made possible without the gracious support of the Andrew W. Mellon Urban Connections in African Popular Imaginaries research project. I would also like to thank the Department of Literary Studies in English at Rhodes University for hosting me.

I would like to extend my sincere and unending thanks to my ever-patient supervisor, Professor Dan Wylie; thank you for always being willing to chat over coffee and digestive biscuits. Thank you for your commitment to keeping me from becoming too panicked and/or tangential. Thank you for choosing my project and for your mentorship and guidance throughout.

Without my family this project would not have been possible; you have all contributed in such unique and important ways and I am inexplicably grateful for your influence. Mom, thank you for your fierce allyship, for hour-long phone calls, and for being tender when I needed it most. Dad, thank you for being willing to discuss my work with me, for the most thoughtful care packages, and always being willing to read anything I send you. Keags, thank you for always listening to me and staying proud regardless; for teaching me, and for rants about everything from soccer to hummus. Miem, thank you for fostering my love of reading and for bragging about me like only a gran can.

To Gidion, thank you for showing me so much love, support, and patience; thank you that I can always count on you for anything (and sometimes even everything). For her eternal camaraderie, encouragement and unflinching friendship, I would like to thank Leisha.

This thesis would not be what it is, and I would not be who I am without the kindness and love of Ian Stewart Junior, Tahzeeb Akram, Jon Wilson, Jordan Stier, Chelsey Wilken, and Michael Simons.

Abstract

This thesis will interrogate the spatial dynamics and configurations of one of the country's most prominent cities: Johannesburg. Johannesburg has been, and continues to be, a central focus in the nation's imaginary. There is a trend within South African science fiction (sf) – both literature and film – to portray Johannesburg as a dystopian, post-law, poverty-stricken space as a means of conceptualising the socioeconomic situation within the country. This study will isolate Johannesburg-based works of sf and interrogate why authors and filmmakers disproportionately return to this setting. Investigated are three contemporary works, namely, *Zoo City* (2010) by Lauren Beukes, Neill Blomkamp's film, *Chappie* (2015), and *Dub Steps* (2015) by Andrew Miller. This study explores the ways in which South African works of sf serve as social and political critique in the post-apartheid era of financial disparity, the formation of new boundaries, divisions of space and privilege, and the dereliction of critical infrastructure. The primary methodology of this thesis is that of Marxist literary analysis (specifically with reference to Louis Althusser's theoretical models), which will be conducted alongside discussions of authentic history of the country as well as political developments in order to illustrate how South African sf critically engages with, and succinctly critiques, its context. The aesthetics of African sf are inseparable from the politics of the past and the current moment and through the aesthetics of the future, South Africans can reimagine the politics of the now. This study therefore also revisits a selection of non-sf Johannesburg-set novels published post-1925 and argues that these texts can be studied as early examples of South African dystopian writing. In doing so, this study illustrates that dystopian writing about and in South Africa is not an advent of the 21st century, but an extension of a long history of critical engagement. This thesis suggests that the dystopian genre is helpful in reframing the issues of the present (and the past) so that some form of meaningful change is theorized. The underlying impulse of dystopian cultural production is ultimately hopeful: a worse context is imagined to warn society of its follies so that these shortcomings and issues can be corrected, thereby avoiding the disastrous world(s) portrayed in the fiction. In this way, this study contends that local sf should not be inextricably linked to the melancholia that thoughts of dystopia bring about. Rather, the nuanced criticism contained within these dystopian texts is testament to the country's ever-enduring spirit of change and transformation.

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Introduction: Conceptualising a Dystopian Johannesburg

As sites where the duration and depredation of objects, persons, and memories take place in time, cities are haunted by their own histories.

Martin J. Murray, *Taming the Disorderly City* (2008:39)

Keith Brooke suggests that science fiction (sf) is “the most political of all genres of imaginative writing” and that it “posits what-ifs and then sets out to explore their impact” (2012:126). African sf may be in its early stages of widespread recognition, but it has quickly become a mainstay of African cultural production. Matthew Omelsky argues that African sf “must be taken seriously alongside the now canonical genres of the continent, such as the old guard realism of Chinua Achebe, the experimental cinema of Djibril Diop Mambéty, and the transnational modernism of Chimamanda Adichie and Alain Mabanckou” (2014:35). The African imaginary is geared towards tackling problems of ecology, power, poverty, history and temporality, and sf is contributing to the critical discourse on these issues and subjects. Speculative fiction and sf on the continent reconfigure the African space in ways that help Africans grapple with their socioeconomic, cultural, and global contexts: popular imaginings speak to the lived reality of Africans in new and novel ways, making them invaluable in their critical richness and complexity. The aesthetics of African sf are inseparable from the politics of the current moment and through the aesthetics of the future, Africans can reimagine the politics of the now (Omelsky, 2014:49).

Sf consumption and production has thrived on the African continent in the last decade, much of this dissemination taking place online in blog posts and forums, as well as in critical short story anthologies¹. While much of the critical focus has been restricted to contemporary sf in Africa, it is crucial to note that African sf has a long and rich lineage which often goes unrecognised because it is aesthetically different to the canonical sf of the global North, and has thus not been recognised as fitting into the genre by the European and American academics who have shaped the vast majority of sf theorisation over the last century (Stier, 2019:1). However, South Africa has been at the helm of this contemporary outpouring of sf as far back as 1924 with the international publication of Ferdinand Berthoud’s short story titled “The Man Who Banished Himself” (Omelsky, 2014:34). Niell Blomkamp and Lauren Beukes have become so popular both locally and abroad that their productions have become somewhat

¹ *AfroSF* (2012), *AfroSFv2* (2015), and *AfroSFv3* (2018) edited by Ivor W. Hartmann; *Africa SF* (2013) edited by Mark Bould; and *Mothership: Tales from Afrofuturism and Beyond* (2013) edited by Brian Campbell and Edward Austin Hall.

synonymous with the genre's growth in South Africa (and Africa as a whole). South Africa's tumultuous history has proved rich context for the flourishing of sf, which more often than not is informed by apartheid and its ever-present legacy.

The notion of science fiction being inherently political will guide my analysis of the critical nature of the genre, specifically in a South African context. The critical nature of the genre engages with the country's history to such a degree that Joan-Mari Barendse calls South African works of dystopian fiction "a new form of South African struggle literature" (2012:7). More specifically, I will interrogate the spatial dynamics and configurations of one of the country's most prominent cities: Johannesburg. This city has been, and continues to be, a central focus in the nation's imaginary. There is a trend within South African sf (both literature and film) to portray Johannesburg as a dystopian, post-law, poverty-stricken space as a means of conceptualising the socioeconomic situation within the country (Barendse, 2012). My study will isolate works of sf that are set in Johannesburg and I interrogate why authors and filmmakers disproportionately return to this setting as opposed to other South African cities which may arguably present the same historical fullness.

I investigate three contemporary works, namely *Zoo City* (2010) by Lauren Beukes, Neill Blomkamp's 2015 film, *Chappie*, and *Dub Steps* (2015) by Andrew Miller. My study aims to explore the ways in which South African works of sf serve as social and political critique in the post-apartheid era of financial disparity, the formation of new boundaries, divisions of space and privilege, and the dereliction of critical infrastructure. The primary methodology of this thesis is that of detailed Marxist literary analysis (specifically with reference to Louis Althusser's theoretical models), which will be conducted alongside discussions of the country's actual history and political developments in order to illustrate how South African sf critically engages with, and succinctly critiques, its context.

The dystopian² mode of writing shifts these social ills into renewed focus by showing an awareness of the advances of technology that connect, divide, and in some ways, control us (such as surveillance and social media), as well as new political ideologies and changes in the post-apartheid social climate. Analysis of contemporary sf shows that apartheid-era boundaries have not disappeared, but have rather been redefined. Once consisting of curfews, homelands, and permits, these repressive boundaries have transformed into security booms, gated communities, barbed wire, and guard huts. South African sf consistently seems to turn to

² My use of "dystopian" is not restricted to associations of a genre of bleak futurism; rather, I use the term as an adjective to expand on critical or unpromising descriptions from literature(s) of the past and present as well as the traditional association of future projections.

Johannesburg for inspiration in order to expose the social ills of the country as a whole. This intricate metonymy encourages readers to consider afresh the South African social situation with regard to prejudice, crime, and inequality. In a largely desensitised, economically volatile nation, this metonymy brings into focus the uncomfortable truths South Africans mostly neglect to deal with directly as a nation.

I will begin by conceptualising dystopian Johannesburg within a historical framework in order to illustrate its changing forms and representations. The idea of Johannesburg as dystopic is not new, as racial prejudice and the normalization of violence have plagued the city since its inception as a mining settlement in the nineteenth century. To note some of many possible examples, R. R. R. Dhlomo laments the immorality of the city in *An African Tragedy* (1928); Peter Abrahams writes about the prejudices against working-class non-whites in *Mine Boy* (1946); Alan Paton explores alienation, racial dynamics, and crime in *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948); and more recently, Ivan Vladislavić represents Johannesburg as eerily and subliminally dystopian in *The Restless Supermarket* (2001).

The infrastructural and social changes that have taken place post-apartheid create further complex and unequal intersections within the populace (Bremner, 2010; Christopher, 2001; Holland & Roberts, 2002; Murray, 2008). The spatial divide between the rich, who live in the leafy and fenced-off suburbs (who are sheltered and safe), and the poor, largely migrant population that is relegated to the city centre (who are subsequently victimized and neglected), provides a site from which science fiction draws inspiration. Because this trend reflects the global capitalist situation and its intersections of wealth and privilege, and of space and power, a Marxist analysis is especially appropriate. Only kilometres apart, two divergent worlds lie, each with their own set of socioeconomic codes and issues: science fiction flourishes in this divided space, as there are innumerable complexities that lie beneath the obvious dividedness of the city. This genre presents the social situation in Johannesburg in a unique, provocative and imaginative way in that it proposes futuristic, speculative depictions that extend certain aspects of past literatures.

With reference to the selected primary works, many critical writings have been published on Neill Blomkamp's more popular film, *District 9* (2009) – despite its racially problematic and culturally insensitive depictions of Nigerian immigrants as nothing more than drug lords and gang members - and it is widely regarded as South Africa's first science fiction film. *Chappie*, however, has been neglected critically; the film lends itself to analysis from an Althusserian Marxist perspective as the state's repressive apparatus (that is, the military and police force) is depicted as largely privatised and modernised, raising issues of corporate greed,

corruption, and the safety of citizens. Bryant William Sculos states that *Chappie* is about “humanity’s dialectically creative and destructive potential”; his article critiques “thoroughly undemocratic” neoliberal capitalism in South Africa (2015:2); the results of which are evident in the events within the film. Neoliberalism is seen to be at the heart of many global crises, such as economic meltdowns, the collapse of public health, and spikes in child poverty. This system relies on the ideology that recasts inequality as virtuous; the market, it is claimed, ensures that “everyone gets what they deserve”, when that is far from the lived reality (Monbiot, 2016). *Chappie* is a prime example of the political role that science fiction can play in ambitiously critiquing global superstructures from a unique and context-specific foothold in the South African film industry. My analysis of *Chappie* will include discussion of Ishtiaq Shukri’s novel, *I See You* (2014), as Shukri’s text engages with notions of the “deep state”, similarly illuminating the role of corporations in state governance.

Cheryl Stobie similarly connects the concerns of *Zoo City* to “the current mood of the South African nation”; the novel comments on the “disenchantment and melancholy” that followed on from “post-apartheid euphoria” (Stobie, 2012:367). Moreover, Stobie calls for socially aware writing in order to “lead to a mutation of thought by questioning issues such as rights to a fair share, reciprocity and democracy” (2012:367). Neville Hoad (2016) has analysed *Zoo City* as “a complicated set of allegories of environmental disaster, HIV/AIDS, xenophobic violence, and contemporary African identity” and notes that the novel is heavily informed by South Africa’s apartheid and post-apartheid history. The novel depicts the lifelong punishment and stigmatization of criminals by ‘animalling’ them, that is, each criminal is assigned an animal which they have to keep with them, and this animal serves as a signifier of criminality to other citizens. Althusser’s ideation on the state’s repressive apparatus will guide my analysis of this mode of punishment; additionally, Althusserian notions of power maintenance through class alliances will be helpful in my study of the obvious dividedness of the city. Although there is a relatively large body of academic work on *Zoo City* (Dickson, 2014; Graham, 2014; Stobie, 2012), this critical engagement has not focused on divisions of space and privilege, or the system of governance in the country, and I see these elements as critical to the subversive narrative of the text.

Andrew Miller’s *Dub Steps* is a comparatively new text, and a literature review yielded no published studies of the novel. In the future projected in the novel, humans have, for the most part, disappeared, and the remaining few have to learn to work together in a society that they structure for themselves without state control. The novel depicts the city of Johannesburg as overgrown and overtaken by the unbridled forces of nature: it is a return to a “hellish Eden”

(Van Wyk, 2015) in which humans have regained free will, devoid of dogma or socialised norms. *Dub Steps* is ripe for study through an Althusserian lens, precisely because there is an absence of Repressive State Apparatus and ideology as a whole (which is so evident in my other primary texts), so readers are privy to speculation about how individuals would potentially survive without state control and restriction. I argue that Miller invites us to consider the role that the government and state-sanctioned ideologies play in our lives, and allows us to question their necessity and efficacy. Miller raises provocative questions of whether totalitarianism is inevitable and whether oppressive social structures will simply reassert themselves even once trade, land ownership, and social hierarchy have supposedly been removed.

Theoretically, Louis Althusser's notions of Ideological State Apparatuses (the media, the legal system, gender, the family, and all associated means of socialisation) and Repressive State Apparatus (namely, the police force and army) will structure my analysis (Althusser, 1994:110). Althusser states that ideology posits individuals as subjects and is inescapable; in short, "man is an ideological animal by nature" (2004 [1969]:698), and ideology imposes on our lives without us knowing it is doing so. This is an important notion in the context of my study, as although the characters in the novels might envision themselves as being free, ethical subjects, they are in fact at the mercy of the dominant ideology that infiltrates their lives: they are all "concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects" within their systems (Althusser, 2004 [1969]:699). Althusser theorises that "there is no practice except by and in an ideology" and there is "no ideology except by the subject and for subjects" (2004 [1969]:697). Johannesburg is the way it is (in literature and in reality) because it has been made so by individuals, as subjects of ideology – it is not simply a strange coincidence that it is seen to exhibit the characteristics of a dystopia. The formation of the city has been vulnerable to oppressive and elitist practices, regime shifts, and the ebb and flow of global capital; Johannesburg's history can be traced alongside the history of the dominant ideologies at any given point in time.

Introducing Althusser

Althusser's work has "consistently provoked ... passionate response" from other theorists, including prominent Marxist scholars (Sprinker, 1995:201). The main critique regarding his body of work is that the theorisation lacks a clear definition of terms and that generally his texts contain an absence of "pristine theoretical consistency" (Sprinker, 1995:202). Moreover,

Althusser's theoretical rejection of human-centred agency and his insistence on the "scientificity" of his theory have been the cause of controversy (Cohen, 1992:326). However, I propose that Althusser's notions of State Apparatuses will be illuminating to my study of the fiction, despite the theory's limitations.

Political theorists Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels penned what is now regarded as one of the most influential texts in communist thought and political philosophy, namely, *The Communist Manifesto*, which was published in 1848 and has become a springboard for much heated political and philosophical discussion. Although the text consists only of a preamble and four chapters, it has been at the forefront of the critiques of capitalism and the promotion of socialism globally (Brians, 2016:¶4). *The Communist Manifesto* outlines how different systems of belief (or ideologies) emerge to justify the position of the ruling class and to persuade the masses to accept their exploitation. The theory posits that the most fundamental social conditions that must be examined are the relationship between classes which themselves arise depending on how society organises production; and the notion that different ways of organising production give rise to different classes. History has known a number of different forms of class society, but the common feature is a minority ruling class that exploits the working majority by expropriating surplus wealth created by their repetitive and alienating labours.

According to Marxist thought, it is the conflicting interests of different classes that are the real social basis upon which racial prejudices, discrimination and oppression are formed and maintained. In the struggles between classes, differences of race, gender, age, sexuality, and religion are frequently given an antagonistic form, leading to corresponding ideologies of racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, and religious prejudice. Marxism's dialectical materialism seeks to interrogate the development of social conditions as an ever-compounding amalgamation of processes and interactions. This means that Marxism recognises that ideas and ideologies can themselves interact with the economic forces that originally created them, adding layers of complexity to social conditions (Labasebenzi, 2015:12). One of the most recognized theorists who has analysed the ways in which ideologies determine lived realities is Louis Althusser, and despite the controversial nature of his work and his personal life³, his writings have remained central to Marxist conceptualisations of social conditions.

³ Althusser's life was punctuated by severe periods of mental illness and in 1980, he murdered his wife, Hélène Rytmann.

Louis Althusser was regarded as the leading Structuralist Marxist philosopher in France in the 1960s. Fundamental to Marxist political theory and criticism is the notion of ideology and its effects on society, and Althusser outlines the notion of ideology in two critical essays, namely ‘Marxism and Humanism’ (1965) and ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’ (1969). The latter has become integral to the debate over the meaning of the term ‘ideology’, as the word has been notoriously abstract and therefore challenging to define and delineate.

Althusserian criticism’s Marxist orientation will be helpful when assessing the social ramifications of the wealth gap and resulting spatial divide in South Africa⁴ as depicted in dystopian portrayals of inner-city Johannesburg. Althusser’s argument is somewhat dense and intricate, but in essence, he conceptualises ideology as “one particular form of cognition as the product of one particular type of signifying practice” (Bennet, 1979:113). He describes ideology, which traditionally had been characterized as a species of “false consciousness”, as a set of practices and institutions that sustain a “representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser, 2004 [1969]:694). In any historical era, the dominant ideology embodies, perpetuates, and serves to legitimise the interests of the dominant economic and social class (Abrams & Harpham, 2009:181). Althusser separates his argument in ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses’ into two main theses:

- (i) *Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.*

Althusser notes that the “world outlooks” of individuals (such as religious ideology, ethical ideology, legal ideology and political ideology) often do not correspond with their lived reality (Althusser, 2004 [1969]:693). That is, these “world outlooks”, as he refers to them, are largely imaginary; that is, their ties to reality are non-existent. These ideas do not correspond to reality, and therefore constitute an illusion; they do, however, allude to reality, and need only be “interpreted” to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation of that world. In short, Althusser concludes that ideology is both simultaneously illusion and allusion.

This “interpretation” is multifaceted and therefore can exist and function multitudinously, but what is important is that we are aware of his central concern, namely: in ideology “men represent their real conditions of existence to themselves in an imaginary form” (Althusser, 2004 [1969]:694). He is also aware of the fact that individuals feel the need to have

⁴ Terry Eagleton states that there is “no need to drag politics into literary theory...as it has been there from the beginning” (1992:194).

this “imaginary transposition” of their real conditions of existence in order to “represent to themselves” their real conditions of existence. Althusser questions this “need” and arrives at two conclusions with regard to the origin thereof:

1. In the 18th century, priests and despots are responsible for creating and disseminating these “Beautiful Lies” of religious code in order to get ordinary individuals to obey them. There is therefore a cause for the imaginary transposition of the real conditions of existence: that cause is the existence of a small number of powerful men who base their domination and exploitation of the “people” on a falsified representation of the world which they have created in order to enslave other minds by dominating their imaginations.

2. This cause/origin is the material alienation which reigns in the conditions of existence of individuals themselves. This is the idea that individuals make themselves an alienated (and therefore, imaginary) representation of their conditions of existence because these conditions of existence are themselves alienating. This notion ties into Marxist ideas of “alienated labour” and estrangement. In order to make sense of their exploitation, repression, and poor social conditions, workers have to project an imaginary sense of the world to themselves.

In conclusion, Althusser states: “[w]hat is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live” (2004 [1969]:695).

(ii) *Ideology has a material existence.*

While discussing the ideological State apparatuses and their practices, Althusser communicates that each of them is the realization of an ideology (the unity of these different regional ideologies such as religious, ethical, legal, political and aesthetic being assured by their subjection to the ruling ideology). An ideology always exists in an apparatus and its practice(s); this existence is material. The illusion/allusion finds a certain existence in reality as it influences the way in which people live their lives; it exists in a plethora of modalities, and is by no means singular (Althusser, 2004 [1969]:695).

An individual behaves in a certain way, adopts a particular everyday attitude, and participates in certain regular practices that are those of the ideological apparatus on which the ideas depend that the individual has in all consciousness freely chosen as a subject. In this way,

ideology is manifested in real-world practices because people behave in line with their beliefs, or subscription to religious, ethical, political ideologies. An individual acts upon these ideas that constitute an ideology, and therefore, as a 'free' subject, must inscribe meaning to the material actions they partake in. In every case, the ideology of ideology thus recognizes, despite its imaginary distortion, that the "ideas" of a human subject exist in their actions, or ought to exist in their actions, and if that is not the case, it inscribes other ideas corresponding to the actions (however perverse or deviant) that they perform. The theory argues that an individual's ideas are their "material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of that subject" (2004 [1965]:697). Althusser points out that "these practices are governed by the *rituals* in which these *practices* are inscribed, within the *material existence of an ideological apparatus*⁵ be it only a small part of that apparatus: a small mass in a small church, a funeral, a minor match at a sports club, a school day, a political party meeting, etc." (2004 [1969]:696). It therefore appears that the subject acts insofar as they are set into action by the following system (set out in the order of its real determination): ideology existing in a material ideological apparatus, prescribing material practices governed by a material ritual, and which practices exist in the material actions of a subject acting in all consciousness according to their belief(s).

Another central point of Althusser's theory is that ideology interpellates individuals as subjects; that is, there is no ideology except for the subject(s) and by the subject(s). The category of the subject is constitutive of all ideology, but simultaneously, the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of "constituting" concrete individuals as subjects. In the interaction of this double constitution exists the functioning of all ideology, ideology being nothing but its functioning in the material forms of existence of that functioning (Althusser, 2004 [1969]:698). Althusser notes that everyone is always a subject of ideology, and therefore everyone is constantly reinforcing a specific ideology or set of ideologies, even if this is done unconsciously. At the heart of the matter, Althusser claims that individuals are always already subjects; ideology imposes on our lives and implicitly dictates how and why we do things.

Judith Butler has been critical of this aspect of Althusser's theory as she believes that his theory posits subjection and subjectivity as seeming to function as a version of the story of original sin: we are born guilty, and in response we subject ourselves to the law. Furthermore,

⁵ Italics are Althusser's own.

Butler is critical of the fact that Althusser presents ideology's interpellation as unavoidable and irresistible, and that this "divine demand", experienced by the subject as a pure obligation, is presented in its psychological form as a nagging guilt (Lampert, 2015:125). If Butler's account is correct, then Althusser's theory of ideology would seem to rest on some (unacknowledged) feeling of obligation; this, then is why Butler charges that in Althusser's account "the efficacy of ideology consists in part in the formation of conscience", and that this "prior doctrine of conscience" is "unelaborated" within Althusser's theory (Butler, 1997:114). Butler lays out a theory of conscience as a retroactive foundation of subjecthood, a motivation for clinging to one's (already constituted) subjecthood and defending oneself from the "accusation" that one is a "bad subject." The shift in emphasis from guilt to "passionate attachment" is at the heart of Butler's theory of interpellation. The efficacy of ideology is not driven by fear or lack, but instead by an attachment to one's own subjecthood and all of the ideologies that collectively constitute it (Lampert, 2015:125). Butler's critical engagement calls for the theory to "make room" for what we might call "resisting our fate". It would seem that Butler is willing to accept the general, theological structure of Althusser's theory, but she believes that a clearer account of conscience might also provide us with the means to resist ideology's influence. As we will see, such resistance is a primary drive of sf plots.

No meaningful stance is taken by Althusser on the mental activity of the subjects, specifically that which does not manifest itself in the material. Individuals' musings and thoughts do not always find a physical outlet in the world – trivialities rush through the human brain constantly, but do not find themselves being expressed in any observable way. Althusser makes no note of this, as his preoccupation with the material tends to ignore the more nuanced cognitive realities of the individual. Theorists of the psychoanalytic school of thought might potentially argue that all thoughts within the brain have value, and the unconscious should be studied just as meticulously as the conscious⁶. Even if it is accepted that individuals are all already subjects, I argue that this theoretical notion could benefit from a more comprehensive consideration of individuals' non-material conceptualisations and beliefs that may never manifest themselves in deeds or communications; it seems somewhat rudimentary and naive to ignore the parenthetical cognitive functioning of the individual and focus solely and explicitly on the material manifestations of human thought. Individuals' thoughts are shaped by their context, and in turn, by the dominant ideology, but surely potential resistance to this

⁶ See: Carl Jung's *Psychology of the Unconscious* (1912), Sigmund Freud's *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), as well as Jacques Lacan's *The Insistence of the Letter in the Unconscious* (1966).

ideology starts as a dormant musing in the unconscious. I suggest that Althusser's theory, to some extent, robs individuals of their capacity for cognitive agency and the aptitude for independent thought, and in this way, fails to account for all the intricacies of human cognition.

It is however important to note that Althusser used much of famed psychoanalytical theorist, Jacques Lacan's work as a basis for his understanding of ideology, and that this is indicative of an awareness of psychoanalytical theorists and their preoccupations. Unlike Marx's earlier conceptions of ideology, Althusser approximates ideology to Lacan's understanding of "reality", that is, the world we construct around us after our entrance into the "symbolic order"⁷ (Felluga, 2011:¶1). According to Althusser (similarly to Lacan), it is impossible to access the "Real conditions of existence" due to our unavoidable reliance on language; however, through a rigorous, "scientific" approach to society, history, and economics, we can come closer to perceiving if not those "Real conditions", then at least the ways that we are inscribed in ideology by complex and dynamic processes of recognition (Felluga, 2011:1). Althusser deems it an impossibility for individuals to recognize their context(s), histories, relationships, and societal roles independently of psychological ideological permeation, but he assigns value to individuals' recognition of the ideological permeation in question – to be aware of the dominant ideology is one step closer to the "Real" conditions of existence.

Althusser's texts are self-reflexive in that he identifies both the reader and writer (himself) as upholding and creating ideology in perpetuity; his theories in themselves are examples of ideology and he is acutely aware of this fact, and he uses this to reinforce his arguments in general. He makes sure to approach conclusions with a degree of reservation, and invites readers to engage with his works, as he is aware of their status as ultimately ideological in and of themselves.

Althusser summarises what he has discovered about ideology in general. To paraphrase: the structure of ideology ensures simultaneously⁸:

- I. the interpellation of "individuals" as subjects;
- II. their subjection [an individual's compliance] to Subject [ideology];

⁷ Lacan's work on the "symbolic order" is made up of the social world of linguistic communication, intersubjective relations, knowledge of ideological conventions, and the acceptance of the law. Dino Felluga (2011) summarises as such: "[o]nce a child enters into language and accepts the rules and dictates of society, it is able to deal with others". Moreover, through the acceptance of the language's rules, an individual is able to enter a community of others. The symbolic, through language, is "the pact which links ... subjects together in one action" (Lacan quoted in Miller, [1954] 1991).

⁸ See Althusser, 2004 [1969]:701.

- III. the mutual recognition of subjects [individuals] and Subject [ideology], the subjects' recognition of each other, and finally the subjects' recognition of themselves;
- IV. the absolute guarantee that everything really is so, and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right.

Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses

The theorisation that Althusser is arguably most recognised for is his notion of the state apparatuses, which he argues are hugely influential in subjects' lives, and how subjects are encouraged and allowed to live these lives. This theory places great emphasis on the role of the state and how it functions both discreetly and overtly to steer its citizens into compliance. Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) include, for example, the government, the army, the police, the courts, and the prisons. 'Repressive' suggests that this state apparatus ultimately "functions by violence" – which includes administrative repression, a kind of non-physical violence (Althusser, 1971 [1984]:17). Althusser differentiates Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) by defining them as "a certain number of realities which present themselves to the immediate observer in the form of distinct and specialised institutions", and these include:

- the religious ISA (for example, the systems of different churches, mosques, and synagogues)
- the educational ISA (for example, the systems of different public and private schools)
- the family ISA
- the legal ISA
- the political ISA (for example, the political system, including the various parties and structures)
- the trade-union ISA
- the communications ISA (for example, press, radio, television, and media)
- the cultural ISA (for example, literature, arts and sports)

There is a plurality of ISAs and what connects them may not be obvious at first glance, but Althusser notes that many of these institutions exist within the private domain, whereas RSAs are primarily public, or obviously state-controlled. However, what is important is not whether they are 'public' or 'private', but rather how they function: private institutions can very easily function as an apparatus/tool of the state (Althusser, 1971 [1984]:18). RSAs function by means of violence and repression, whereas ISAs function by ideology. It is only logical to recognize

that ISAs cannot function without levels of repression (even if it is simply symbolic), and RSAs cannot function without a certain level of ideology (to ensure their own cohesion and reproduction); what matters is how these apparatuses function in order to dominate, and this primary functioning defines them. Althusser is careful to state that an institution cannot function exclusively by repression or solely by ideology. State Apparatuses achieve a ‘double functioning’ (depending on context, these state apparatuses – ideological or repressive – function either predominantly or secondarily) by repression and by ideology (Althusser, 1971 [1984]:19-20)⁹.

ISAs function predominantly by ideology (as stated above), and they are unified by this functioning, as they all inevitably fall under the umbrella of the ruling ideology, that is, the ideology of the ruling class. In principle, the ruling class holds state power (openly, or by means of networks, connections, or political ties), and thus has RSAs at its disposal, and so it can be accepted that the ruling class does in fact hold some level of power over the ISAs in so far as the ruling ideology is realized in the ISAs. By way of illustration Althusser uses the example of Lenin’s revolution of the school system: Lenin changed the curriculum at sites of learning (that is, the educational ISA) to make it possible for the Soviet proletariat to secure the future of the dictatorship of the proletariat and the transition into socialism (Althusser, 1971 [1984]:20). ISAs foster an ideology that will be sympathetic to the desires of the state and conducive to the political status quo. Thus, the power of the state is maintained by the ISAs in a very subtle manner through the internal consent or ‘willing compliance’ of the citizens. In this way, we see that ISAs can also be responsible for disseminating the agenda of the state even though they are generally regarded as private.

Marc Angenot and Darko Suvin (1979:168) argue that all literature has two main functions, namely: “illuminating human relationships, thus making for a more manageable and pleasurable life” as well as “obscuring or occulting them [human relationships], thus making for a more difficult life”. Both of these functions are innately ideological, therefore making the study and criticism of literature (and in this case, specifically sf) an act of understanding how a text interacts with its socio-political and historical context as an object of ideology.

⁹ This notion is discussed at length in my discussion of *Zoo City* in Chapter One.

Marxist Literary Criticism in Contemporary Science Fiction

Marx, preoccupied predominantly with political and social theories, is not known to have developed any fully formed aesthetic or literary theories. Marx did however maintain strong opinions on the arts and their function(s), and these opinions were consonant with his general philosophies (Padover, 1978:21). It is from these general philosophies that the Marxist critical analysis of literature finds a foothold: Marxist literary analysis is primarily concerned with the major social tenets fundamental to Marxist political theory.

Typically, Marxist literary criticism undertakes to explain the literature in any given historical era, not as works “created in accordance with timeless artistic criteria”, but rather as “products” of the economic and ideological determinants specific to that era (Abrams & Harpham, 2009:182). From its inception in the late nineteenth century, Marxist literary criticism has given rise to statements about the politicised nature of art, literature, and culture. The overarching assumption is that literature can only be understood if its full context (historical, economic, social, economic, and cultural) is considered.

In this way, literature is seen to be an active agent in its social and cultural world. It can work to expose wrongs in a society, or it can act as a veneer over troubling fissures and make a class-divided society seem unified and content. One major assumption of Marxism is that culture, including literature, functions to reproduce the class structure of society. It does so by representing class differences in such a way that they seem legitimate and natural. Literature is in the first instance a social phenomenon, and as such, cannot be studied independently of the social relations, the economic forms, and the political realities of the time in which it was produced. Marxist literary criticism has traditionally been concerned with studying the embeddedness of a work within its context(s), and some Marxist criticism argues that literature reflects unproblematically the values and ideals of the class in dominance.

Moreover, all literature is determined by economics, that is, by the translation into cultural limitations and imperatives of the sheer weight of how material life in a society is conducted. These limitations range from the choosing of what will or will not be published to the implanted selection procedures that readers inherit from schooling within a culture that shapes what and how they read. This “reflectionist” approach to literature has been supplanted by critical approaches that emphasize the complexity of the relationships between literature and its ambient context (Rivkin & Ryan, 2004b:645). In their piece, “Starting with Zero” (2004a:643), Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan note that in the context of Marxist literary criticism, “one function of literature is to offer those on the losing end [the workers, or

“proletariat”] images that assure them that their situation of relative deprivation is the natural result of fair play and fair rules, not of systematic dispossession that is a structural feature of the society”.

Some contemporary Marxist critics continue to emphasize the role of literature and of culture in reproducing class society, while others choose to look for ways in which literature undermines or subverts the dominant ideologies of a specific culture. Althusser’s stance reads as such: he does not regard society as one monolithic, all-encompassing whole, but rather as being made up of many social formations (such as ISAs). Ideology is seen as an organic part of every social totality; it is “indispensable in any society” (Bennet, 1979:117). Individuals are related, in ideology, to the material conditions of their existence through the imaginary concept of their own selfhood and the place they occupy within their society’s social order. Althusser notes that a great work of literature is not merely a product or reflection of ideology; it creates for the reader a distance from which to recognise and expose “the ideology from which it is born ... from which it detaches itself as art, and to which it alludes” (Abrams & Harpham, 2009:184; Mambrol, 2016).

Furthermore, in *For A Theory of Literary Production* (1966), Pierre Macherey, one of Althusser’s students, stresses the idea that a literary text “not only distances itself from its ideology by its fiction and form, but also exposes the contradictions that are inherent in that ideology by its silences or gaps”. In other words, of equal importance to what a text contains is what the text also does not say because its intrinsic ideology makes it impossible to say it; these textual gaps are also known as the text’s “ideological repressions” (Macherey, 2004 [1966]:703). Moreover, Macherey stresses that the role of Marxist literary criticism is to make these silences speak, and therefore expose a text’s unconscious, repressed ideological content through critical analysis. Macherey sees the gaps in a text as possibilities of the text saying something other than what is presented at face value, or as he explains: “[t]he recognition of the area of shadow in or around the work is the initial moment of criticism”. In this way, we see that the gaps in a text are just as important as what that text does include, almost as if there is a double-exposure to possible meanings and interpretations; what is there is just as important as what is not.

Marx’s theoretical works outline a pointed critique of capitalism, the positioning of history as a dialectical process through which humans can construct themselves, and the notion that the ultimate goal of humankind is, or rather should be, the attainment of a fair and democratic society. Marx constructed his vision of communism out of the human and technological possibilities already visible and available in his time, given the priorities that

would be adopted by a new socialist society. The programmes introduced by a victorious working class to deal with the problems left by the old society and the revolution would unleash a social dynamic whose general results, Marx believed, could be charted beforehand. Projecting the communist future from existing patterns and trends is an integral part of Marx's analysis of capitalism. It is in this vein that Marx declares, “[w]e do not anticipate the world dogmatically, but rather wish to find the new world through the criticism of the old” (Marx quoted in Easton & Guddat, 1967:212). Although the socialist movement slumped after the collapse of the Soviet bloc (Csicsery-Ronay, 2003:113), many of these key concepts have been used as springboards for other revisionist political and theoretical movements and schools of thought.

Considering the argumentation above, it stands to reason that Marxist-orientated literary criticism and theory is mostly preoccupied with a text's contextual situatedness: this approach is cognisant of literature as a response to a specific socio-political moment, even as it looks to the future. This theoretical position links to much of the sf that has been produced since the 20th century as the genre has more often than not been used as a medium through which authors could address their context-specific woes and grievances. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr notes that since the 1960s “many of the most sophisticated studies of sf have been either explicitly Marxist in orientation or influenced by Marxist concepts adopted by feminism, race-criticism, queer theory and cultural studies” (2003:113). This is because sf conceptualises changes that would affect the entire human population, and, more often than not, these changes come about as a result of scientific discoveries and inventions that human beings apply to their own “social evolution” (Csicsery-Ronay, 2003:113). Additionally, Marxist studies of sf have come about because much sf critiques capitalism, even when the fiction is not explicitly Marxist; and South African sf seems to deal with capitalism and apartheid as associated evils, especially when conceptualising spatial politics and longstanding earning disparities. In a broad sense, this is what occupies the Marxist social imagination, namely resourceful large-scale changes for the good of the masses, and so Marxism's theoretical fine-tuning alongside the flourishing of sf comes about organically as a result of shared interests and themes.

In the conclusion of *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx attempts to describe his vision of a utopian society which stays true to the aforementioned universal goal of a just and self-governing society. Crucial to the attainment of this goal would be advances in technology; human liberation would be dependent on the technology that could free individuals from gratuitous toil. The earliest examples of sf narratives mirror this concern in terms of the invaluable role technology would play in the liberation from exploitative orders, and this preoccupation has continued well into the 21st century. F.K Buah outlines Marx's idea of

societal utopianism as the “welfare state”, and conceptions of a utopian society as being a society “which maintains a wide range of social services, and this guarantees for all its citizens a certain standard of living” (1978:122). At first glance, the Marxist utopian vision is that of an egalitarian, classless society in which technology has resolved the demand for strenuous labour, so that individuals would no longer feel alienated from their work as the means of productions would not be owned, controlled, and dictated by the elite.

However, it is crucial to note that modern Marxist thought leaders have been hesitant to align themselves with these more naïve conceptions of utopia. As M. Keith Booker explains, the distinction between socialism and utopianism has not always been clear cut. Marx argued that socialism was not a fantasy, but rather a necessary and unavoidable reality, and attempted to argue that communism was a natural, even necessary result of the natural evolution of capitalism. Modern utopianism is closely linked to the kind of faith in science and rationality that Marx and Engels maintained in their ideation of an improved human society through socialist systems (Booker, 1994:4). Moreover, many twentieth-century Marxist thinkers had grown sceptical of this supposed promise of a utopian vision potentiated by advances in technology, and as a result, have not shared in this notion of a coming socialist paradise.

Terry Eagleton argues that the notion of a Marxist utopia is somewhat redundant in and of itself as he notes that a Marxist utopia is a “contradiction in terms” (2011:64). In agreement with many of Marx’s critics, Eagleton asserts that Marx was relatively vague in his predictions of a future free of failure and suffering; if anything, Marx can be said to have believed that clinging to idealistic ideas about the future provides a false sense of security with which we shield ourselves from the open-ended unpredictability and precariousness of the present (Eagleton, 2011:66). Marx was concerned with the denouncement of greed, corruption, and power-mongering of his present, as opposed to attempts at foretelling the future. In this way, Marx can be read as more prophetic in his concerns about the malevolent underlying tenets of capitalism than about the ideation of a flawless society: utopian blueprints for the future were nothing more than a distraction from the political tasks of the present. Eagleton (2011:68-69) summarises:

The point for Marx is not to dream of an ideal future, but to resolve the contradictions in the present which prevent a better future from coming about ... The hope for a better future cannot just be wistful ... If it is to be more than an idle fantasy, a radically different future must not only be desirable but feasible; and to be feasible, it has to be anchored in the realities of the present.

In this way, theorising a Marxist utopia becomes somewhat problematic and complicated: much like feminism, Marxism is intended to be a relatively temporary mode of thought because once the core ideal has been realized (gender parity or the end of class-based exploitation, for example), the theory should fall away as it has achieved what it set out to. Emancipatory politics are only useful insofar as forms of slavery exist; that is to say that once the key concerns of these emancipatory theories have been tackled, they will necessarily die out. Marxism is meant to be the bridge between an oppressive present (and past) and an emancipated future: once this bridge has been crossed, Marxist thinkers and theories are no longer necessary. Marxist theory can thus be regarded as liminal, a means to an end, and not a final destination or utopian conclusion.

While Marxist conceptions of utopia muddy the theoretical waters, Marxist conceptions of dystopia are far more concrete and overt: they would involve the ravages associated with the economic system of capitalism, and the class conflict it breeds. As long as capitalism holds, the proletariat are perpetually stuck in a cycle of physical and ideological toil and alienation which they cannot emancipate themselves from without violent revolution. Any attempts at breaking away from the suffocating influence of capitalist's manipulation of economic resources result in extreme punitive and repressive measures by the state and ideological suppressions through ever-evolving means of interpellation.

Marxist criticism's preoccupation with the contextual embeddedness of a text is crucial to my tracing and delineating the critical nature of South African sf. It is through this contextual (political, social, historical) embeddedness that sf realizes its distinctly analytical and self-aware nature. This theoretical approach is necessary to orientate the analysis embarked upon in this thesis; in-line with Marxist tradition, I read the selected (dystopian) literature as an "active agent" of engagement, critique, and even rebellion. These texts are responses to specific political moments and are in constant conversation with Marxist arguments and concerns.

Transcending Pessimism: Theorizing a Contemporary Dystopia

The foreword to Erica Gottlieb's text, *Dystopian Fiction East and West: A Universe of Terror and Trial* (2001), outlines dystopian fiction from the early twentieth century onward as "[presenting] us with a society where the ruling elite deliberately subverts justice". Gottlieb also notes that this genre can be read as a protest against a political situation that presents as "the worst of all possible worlds, a universe of terror and rigged trials". Over thirty fictional

texts are analysed by Gottlieb in this germinal work, and she posits dystopian fiction as a unique response to the political and socioeconomic contexts of authors; the novels are not situated in some distant and hypothetical future but are rather disapproving responses to a world that is, but should not be. Dystopia and utopia embody notions of damnation and salvation in the modern secular age: salvation would be a fair and just society governed by well-informed officials who have been chosen by an enlightened and unselfish populace, whereas modern damnation is seen as a fundamentally unjust society with skewed morals and policies, that is dominated by a power-crazed elite; Gottlieb refers to this as a “vision of a collective hell for society” (2001:3). Another function of the dystopian novel is to act as a kind of cautionary tale; a marker of what could go wrong if society’s ills and shortcomings are not addressed. The dystopian idea of a collective hell for a society can be seen in some of the most famous examples of early dystopian fiction¹⁰ as they posit their settings as inescapable hellscape. Modern measures of punishment, deportation, trafficking, slavery under capitalism, and the waning of religious traditions and practices, show that repressive state apparatuses are blossoming in our current socio-political climate, and we are always (perhaps unknowingly) subjects to this system.

Moylan and Baccolini (2003:1) note that within popular culture, more overt forms of dystopia are portrayed in sf after World War II, and this trend has extended to contemporary media: these hellscape are responses to turbulent historical and socioeconomic contexts (such as the Holocaust, the threat of nuclear war, and ecological collapse). Furthermore, just as Gottlieb theorises, Moylan and Baccolini posit dystopian sf to have prophetic value in that these texts warn us of “terrible socio-political tendencies that could, if continued, turn our contemporary world into the iron cages portrayed in the realm of utopia’s underside” (2003:2). The tone of the genre shifted in the 1980s and transcended nihilistic neuroses typical of the texts that had been penned up until then: texts now showed more critical self-reflexivity and fluidity in terms of forming a more nuanced oppositional stance. Dystopian sf became grounded as a critical genre through which the political, economic, and social environment could be navigated and critiqued.

After decades of study and analysis, a variety of formal textual strategies have become associated with dystopian sf. Most prominently, the narrative is initiated *in media res* in a fractured and flawed society – unlike utopian fiction, which usually entails some derivative of

¹⁰ See: Yevgeny Zamyatin’s *We* (1924), Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932), George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), and Ray Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* (1953).

a protagonist's journey to a strange new place. Even without this dislocating journey of the protagonist, textual estrangement is retained by a consistent focus on the protagonist's perceptions and experiences of their defective society or space. The protagonist, and in turn, the reader, are "always already *in* the world in question, unreflectively immersed in the society" – this unreflective immersion is critical for the achievement of cognitive estrangement (Moylan and Baccolini, 2003:5)¹¹. Furthermore, a counter-narrative usually simultaneously flourishes in the text as the protagonist/citizen of this dystopian space or regime begins experiencing degrees of alienation, exclusion, oppression, and then resistance. The inevitable conflict within the text rests on the notion of language and discourses of coercion and consent. Moylan and Baccolini summarize the critical role of language in dystopian literature as follows:

The material force of the economy and the state apparatus controls the social order and keeps it running; but discursive power, exercised in the reproduction of meaning and the interpellation of subjects, is a complementary and necessary force. Language is a key weapon for the reigning dystopian power structure (2003:5-6).

It then stands to reason that the archetypal protagonist of a dystopian text initiates resistance incrementally through their use of language in terms of verbal confrontation with the oppressors or the appropriation of oppressive discourse. Because the protagonist is usually barred from using this language of authority, their use thereof exposes the reigning dominant discourse as hollow propaganda, a farcical attempt to control the masses. In this way, ideological state apparatuses are increasingly tampered with and destabilised, thus granting the protagonist more self-determination and agency. The protagonist taking control of language (and by extension, means of representation and interpellation), is a crucial tool that serves to extend ideas of resistance to some form of oppositional act which serves as the climax of the novel. In this way, dystopian fiction is said to generate "its own didactic account" in the critical encounter that ensues when the protagonist meets and confronts the contradictions of the society they find themselves in (Moylan & Baccolini, 2003:6).

Moylan and Baccolini (2003:6) posit a typical example of dystopian narrative¹² as being facilitative of a politically charged and formally flexible stance. This capacity for narrative creates the possibility for social critique and utopian anticipation in the dystopian text. A majority of modern dystopian texts take pains to outline the innate flaws of a society by means of pessimistic projections of the future, but some texts anchor themselves in the utopian notion

¹¹ Italics are authors' own.

¹² That is, the structure in which the alienated protagonist refuses a regime or way of being.

of presenting a horizon of hope for the future – readers are left with the nagging feeling that perhaps all is not lost, and societal change and reconstruction are indeed both possible and plausible. This premise for the structure and plot of the sf novel became popular in the 1980s, and became known as “critical dystopia”. Lyman Tower Sargent defines critical 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 worse than contemporary society”, but the texts also normally include at least one utopian enclave or hold out hope that the dystopia can be overcome (2016:¶7). Many of these modern critical dystopias warn against a capitalist-run world (a modern form of totalitarianism after the demise of Soviet style communism) but hold out hope for positive, utopian imaginings of the future which can be realised through “real-world mutual aid” (Seyferth, 2018:5). The recent spurt of dystopian literature, originating from widespread feelings of disillusionment and disempowerment brought about by late-stage capitalism and the profit-driven political climate it has bred, has led to a resurgence of Marxist-orientated criticism. Marxist theorisation gels with the concerns of contemporary dystopian imaginings which are unavoidably concerned with addressing the ills of rampant, unchecked capitalism and the globally debilitating effects thereof.

The traditional dystopian text is by definition pessimistic and bleak, but hope is hinted at as existing outside of the pages, if not within the text itself; that is, if dystopias are presented as warnings, then there is ultimately hope that the society in question can escape this miserable future by heeding these warnings and altering its ways. In theorizing critical dystopias, Moylan and Baccolini (2003:7), posit modern critical dystopias as maintaining an element of hope by resisting closure at the end of a novel – a sense of finality is avoided by leaving the conclusion of the novel open-ended or ambiguous. Readers are left with lingering hope as the critical dystopia rejects the subjugation of the protagonist, and in doing so “opens a space of contestation and opposition for those collective ‘ex-centric’ subjects whose class, gender, race, sexuality, and other positions are not empowered by hegemonic rule” (Moylan & Baccolini, 2003:7).

Moreover, critical dystopias employ genre-blurring so as to include elements of multiplicity, fragmentation, hybridity, and complexity. This amalgamation of forms makes for an impure and renovated form, which results in texts being both formally and politically oppositional. By rejecting traditional conventions of form and genre, the dystopian text resists the dominant hegemonic ideology which reduces everything to a global monoculture. Similarly, M. Keith Booker argues that “the very fact that genres like dystopian fiction carry such specific ideological resonances presents important opportunities for writers who would

seek to challenge the ideologies embedded in those genres” (1995:59). The 1990s saw a turn in the dystopian text, as these texts “resist both hegemonic and oppositional orthodoxies even as they inscribe a space for a new form of political opposition” (Moylan & Baccolini, 2003:8).

Contemporary texts explore agency that is founded in multiplicity and difference, yet allied with a political leaning that speaks back to a collective societal voice. These dystopian novels not only explore the ugliness of the present political and social systems, but also seek ways of alleviating some of these issues. In this way, the modern dystopian novel refreshes links between the utopian impulse and socio-political awareness. South African dystopian sf speaks to some of the populace’s core concerns, namely disparity, instability, safety, segregation, and political unrest – this conversation between the fictional and the social realities of the setting brings about meaningful critical engagement and from this, renewed social awareness.

Dystopian Jozi: A Literature Review

It was terrible, he said. The city. Life was dark and dangerous and filled with the stink of humanity. “Jozi is fucked. If you gonna survive, you have to become fucked too. Crazy like the city. Otherwise you go home.”

Andrew Miller, *Dub Steps* (2015:178)

Dystopian literature has become a viable means through which postcolonial African authors can explore their specific cultural situations and make sense of their realities. African writers of dystopian fiction are, however, faced with problems involving attempts to contribute to the development of revised cultural identities that escape the dominance of western bourgeois ideologies while writing within genres traditionally informed by these exact ideologies. I do, however, suggest that the paradigm of bourgeois dystopian form and narrative enables African writers to approach the conceptualization of a dystopia with heightened clarity. These writers sometimes exist in a kind of proto-dystopia in terms of context-specific corruption, crime, and the scars of colonialism, and by translating their experiences into sf text, they are committing an oppositional act against their regimes or political structures. Their expressions of dystopia are articulations of meta-dystopian perspectives and are thus uniquely apt and incisive, hence their growing popularity. Projections of a damned future are more often than not reimagined versions of a tumultuous past. For example, many of the dystopian texts set in South Africa are influenced by the social engineering of apartheid and thus project defective and dysfunctional

future societies riddled by segregation, elitism, and violence. This connection with the country's historical context lends a level of realism to the dystopian texts, so readers can easily identify with the underlying themes associated with the oppressive regime; this also acts as a springboard from which the writers can extrapolate their narratives to hyper-personal accounts of socio-political understanding and awareness. In theorizing the African dystopian text, M. Keith Booker (1995:61) notes that African dystopias are unique in that depictions of the conditions of these dystopian societies "can be related more to a suppression of genuine collectivity than to a suppression of individualism by a collective tyranny"; unlike western dystopias which depict the loss of individual agency as the chief strategy of oppression by an authoritarian regime.

African literature is almost always presented as a matter of authors writing back to (what can broadly be referred to as) the western literary canon: by extension, African sf writers are always in textual conversation with western sf writers by the sheer fact that they have chosen to write in the same genre. African engagement with the English canon has been the source of some debate: Chinua Achebe sees this engagement as fruitful and enabling, whereas Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o argues that African literary production in English is highly political and even debilitating. While Chinua Achebe (1975) acknowledges the harmful symptoms of the package deal of language and colonialism, he argues that English has been instrumental in developing "a new voice coming out of Africa, speaking of African experience in a worldwide language", thus allowing African thought to travel beyond the bounds of tribe, dialect, culture, or country. However, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986:285) conceptualises English as having been "assumed to be the natural language of literary and even political mediation ... between Africa and other continents" which has resulted in a huge gap of knowledge production and recognition in/of African languages. Evidenced by Achebe and wa Thiong'o's (divergent) arguments is the notion that writing back to western literature is an important way through which African writers can confront and engage with western economic and cultural power dynamics in fiction.

It is also important to note that questions of canonical inclusion are especially relevant for African sf because traditional examples of globally-recognised sf have mostly been classified by western standards. Which African texts can be considered "sf" when works penned by African authors were not written to conform to western sf standards or canonical requirements? Jordan Stier argues that some early fictions serve as examples of sf produced on the continent, and their recognition and reclamation as early African sf should influence global theorisation of the canon (2019:92). Stier (2019:14) posits:

African [sf] then, as a genre, is inherently differentiable from other subgenres of [sf] by virtue of the author's knowledge of the world around them, their own personal modernity. It is different to canonical [sf] because the understanding of the world shown by African [sf] texts is often somewhat different to that shown by texts from Europe and North America. However, they are still science fictional, because they speculate beyond the present bounds of that ontology in a way that is still plausible to it.

Stier's argumentation links to Jean Baudrillard's assertions of sf as "an extravagant projection of, but qualitatively not different from, the real world of production" (1991:309) and this is important to the requirements imposed on early African fictions in order for them to be classified and canonised as sf. What I aim to illustrate here is that classification of texts as sf should be fluid and open to revision: it is through this revision that African texts can be potentially included in the sf canon, thus solidifying the notion that sf is not a western import, but rather existed on the continent in various forms for centuries.

Some African novels which have not been recognised as sf contain sustained engagement with sf tropes and themes. Most notably, these texts contain future imaginings of their modernity which create context-specific novums, and speak to western sf preoccupations with the occult and the 'alien'. The African novel has "essentially evolved out of the writer's mandate to reflect socio-political and economic experiences" of their country at the time, and so the African novel shows an awareness of context-specific socio-political realities just as 'traditional' western sf does (Afolayan & Ibitoye, 2011:342).

Gottlieb describes dystopian novels as containing "the push and pull between utopian and dystopian perspectives", and portraying how an originally utopian promise is "abused, betrayed ... or fulfilled so as to create tragic consequences for humanity" (2001:8). In this way, many novels penned during the apartheid era can be read as dystopian texts: to the white politicians, apartheid social engineering was an attempt at a utopian white homeland within the country, separated from the perceived threats that would accompany a racially integrated, egalitarian society. Much of the literature of the time presents readers with the flipside of this same coin – the social and financial benefits of apartheid for some of the population resulted in inhumane and cruel living conditions, discrimination, and alienation for others. Booker (1995:59) explains the paradigm of dystopian fiction as "an oppositional confrontation between the desires of a presumably unique individual and the demands of an oppressive society that insists on total obedience and conformity in its subjects". Booker's definition is helpful in that it illuminates the link between the impulse of African literary confrontation (and conversation)

and the actual hostile lived experience of many on the continent: contentious lives lend themselves to contentious literature.

Before examining the three central contemporary texts, I revisit a selection of non-sf South African novels through an Althusserian lens and argue that they can be studied as early examples of African dystopian writing. In doing so, I illustrate that dystopian writing about and in South Africa is not an advent of the 21st century, thus contextualising contemporary dystopian writings as part of a long history of critical engagement. The notion of sf being inherently political and oppositional will guide my analysis, specifically with reference to the conceptualisation of Johannesburg as a contemporary dystopia. Cityscape-set dystopian fiction is attracting much academic scrutiny in Africa and has been established globally; there is, however, a gap in the study of Johannesburg-set fiction published post-1925 and my analysis will attempt to contribute to knowledge production in this field.

I argue that R. R. R. Dhlomo's *An African Tragedy* (1928), Peter Abrahams's *Mine Boy* (1946), Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), and Ivan Vladislavić's *The Restless Supermarket* (2001) can be read as examples of the move towards dystopian sf as a viable fictive genre to critique each author's context(s). The chosen texts engage with pre-apartheid and apartheid-era economies and politics, questions of wealth and privilege, the 'alien', and the social divides inherent to the chaotic city. As for the texts' futuristic engagement, I argue that these texts are examples of what Michael Green (1997:244) calls "future histories"; future histories, he proposes, are works that "seek to comment upon the past and present by projecting the implications of the past and present forward in time".

Dhlomo, Paton, and Abrahams' texts all exhibit what is known as the "Jim Comes to Joburg" trope, casting the rural as trustworthy, idealistic, and faithful while the city is alien, licentious, and corrupt. This trope is loosely used to categorise works which are essentially concerned with the rural black man's encounter with the white-controlled industrialised city and is first used in the 1950s after the release of the titular film (Gray, 1985:61). Initially the film was released as *African Jim* (1949) but has since become referred to as *Jim Comes to Joburg*. Directed by Donald Swanson, the film depicts a rural black youth moving to Johannesburg in post-war South Africa with the intention of finding work; instead, the protagonist falls upon hard times until his singing talent is discovered, thus rendering him relatively upwardly mobile. Saul Dubow explains that, in accordance with National Party separatist ideology, "[c]ities were portrayed as an 'alien environment' for which they [blacks] were supposedly not yet ready" (1989:31). The ideological alienation of non-whites from the city was critical to the formation of the (formalised) apartheid ideology of separate

development, so the African's positionality in an urban space was directly governed by racist categorisation and the resultant discrimination. Moreover, the city space was often described as the site of vice and immorality which contained "influences far too potent for his [African's] powers of resistance", thus justifying state efforts at monitoring and separation (Dubow, 1989:31).

The Dhlomo, Paton, and Abrahams texts engage with the hyper-scrutinized reality of the black man in the city by means of describing close encounters with the law, specifically infringement of the nine o'clock curfew for all black adults. Inaccessible paperwork and state bureaucracy were weapons through which the state could continually delegitimize the presence of non-whites in the urban space. Infringement of this curfew would result in a fine or arrest and non-white citizens were required to carry up to 27 documents with them at all times including after-curfew passes, tax receipts, travelling passes, permits to seek work, service contracts, and copies thereof (Landis, 1957:46). Sarah Nuttall and Achille Mbembe (2007:282) suggest that race "was used as a weapon in the production of barriers and asymmetrical privileges". Moreover, the city was built on the backs of mines and miners, which resulted in the development of "a system that was based on a rigidly racial hierarchal division of labour, an original violence" which first existed under the surface of the city (Nuttall & Mbembe, 2007:282). The irony of this situation is that white wealth and development was directly dependant on cheap black labour, yet black bodies were systemically and systematically the site of the harshest abuses at the hands of white industrialism.

Published by the missionary Lovedale Institution Press in 1928, R. R. R. Dhlomo's novella, *An African Tragedy*, is a Christian cautionary tale about the misfortune that befalls those who give in to the "nefarious activities" inherent to "that most unreliable city of Johannesburg" (Dhlomo, 1928:2;1). The novella narrates the downfall of Robert Zulu, a teacher at the Siam Village mission school in what is now known as the province of KwaZulu-Natal, who leaves for Johannesburg to raise money for the *lobolo*¹³ requested by his intended bride's father. In Johannesburg, Robert succumbs to a life of sin and takes to excessive drinking and lechery and is plunged "deeper and deeper in vice and evils" (Dhlomo, 1928:2). The Christian beliefs and values of the protagonist become compromised as "[p]leasure is the essence of young people's lives here in Johannesburg" so Robert and his new friends take to

¹³ *Lobolo*, sometimes referred to as "bride wealth" or a "bride price" involves a young man paying an agreed upon amount to his future wife's father, who in turn gives his blessing for the marriage to take place.

enjoying themselves “like lords” by participating in gambling, promiscuity, and excessive drinking (Dhlomo, 1928:4).

Robert takes to socialising in Prospect Township, the last inner-city township to be removed by the government in 1936; this metropolitan slum is described as a “revolting immoral place; where the black sons and daughters of Africa are kicked about by their unbridled passions as a football is on the playfields” (Dhlomo, 1928:5). The township is characterised by brutal violence and gross iniquity and this moral deprivation is strongly condemned by the text’s moralistic and critical narrator. The township infrastructure was allowed to slump because these spaces were exclusively non-white by design: black people were “to work in the city but not to live in it” (Nuttall & Mbembe, 2007:282). The activities that take place in Prospect Township so shock and upset the overtly Christian narrator that he proclaims: “No wonder Black Africa is cursed!” (Dhlomo, 1928:5). Blackness and brutality in the context of Johannesburg are equated multiple times by the narrator, who casts the urban as illicit and violent, and the rural as moral and chaste.

After attempting to visit his friend in Newclare Location, Robert finds himself desperately lost in the city past curfew after being denied boarding a tramcar back to his lodgings. Officially illegal in roaming the “dark streets of Slum-land” after escaping two stalwart Zulu police officers demanding the paperwork he forgot at his accommodation (Dhlomo, 1928:14), he finds refuge in a nearby gambling den. This ploy is foiled when he witnesses the murder of a Xhosa youth who has been accused of cheating at cards. Not being amongst his countrymen, Robert fears he will be falsely accused of the adolescent’s murder so he flees the scene and makes haste to return to the mission and his future wife (Jane) “as fast as his legs could carry him” (Dhlomo, 1928:19). The slum as a dynamic place of self-realization allows Robert to reflect on his own newfound predicament as a murder witness and drunkard, thus forcing him to abscond to KwaZulu-Natal.

Robert’s return is highly anticipated by his community and he is met at the train station by school children and Jane, all in awe of his fashionable attire as he has learned to “let [his] money and clothes advertise [him]” (Dhlomo, 1928:4). Once the initial excitement fades, his presence soon becomes troublesome as he has brought his lecherous habits back with him from Johannesburg. After they are married, Jane becomes pregnant with their first child but the child is born ill – it is then revealed that the illness is caused by Robert’s syphilis (which he has spread throughout the community, including to his pregnant wife). Undeterred, Robert continues to “monopolise the girls as if he were not married”; this breeds disdain amongst the men of the rural community who then plot to poison him (Dhlomo, 1928:35). The diseased

spectre of Johannesburg life then continues to haunt the self-sacrificing, supposedly pure people of Siam Village who are ultimately unable to navigate the consequences of Robert's inner-city sin. The protagonist of this morality tale is irredeemably corrupted by the city; the city is cast as tainted, sinful, a place of temporary connections and sexual pleasures, and presented as a threat to the morality of black South Africans.

While the novella is brief and steeped in unapologetic Christian ideology and its conditions of publication, it is valuable to the study of historical conceptions of the city as dystopic. The protagonist's journey comes to exemplify the trauma of being black in Johannesburg, including, but not limited to, exposure to: segregated trams, curfews, exemption certificates, Blantynes (Malawian gangsters), assault, tribalism, and illiterate, crooked black policemen.

Peter Abrahams's *Mine Boy* (1946) was one of the first novels to bring to light the extreme hardships of black South African labourers in their white-dominated country. The novel communicates Johannesburg as emerging "not as decontextualized moral abyss but as a multifaceted social and material space organised through complex systems of race and class-based exploitation" (Sandwith, 2018:19). The protagonist, Xuma, moves to the highly industrialised city of Johannesburg and the strangeness of this social climate impacts him deeply; his position as a relative outsider to the city allows him to witness his countrymen's way of life and their gross lack of privilege with acute awareness and freshness of perspective. Xuma relocates to Johannesburg to work in the mines, but is cautioned by compatriots as soon as he arrives: "[T]he mines are no good, Xuma, later on you cough and then you spit blood and you become weak and die. I have seen it many times. To-day you are young and you are strong, and to-morrow you are thin and ready to die" (Abrahams, 1946:16). Lindsay Bremner's pivotal collection of essays, *Writing the City into Being* (2010), is a study of how and why Johannesburg came to be viewed in this way, and how the city has remained a focal point for contemporary dystopian literature. Bremner suggests that the city has always "served as a container of organised violence and a transmitter of war", and can therefore be said to transmit "a collective personality structure whose more extreme manifestations are now recognised in individuals as pathological" (2010:188): it is the city itself that is seen to make residents hostile, sick, suspicious, and paranoid. Johannesburg is personified and described as being a callous tyrant, ungrateful for the many sacrifices black individuals make for it, all the while robbing the people of their freedom(s) and customs.

Similar to Reverend Khumalo in Paton's novel, Xuma is struck by the way the people of the city "seem to believe in nothing", and are not "tied down" by any obvious social and

cultural codes (Abrahams, 1946:17). The city is a heterogenous cultural space in which traditions are regularly discarded: more emphasis is placed on day-to-day survival and the building of new eclectic communities and networks. *Mine Boy* articulates the seeds of a utopian dream in a dystopian society, that is, the miscarried promise made by the ruling class. When Daniel François Malan (1874-1959) spoke about apartheid in parliament for the first time in 1944, he elucidated that it was intended to be different from what was considered to be the negative idea of segregation, and that it would rather be a positive system within which all the various ethnic groups in South Africa could “uplift themselves within their own cultural framework” (Obermeyer, 2016:10). Edward James outlines the most basic structure of a utopian civilization as consisting of “communal activities within small village-style communities” (2003:220), and this is indeed the narrative that Daniel Malan tried to sell the South African people. However, this seemingly utopian promise was betrayed: what transpired was the fracturing of black communities and the disproportionate allocation of privilege to the minority racial group. Abrahams aptly notes this contradiction between the original utopian dream and the ugly reality of 1940s South Africa.

Xuma, however, is openly resistant to the prevailing racial power dynamic and accompanying hierarchy. Working his way up to the position of mine “boss boy” (traditionally this would entail being a black team leader tasked with managing the other black miners, but who remains under the supervision of a white man), he is able to navigate the social terrain more fluidly, as the narrator explains:

[Xuma’s] white man had even tried to make friends with him because the other mine boys respected him so much. But a white man and a black man cannot be friends. They work together. That’s all. He smiled. He did not want the things of the white man. He did not want to be friends with the white man. Work for him, yes, but that’s all. And didn’t the others respect him more than they respected Johannes. It was because he did not say baas to the white man but knew how to deal with him (Abrahams, 1946:93).

The protagonist has come to realize the value he holds in his position as “boss boy”, and uses this to leverage respect from the white men he works with. Xuma refuses to conform to the behaviour required of black labourers, and does not fall prey to the largely unattainable “things of the white man” – he places no value on whiteness, and perceives the conforming thereto as the abandonment of one’s own cultures and customs. Xuma refuses to address his white superiors as “baas” (the Afrikaans word for “boss”): he is fully cognisant of the twisted, bigoted nature of his surroundings and understands that he cannot initiate any change to a system that

he is unquestioningly part of. In resisting the dominant ideology of the time, Xuma avoids the social mechanisms that would ensure his punishment; by removing himself from the dichotomy of “baas” and “boy”, he is able to transcend hierarchical boundaries that other miners cannot.

Through investigating the power dynamics of the mines, *Mine Boy* is able to illustrate that the country’s wealth was built more on the cheapness and availability of black labour than the initial discovery of gold and diamonds. Black men were subjected to unbreakable contracts, family separation, crowded living conditions, physically exhausting work, and pitiful earnings mostly because other opportunities for work were few and far between as separatist policy-making gained momentum. Exploitative working conditions enforced by mine owners signify the devaluing of black bodies and the unethical and racially-determined capitalist praxis which would continue at the expense of Africans in perpetuity.

The plot of Paton’s *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948) concerns Reverend Stephen Khumalo who lives in relative poverty in Ixopo in KwaZulu-Natal. Reverend Khumalo receives a letter informing him of his sister’s illness and summoning him to Johannesburg to visit her. During the apartheid era, it was not uncommon for blacks to move from rural areas of the country to the urban periphery of Johannesburg in search of work, and this is what Khumalo’s sister had done. Upon his arrival in Johannesburg, Khumalo seems taken aback by the scale and pace of the city, and he soon finds out that his sister has become a prostitute as a means of earning an income, while his estranged son, who had also moved to Johannesburg, is involved in committing a murder. The text thus presents Johannesburg as a hub of sin and immorality, the place of “young men and young girls that went away and forgot their customs, and lived loose and idle lives” and “young criminal children” (Paton, 1948:22). In contrast, in chapter one of the novel, rural Ixopo is described as Edenic and unsullied – a preserved utopian ideal of rurality and community. Like Dhloomo, Paton idealises the rural and describes Ixopo as a utopian space where black people can exist in harmony with the natural splendour that surrounds them, free from the propensity to sin that Johannesburg comes to represent.

Dystopian literature tends to depict a society in which individuals are repressed, personal freedoms lost, and creativity is stifled. In this vein, Paton presents the suppression of black expression by means of Khumalo’s learning about the local paper upon his arrival in eGoli¹⁴: this paper intended for black readership is the Bantu Press (jokingly referred to as the “Bantu Repress”). A local priest, Msimangu, explains that the paper is very moderate and is

¹⁴ eGoli, from the Zulu word meaning “place of gold”, referring to the Witwatersrand Gold Rush of 1886 that led to the establishment of Johannesburg. Derivatively, in her novel *Wild Deer* (1933), Ethelreda Lewis refers to the city “Goldberg”.

run with the cooperation of whites, and “does not say all that could be said” (Paton, 1948:27); Msimangu is acutely aware that black South Africans are deprived of the entire truth of their situation by means of growing bowdlerization (which would peak with the state censorship apparatus, the Publications and Entertainment Act of 1963) and white ownership of the media. When discussing the role of the Bantu Press, Msimanga cries “Who will tell the truth?” (Paton, 1948:27), insinuating that the newspaper is doing no such thing for its readers.

Paton’s novel is rhizomatic and fractured in that there are divisions within chapters, and some of these chapters stray from the narrative of Reverend Khumalo totally. These more divided chapters act as an outlet for Paton’s own ruminations on the subjects of segregation, crime, injustice, and poverty. One such is chapter twelve, in which Paton presents various discussions on race and the segregationist policies of the time between unnamed, presumably white and privileged individuals. These sub-sections within chapters are riddled with hypothetical situations, rhetorical questions, and the (varying) white attitudes towards the fate of the country; while these sub-sections all differ in format and style, what they all have in common is the highlighting of black individuals as devoid of agency and having no say in their destiny. One such passage speculatively discusses remuneration of labourers and the future consequences this may have on the attainment of “peace”:

Who knows how we shall fashion a land of peace where black outnumbers white so greatly? Some say that the earth has bounty enough for all, and that more for one does not mean less for another, that the advance of one does not mean the decline of another. They say that poor-paid labour means a poor nation, and that better-paid labour means greater markets and greater scope for industry and manufacture. And others say that this is a danger, for better-paid labour will not only buy more but will also read more, think more, ask more, and will not be content to be for ever voiceless and inferior (Paton, 1948:71).

Capitalist greed and the privilege that accompanies whiteness is seen to determine the fates of the labourers: the black populace is specifically deprived of meaningful education, or the means to attain any education at all, so that they can be kept in subservient roles that fit the ideological agenda of the state. The speaker notes that paying the workforce better may result in an economic boost, but even so, the black population is dehumanized and considered a mere vessel for white prosperity. Echoing *Mine Boy*, Paton’s novel depicts the black body as being reduced to a cog in the machinery of the country’s economy. Moreover, the use of the impersonal pronoun “they” creates an alienating effect for the reader as “they” are never identified, thereby exposing the speaker’s lament as essentialising. The use of “they” implies a lack of

accountability and a deflection of blame regarding the arguments presented, no matter how controversial they may be. In this way, the destiny of the black population becomes dinnertime conversation, a mere chat that can be discarded as soon as the participants tire of the subject, all the while blacks are forced to remain voiceless, agency-less proxies of the racialised capitalist system. The ruling minority maintains a system of mass exploitation and the “expansion of global spheres of privilege” act to “limit the freedom (and choice) ... of the poor” (Murray, 2008:15).

While the novel’s structure is interesting because it provides a multiplicity of narratives and perspectives, ultimately Khumalo’s story becomes overshadowed by Paton’s seemingly insatiable need to distance himself from the dominant discourse of racialised segregation. By creating a black protagonist and then speaking over him, ironically Paton is complicit in this erasure of (even fictionalised) black voices and imaginaries: Khumalo’s trajectory and narrative is often interrupted or set off course by white impulses and choices. The novel, perhaps unintentionally on some levels, displays both the implicit and explicit suppression of black expression: even well-meaning liberal white authors of the time could not project a future of black uninhibitedness and this is perhaps the most chilling aspect of *Cry, the Beloved Country*. In his article “Future Tense: The Problem of South African Apocalyptic Fiction” (2015), Michael Titlestad reads Paton’s novel as neither overtly dystopian nor post-apocalyptic, but rather a (white) liberal manifesto of sorts: “[the novel’s] liberal appeal for reform depends on predicting a catastrophic future if segregation and economic disparity (and their social consequences) are not addressed. Only dispositional change on the part of white South Africans – their conversion – can prevent an otherwise ineluctable progress towards hostility and widespread violence” (2015:32). In Titlestad’s reading, Paton’s novel is seen as a somewhat egotistical echo chamber for liberal whiteness and white guilt.

A more recent example of a Johannesburg-set text that can be read as a work of dystopian fiction is Ivan Vladislavić’s, *The Restless Supermarket* (2001). Vladislavić’s novel presents a different form of alienation of the individual from the city. While the argumentation above has focussed on the alienation of black individuals during the time of apartheid, I suggest that *The Restless Supermarket* shows that this alienation is not always racially determined, but can more effectively be conceptualised as the tension between individual versus social system. The city is seen as a place of individual un-belonging, a space of individual anxiety in the face of all-encompassing socio-political machinations.

The narrator in *The Restless Supermarket* is a retired proof-reader named Aubrey Tearle who is trying to navigate the political climate of pre-democratic Johannesburg with excessive

cynicism and mild racism. Tearle's attempts to enact some form of change take the form of grappling with ideological apparatuses by writing letters to the editor of the *Star* newspaper about the everyday trivialities he experiences, such as the format of the crossword in the newspaper, or the proficiency of local delivery-van drivers. Tearle's fixation with language causes him some uneasiness as he attempts to navigate the changing socio-political milieu and the vocabulary it introduces. Tearle presents as a liminal character, alienated from his friends, past career, and the changing socio-political situation of the country on the cusp of democracy – his existence is insular and self-involved. This solitary life allows Tearle to walk the streets of the city, absorbing every detail, and marking the changes as they happen around him. Because of the character's demeanour and level of privilege as a white male, he seems preoccupied more with the infrastructural degradation and decay of the city than the positivity of the political shifts as the country inches towards a democracy in which every citizen is afforded the right to vote. *The Restless Supermarket* thus exposes what Nuttall and Mbembe term "the ecologies of ignorance" through the aging white character of Tearle, who is attempting to navigate "the making of racial friendship or collegiality in the city" through fragmentary and awkward encounters with non-whites in Café Europa (2007:282).

Seeing a corpse from the window of his flat in Hillbrow, Aubrey indifferently describes how "[the corpse] lay among the rusted pipes, blackened bricks and outcrops of old foundations that mark every bit of empty land in [Johannesburg], as if a reef of disorder lay just below the surface, or a civilization had gone to ruin here before we ever arrived" (Vladislavić, 2001:6). Vladislavić creates a layering of the city's gruesome past(s) and present(s), showing that Johannesburg's beginnings as a mine camp just over a century before are still present – the ideologies of capitalism, white supremacy, and exploitation cannot be shrugged off in the context of modern-day Johannesburg. In his reading of the novel, Gyan Prakash notes that "[m]oving between the viewpoints of old and new residents, white and black, order and disorder, and real and fantastic spaces, Vladislavić offers a complex, multivalent picture of Hillbrow's changeover, as well as a series of possible futures" (2010:11-12). Furthermore, Vladislavić's novel can be read as a warning against numbness or willing ignorance with regard to the realities of the present and how they could be projected into the future. Dystopian fiction likewise functions as a warning that "we should not allow the still curable illness of our present world to turn into the abhorrent pathologies of the world of the future" (Gottlieb, 2001:27).

As a form of escapism, Aubrey retreats to the Café Europa, a dingy and grotto-like café situated in the heart of Hillbrow. The café sports a mismatched and eccentric clientele, and Aubrey takes delight in observing them and constructing imagined narratives about their lives

as he completes his crossword or the lexical proofreading system that he is trying to compile. A mural of a fictional “Dickensian” city is painted on one of the interior walls of the dimly lit café, and Aubrey takes to calling it “Alibia” (Vladislavić, 2001:19); Alibia becomes a canvas onto which Aubrey can project his imaginings of a utopian city.

Alibia consists of collage-like snippets of European architecture: a “baroque steeple”, “narrow streets and squares”, “canals thronged with barges, houseboats and gondolas”, “silos fat with grain”, and “outdoor cafés” (Vladislavić, 2001:19). Aubrey perceives this bric-a-brac morphed space as highly inclusive, saying that “[a] Slav would feel just as at home there as a Dutchman”, but he does not identify it as his home, citing the fact that he would have been able to see Hillbrow Tower (the Johannes Gerhardus Strijdom Tower) from his crib if it had been built before his birth – his home has always been Johannesburg. Still, he feels a sense of attachment to this mural, partly because one of the landforms depicted in the art piece resembles his balding head, and partly because it is a tiny Eden nestled in the heart of Hillbrow: a freeze-frame of a civilization without segregation or political disputes. Similar to the utopian sf aesthetic, Alibia reads as a “risibly impractical blueprint for a future society” (James, 2003:220). Alibia is “nowhere in particular” and “[a]nywhere in general”, and this placelessness (and timelessness) aids Aubrey in constructing the mural as an imagined future (Vladislavic, 2001:74). Tension is created between this imagined utopia and the protagonist’s gritty reality, and Aubrey seems to construct this utopia as a means to stave off the fear of the socio-political changes to come within his own context as a citizen in a country on the cusp of a drastic regime change. The hybridized Alibia unconsciously acts as a device to soothe the protagonist in light of his growing neuroses as to what the future of the country holds.

The four texts discussed above show that while not traditionally classified as sf, these realist texts can also be seen to invoke conventional sf themes (most prominently: the notion of the ‘alien’, interactions with ever-changing modernity, an ideological ‘war’ between the oppressed and an elitist minority ruling body, and the navigation of strange and otherworldly landscapes) and dystopian aesthetics in order to refocus poignant political criticism of the authors’ contexts. The analysis of the dystopian aesthetics of these four Johannesburg-based texts serves to contextualise and contribute to the contemporary non-western sf ecologies that have flourished, and continue to flourish, in South Africa. While the terminology of classification may be relatively new, it is evident that South African authors have made use of dystopian speculative fiction aesthetics and motifs to critique the socio-political environment of Johannesburg since (at least) 1928.

Nearing 2020, the city of Johannesburg still struggles to shed the reminders of its scarred and troublesome past as the “quintessential apartheid city”, but in doing so, it has become a lens through which we are able to (re)discover how social forces can shape and reshape the built environment, and how racial and class inequalities live on and are simply redefined (Murray, 2008:viii). Social divisions extend past the legacy of apartheid, and new boundaries and social codes are formed in Johannesburg as the political climate shifts and its positionality as a “world-class African city”¹⁵ becomes more pronounced. The end of apartheid left city planners scrambling to reimagine the built environment in terms of the symbolic ideals of racial harmony in light of the notion of the “Rainbow Nation”. Government officials, political parties, and urban planners have had immense difficulty navigating the knife edge between retaining social safety nets for the poor of the city and market-driven growth, and in turn, gentrification of impoverished spaces. Martin J. Murray describes Johannesburg as “prismatic, kaleidoscopic, and ever-changing”, as well as being:

...a city of monumental architecture and abysmal slums; a city of luxurious playgrounds for the rich and empty wastelands for the poor; a city of utopian fantasy and dystopian anxiety; and a city of collective memory and intentional forgetting (2008:vii).

Furthermore, Murray describes the city as having elements of “ontological instability” in that it is decidedly challenging to manage, negotiate, and define (Murray, 2008:viii). This instability leads to varying and complicated representations in popular media – most prominently, the city is portrayed as a sprawling, disorderly metropolis in constant flux. Lindsey Bremner argues that local fictional writing has “exploded” and “many established and new writers have used [Johannesburg] and its transformation as one of the key tropes through which to interrogate post-apartheid society” (2010:262).

Michael Titlestad recognizes the knee-jerk reaction of South African literature (and I extend this to popular media) to prophesize – he calls this media “generally anxious”, and posits that it takes its bearing from “distant historical horizons” (2015:32). South African media is constantly having to negotiate troublesome temporal and historical relationships and as a result, it is often apprehensive in its projections of the future. Fictional approaches have often stressed the country’s scarred past and project this into dystopian imaginings of the ‘future histories’ of

¹⁵ More recently, the plan for the city’s rejuvenation is for local authorities to develop Johannesburg into a “world-class African city”; residents later commented that this claim being used in the city’s official advertising is “misleading” and a “blatant [untruth]” when considering economic instability and high crime statistics (Narsee, 2013).

Johannesburg. As Frederick A. Kreuziger explains in *Apocalypse and Science Fiction* (1982): “[j]ust as the new worlds and galaxies of science fiction are often models of already known worlds and galaxies (literary ones, too), so also future history is plainly modelled on past history”. Janet Kafka (1975:46), arguing for the usefulness of sf as a critical genre, states that it “provides a critical vantage point for commentary on people and societies as we find them today, as well as extrapolating from this to give us a view of some possible alternate futures” and I argue that this is why South African authors turn to this genre to conceptualise their context(s), both real and imaginary. The genre allows authors and filmmakers to produce content that is not limited by struggles with their real-life milieus, but rather extend contemporary and historical themes into a recognisable otherworld.

Traditionally, South African literary production has been concerned predominantly with the realist mode of writing (as can be seen from the international fame and recognition garnered by novelists like Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee, though both have written futuristic novels). A possible explanation for this is presented by Felicity Wood, who argues that this writing “can be related in part to the way in which the South African situation has been perceived as so huge, all-important and dramatic that many South African writers seem to think that to write something gripping and powerful, all one needs to do is reflect the situation, in as straightforward a manner as possible” (1991:32-33). Wood acknowledges that the changing political terrain, as the apartheid regime was drawing its dying breaths in the early 1990s, allowed for a shift in writing mode as things were “far less clear-cut and there [was] less uncritical allegiance and adoration and far more cynicism” (1991:36). It is in this socio-political interregnum that South African sf began to be written and acknowledged more widely.

In arguing why sf authors and filmmakers turn to a huge city like Johannesburg as their setting and inspiration, I draw on the argument made by Choon-Piew Pow in which he describes how cities facilitate the deployment of singular dystopic narratives because of “the assumption that the urban conditions in many places are already dystopic to begin with and that such urban dystopia is not an imaginative futuristic elsewhere but an immediate and present geographical elsewhere” (2015:464-465). I contend that sf has its roots in material conditions and the conditions of Johannesburg (as well as its history as the hub of capitalist investment, racial segregation, ambitious infrastructure and cultural production) make it an ideal site from which to project South African futures cognisant of South African pasts.

Chapter One: The Untameable 011 of *Zoo City*

Zoo City (2010) by Lauren Beukes has become nothing short of canonical in South African sf, being the first novel from Africa to win the prestigious Arthur C. Clark award for best science fiction novel of the year. Although it was published in 2010, a time of great optimism in the country thanks to the Soccer World Cup and the associated business boom, Beukes does not hold back in her nuanced critique of the larger imbalances and inequalities that run rampant not only in Johannesburg Central Business District (CBD) but in the country as a whole. The tone of this noir is sardonic and critical: while the novel is scattered with comedic moments and gratuitous similes, Beukes cuts to the core of South African socio-politics and chooses Johannesburg as the landscape in which to do so. The city's criminal underbelly is the cornerstone of *Zoo City* and the narrative is set into motion through a series of crimes, criminals of varying malevolence, and generally illicit enterprises. The novel's preoccupation with the lawless elements of daily life in the city leads Cheryl Stobie to connect the concerns of *Zoo City* to "the current mood of the South African nation" (2012:367).

The novel comments on the "disenchantment and melancholy" that followed on from "post-apartheid euphoria" (Stobie, 2012:367). Moreover, Stobie calls for socially aware writing in order to "lead to a mutation of thought by questioning issues such as rights to a fair share, reciprocity and democracy", and *Zoo City* embodies this notion (2012:367). Similarly, Neville Hoad (2016) has analysed *Zoo City* as "a complicated set of allegories of environmental disaster, HIV/AIDS, xenophobic violence, and contemporary African identity", and notes that the novel is heavily informed by South Africa's apartheid and post-apartheid history. Due to its prominence in contemporary South African literature, and because of its relative uniqueness as explicitly South African dystopian sf at a time when this literature was not commonplace, *Zoo City* boasts a huge body of study dedicated to it and it has been dissected from innumerable angles. My study of the novel interrogates spatial politics, issues of punishment and stigmatisation of criminals, as well as the xenophobic discourses that have more often than not led to outbreaks of violence in the city. While cognisant of the widely-published research on this text, I argue that my Althusserian analysis of the aforementioned elements contributes to plugging a gap in the scholarship and generating new points of theorisation in *Zoo City*. Moreover, I discuss the actual conditions of Johannesburg alongside Beukes' fictional ones to show how they overlap; in this way, the discussion becomes multidisciplinary as I draw from the knowledge bases of literature, anthropology, history, and city planning, to illustrate what the fiction is so disapproving of.

The novel depicts the lifelong punishment and stigmatization of criminals by ‘animalling’ them; that is, each criminal is assigned an animal which they have to keep with them, and this animal serves as a signifier of criminality to other citizens. This process of animalling is known as “Acquired Aposymbiotic Familiarism”; the recipients of these animals are derogatorily referred to as “apos” (Beukes, 2010:61). The general societal distrust of aposymbiots comes about not only because there is an outward marker of criminality, but because these animals also bestow unnatural abilities on their keepers. These animals or “*shavi*” are sometimes described as “ghosts” or “spirit creatures”, and the criminal keepers of these animals, also referred to as “zoos”, have no say as to what animal they are given or the abilities that accompany it (Beukes, 2010:10). Beukes provides a quasi-dictionary definition of *mashavi* as follows:

Mashavi – a Southern African word (spec. Shona) used to describe both the preternatural talents conferred by an aposymbiot and the aposymbiot animal itself (Beukes, 2010: 177).

The animalling begins taking place after the “ontological shift” which in essence was the general realization that the supernatural is real and that it has agency of its own (Smith, 2016:346-347). Jessica Dickson suggests that Aposymbiosis also operates as a flexible metaphor: “[a]t different points in the narrative it can reference HIV/AIDS, suggest social burdens with hidden potentials for empowerment, signify criminality, and unsettle boundaries of humanness altogether” (2014:70). The animalled are widely perceived to be “[m]urderers, rapists, junkies” and “scum of the earth” and anti-zoo antagonism is fuelled by speculation and a shroud of societal misunderstanding (Beukes, 2010:8).

Protagonist Zinzi December, a quick-witted journalist in her “Former Life” and 419 scammer¹⁶ in her current one, is animalled with a sloth. Zinzi was given “Sloth” after killing her brother with an accidental gunshot. The cumbersome sloth and her bullet-mangled ear are daily reminders of her crime and the heaviness of the tropical mammal that demands to be lugged around becomes a metaphor for the weight of her unending guilt. Unable to find housing because of her sloth, Zinzi is relegated to living in “Zoo City”, Hillbrow: the territorial stigma of the inner-city is highlighted by its offhand, explicit labelling as the place for zoos and is

¹⁶ 419 scammers perform intricate advance-fee scams digitally. The scam typically involves the fraudster promising the victim a significant share of a large sum of money, in return for a small up-front payment, which the fraudster requires in order to obtain the large sum. These scams usually take place over email and boast a range of manipulative templates. The number ‘419’ has become relatively synonymous with scamming as it refers to the section of the Nigerian Criminal Code dealing with fraud.

therefore re-cast as the hub of decrepitude. Zoo City develops an aura of danger, blackness, marginality, and grime and is avoided by citizens who do not live there, but just as it was in the townships during the apartheid era, the privileged remain morbidly curious and presumptuous newspaper articles about the area are published in an act that deeply resembles a kind of voyeurism.

The “gift, curse” that Zinzi draws from her *shavi* is the ability to find lost things and she uses this to make money finding people’s lost possessions for a fee (Beukes, 2010:6). Zinzi is able to visualize an individual’s lost objects as floating debris around this person, reminiscent of how rings encircle Saturn, and she can then trace where these objects are by following the ‘threads’ they emit as if there solely for her unravelling. Although it is a source of income, Zinzi finds this magically-endowed ability more of an inconvenience than anything else as she describes that “everybody’s lost *something*”¹⁷ and as a result “[s]tepping out in public is like walking into a tangle of cat’s cradles” (Beukes, 2010:6). As a self-described “word pimp”, Zinzi elaborates on her *shavi* as follows: “[o]n some people, the lost strings are cobwebs, inconsequential wisps that might blow away at any moment [but] [o]n others, it’s like they’re dragging steel cables” and so finding something for someone is a question of “figuring out which string to tug on” (Beukes, 2010:105;6).

It is, however, Zinzi’s unique *shavi* that draws the attention of procurement agents Amira and Mark (trading as “Marabou and Maltese” because of their respective *shavi*). Marabou and Maltese enlist Zinzi to help them with a missing person case, and against her better judgement and usual reluctance to find missing people, Zinzi agrees to find a young songstress for an exorbitant fee. Marabou and Maltese hire Zinzi on behalf of famous yet suspicious music producer Odysseus ‘Odi’ Huron who has lost one of the halves of iJusi, a young musical duo made up of twins Songweza and S’busiso Radebe. *Zoo City* narrates Zinzi’s misadventures through Johannesburg on her quest to find Songweza ‘Song’ Radebe and her attempt to navigate the world of 419 scamming, adulterous love affairs, and entanglement with some of the city’s most notorious gangsters, hustlers, and criminals.

Social critique is invited in *Zoo City* through Beukes’ use of the familiar setting of Johannesburg made new with magic, muti, and *shavi*. Commenting on the necessity of defamiliarization in sf, Maria Varsam notes “[i]n the process of ‘making things unfamiliar,’ of defamiliarizing objects of reality, dystopian fiction invites the reader to observe the dystopian world as the narrator observes it, not merely to sympathize but also to judge” (2003:206).

¹⁷ Italics are author’s own.

Moreover, it is through the protagonist's perception of reality, that the reader is invited to condemn the society in question as well as the aspects of this society that constitute the protagonist's oppression. In short, it is through the protagonist's condemnation of their society that the reader is encouraged to also internalise and condemn this imagining of a flawed society. Beukes' protagonist is acutely aware of the imbalances that surround her and she acknowledges her place in the social hierarchy, brought about by her criminal status.

In terms of sf theory, defamiliarization in dystopian literature "shows the world in sharp focus in order to bring out conditions that exist already but which, as a result of our dulled perception, we can no longer see" (Varsam, 2003:206) – and this rings true for Beukes' treatment of xenophobia, crime, poverty, the legacy of apartheid, and the symptoms of privilege. South Africans are so overwhelmed by the sheer volume of news articles and grassroots incidences of the aforementioned daily ills (such as crime, xenophobia, racism, and classism) that these phenomena become white noise. By reframing these everyday atrocities, Beukes encourages readers to be more aware of their surroundings as it is only through recognition and acknowledgment of a social issue that any kind of change can be enacted.

By using Johannesburg as a setting, Beukes creates a familiar site in which a process of defamiliarization can take place. Like Vladislavić, Beukes takes pains to orientate readers with exact street names, references to existing buildings, and vernacular language unique to the city – this contextual richness provides a springboard from which the elements unique to dystopian sf can depart. Moreover, as Varsam continues, "[r]eality becomes a site of interpretation, and the reader is asked to partake in this interpretation in order to elicit the exact parameters of the warning conveyed in any given dystopian text" (2003:206). This then organically begs the key question: what is Beukes warning readers against or for? I posit that Beukes is warning readers against complacency and willing ignorance: in a nation as divided and politically volatile as South Africa, it is crucial that citizens keep questioning their position within, and contribution to, these systems. As Althusser argues, these systems and disparities do not exist independently of individuals, but are rather developed and maintained by them, so citizens must become responsible for the role they play in the maintenance of xenophobic and classist discourses and ideologies.

This alienation and defamiliarization in sf is necessary to readers' engagement with the texts because, as Louis Althusser notes, dominant ideologies are "so integrated into our everyday 'consciousness' that it is extremely hard, not to say almost impossible" to recognise their workings, and so our conception of our circumstances becomes "distorted" and "abstract"

(1971 [1984]:2). Althusserian theory explains that individuals are bred into a specific system to achieve a certain goal; in a capitalist society it is often the goal to become a productive member of the system, and it is within this specific system that individuals receive their schooling and the social rules they are to adhere to. Althusser explains:

...[c]hildren at school also learn the ‘rules’ of good behaviour, i.e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour according to the job [they] are ‘destined’ for: rules of morality, civic and professional conscience, which actually means rules of respect for the socio-technical division of labour and ultimately the rules of the order established by class domination (1971 [1984]:6).

In this way, we are socialised into a certain consciousness as much as it benefits the dominant class or system. Furthermore, Althusser clarifies that a dominant system has to embark on the “reproduction of [the subject’s] submission to the rules of the established order” to ensure that “agents of exploitation and repression” are able to utilise the ruling ideology (1971 [1984]:6-7). In Althusser’s theorization, ideology works on a top-down model¹⁸, and that we think a certain way because we have been interpellated by a certain ideology (for example, the education system as illustrated in the quote above) to do so. Power is thus preserved by the ideology of the dominant system: the subjects of this state-sanctioned ideology comply because they have been socialised to do so. Ignorance and the accompanying acceptance of the status quo is convenient for the state and the dominant ideology because it allows them to function selfishly without being hindered, held accountable or problematised.

The defamiliarization in Beukes’ novel helps us readers to become cognisant of how we position ourselves in society or how we are positioned by the dominant ideology as subjects. In my reading, Beukes’ novel aims to illustrate that South Africans have to become more aware of how they perpetuate certain forms of oppression through recognition of their own privilege and how they may or may not have been socially stratified. As a protagonist, Zinzi is intensely conscious of the larger dysfunctions that are obvious in Johannesburg but also of her personal shortcomings - her past drug addiction, her fervour for scamming rich foreigners, her betrayal of her wealthy parents through her dishonesty, and the killing of her brother. A self-reflexive protagonist calls for self-reflexive readers and, in this way, Beukes is able to highlight the

¹⁸ Or in Marxist vocabulary, the infrastructure (the economic base of society) and the superstructure (which contains two “levels” or “instances”, namely the politico-legal and ideology). These terms constitute a “spatial metaphor” in that every society has “a base (infrastructure) on which are erected the two ‘floors’ of the superstructure”. This metaphor is useful in that it communicates the key notion of social structure: “the upper floors could not ‘stay up’ (in the air) alone, if they did not rest precisely on their base” (Althusser, 1971 [1984]:8-9).

shortcomings of our socio-political landscape, both on a personal level (Zinzi in Johannesburg) and a larger structural level (representation of some of South Africa's socio-political, historical, and economic issues in a larger framework).

Neville Hoad similarly suggests that *Zoo City* acts as a national political allegory in that it “reworks versions of South African and more particularly Johannesburg history and social life” in multiple ways (2016:293). Hoad reads Zinzi as embodying an on-going crisis in the “production and reproduction of everyday life in globalized, [post-apartheid] world of contemporary South Africa and Johannesburg” and he describes her biography as “potentially and impossibly national and civic” (2016:294). Importantly, Hoad relies on Jameson's sentiments offered in “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism”, chiefly the sentiment that “[a]ll third-world texts are necessarily [...] allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call national allegories, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel” (1986:69). Although labelling these texts as “third world” has become rather unfashionable and problematic, this quote is helpful because it describes how locating novels within their conditions of production and reception in an era of multinational capitalism can be valuable to their study and this is what I intend to do in my discussion of the novel.

Unlike existing studies, the following discussion of *Zoo City* will be Althusserian in orientation and will focus on divisions and conceptualisations of space along the lines of privilege, futuristic modes of Repressive State Apparatuses in the form of animalling, as well as representations of Johannesburg as the city of migrants alongside discussions of xenophobia. Additionally, I will interrogate why Beukes chooses to deal with these contentious elements of post-apartheid city life in her novel, as well as how these components tie in to theories of the modern African dystopia.

Privatised Citadels and Gangster Warrens: Division(s) of Space

Traffic in Joburg is like the democratic process. Every time you think it's going to get moving and take you somewhere, you hit another jam. There used to be shortcuts you could take through the suburbs, but they have closed them off, illegally: gated communities fortified like privatised citadels. Not so much keeping the world out as keeping the festering middle-class paranoia in.

Lauren Beukes, *Zoo City* (2010:84)

Originally a gold-mining settlement, Johannesburg has exhibited unprecedented growth since its establishment in 1886, and has been subject to many socio-political and accompanying aesthetic overhauls over the years. These continual efforts to establish Johannesburg as a world-class city have left the city perpetually caught in the narratives of cosmopolitanism, developmentalism, and modernity. This often-troublesome ambition is concerned with “making requisite improvements to the physical infrastructure, creating sites of luxurious spectacle, and introducing signature architecture” (Murray, 2008:23). The process of modernizing is often set into motion by waves of gentrification. The resulting classist division often dons the mask of development and progress, but at its core is still harmful to residents, particularly those of a lower income bracket. The city of Johannesburg’s website proudly presents the headline “A Joburg that works is a South Africa that works” – which begs the question: does a Joburg that does not actually work also exemplify a South Africa that is dysfunctional?

Writing about slum tourism in inner-city Johannesburg, Fabian Frenzel explores “territorial stigma” in urban spaces, which can be defined as a “symbolic devaluation of whole neighbourhoods that both results from and effects more material deprivation [and] it is sometimes applied regardless of the actual economic situation in a neighbourhood” (2014:432). Non-sf literature set in Hillbrow conforms to this aesthetic of degradation linked to the area’s territorial stigma, as can be seen in such novels as *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2001) by Phaswane Mpe, *Room 207* (2006) by Kgebetli Moele, and *The Million Rand Teaspoon* (2006) by Nikki Ridley.

In terms of Johannesburg-set sf as an example of “concrete dystopia”, Maria Varsam (2003:206) argues that defamiliarization can help in conceptualising events of the past and aid a reconciliation of history. In short, “the real world is made to appear ‘strange’ in order to challenge the reader’s complacency towards accepted views of history and awaken ... a new perception between history and the present world” (2003:206-207). Furthermore, through comparisons across time and space, the sf author invites readers to critique the historical processes that have taken place as well as to assess what similarities remain between this dystopian representation and the present day – this is a reflection both *on* and *of* reality (Varsam, 2003: 207). This theorization is helpful in seeing the Johannesburg portrayed in *Zoo City* as symbolic of contemporary Johannesburg in that it has showed signs of developing

into what Keith Beavon (1998:1) calls “the neo-apartheid city” because of its intense dividedness and class consciousness¹⁹.

Badlands often become refashioned as attractions and stigmatised territories are taken over in the process of gentrification which results in further displacing the marginalised populations from the space concerned. Areas in inner-city Johannesburg like Hillbrow, Braamfontein, Yeoville, Joubert Park, Berea, and Newtown, amongst others, carry high territorial stigmas and are regarded as some of the most dangerous areas in South Africa, but are slowly being rebranded as fashionable hotspots. In the novel, Zinzi cynically notes that Newtown, the “funkified art, theatre, design and fashion capital of the inner-city” should be burnt down again, just as it was in the early 1900s to quell the spread of the bubonic plague, in order to “purge the blight of well-meaning hipsters desperately trying to paint it rainbow” (Beukes, 2010:160).

Martin J. Murray notes that the almost constant reconfiguration of the city subjects urban residents to a life-aesthetic that “effectively transforms them into law-abiding, model citizens who spontaneously and obediently comply with normative ideals about how a good city should function” (2008:24). In this way, this process is also about management and regulation of citizens and how they perform their daily lives; the urban poor, however, cannot conform to these aesthetic and moral requirements and are thus pressured, evicted and alienated. Visions of a stable and orderly city have been disrupted by the seemingly inconvenient presence of the poor; this presence has antagonised city planners and ruling officials for decades, and has resulted in the evolution of the city in ways that no one could have controlled, despite the restrictive legislation of apartheid. Planners have often had to deal with what Murray calls “antiplanning”, that is: “[t]he corrosive effects of unexpected friction, disruption, and resistance brought about by the stubborn refusal or reluctance of ordinary people to conform to the established rules governing the use of urban space” (2008:24).

Many opportunistic and downtrodden residents have been able to evade the municipality’s disciplinary apparatus by claiming indiscriminate spaces in a process of bottom-up reappropriation that challenges institutionalized authority and the basic principles of urban planning and development. One way in which this is manifested is through the ‘high-jacking’ of buildings by slum-lords who exploit the poor and maintain power through the use of violence

¹⁹ Officially, the only barrier to living in a suburban area is price, but there are nuances to this consideration: although there is an emerging black middle- and upper-class, many black citizens remain on the margins because of the legacy of apartheid. As Keith Beavon notes: “although there are no longer any racial barriers to where one might live, the northern ‘wedge’ and the suburbs adjacent to its western side remain overwhelmingly white” (2014:247).

and intimidation. This specific manifestation of the aforementioned infrastructural issue came about in the 1980s when the apartheid regime was slowly beginning to dissolve. There was a breakdown of institutional segregation which led white people who had lived in the city to relocate to the suburbs; the vacuum was in turn filled by “job-seeking black migrants” who had previously not been allowed to occupy these once-affluent spaces (The Economist, 3 August 2017). Frentzel (2014:437) summarises the socio-political landscape as follows:

During the 1980s, inner-city districts like Hillbrow and Yeoville witnessed an increasingly rapid decline in housing quality, while associated indicators like property prices and perceived security dropped significantly as well. The reasons are to be found in a complex combination of factors resulting from the crumbling [a]partheid regime. From the mid-1970s onwards, increasing numbers of non-white residents were able to secure tenancies in central Johannesburg. These tenancies were illegal according to the [a]partheid Group Areas Act, resulting in higher rents for new arrivals and conflicts in the tenant landlord relations leading to rent strikes and a divestment of landlords from the area. Hillbrow and Yeoville were reclassified as ‘grey areas’ in the Group Areas Act of 1985 – after a landmark ruling had questioned forced removals from the area – and banks and financial institutions redlined Hillbrow and other parts of Johannesburg, effectively halting the ability to secure mortgages [t]here.

Unsure of how to handle this shift in population, the financial ramifications, and the political climate, many property owners simply abandoned their buildings and the area’s decline was compounded. By the mid-1990s, whites had almost completely left these areas and had relocated to the suburbs to the north, and Yeoville and Hillbrow came to be, and still are, regarded by many as lawless slums. Opportunistic gangsters then began occupying these buildings, charging financially desperate individuals to live there in an informal rental market they had created, and making an income from rent on properties which they do not own. Downcast residents pay an agreed-upon amount to occupy a squalid space within the apartment block or shopping complex, not knowing that their rent is essentially illegitimate and they are squatting – when building owners reclaim that property, the tenants find that they have essentially been scammed and they are then evicted for “squatting”.

Beukes chooses these inner-city territories for the setting of *Zoo City* and shows heightened awareness of this pronounced territorial stigma and the prevalence of hijacked buildings in the Joburg cityscape. Zinzi lives in the ironically named “Elysium Heights”, a shoddy and neglected gangster warren which she describes as a “decrepit circus” (Beukes, 2010:53). Elysium Heights is situated in Hillbrow and is home to the animalled; the building is often host to automatic gunfire, prostitution, passport fraud, and 419 scammers. This

decaying apartment block was “condemned years ago” and the rooms have been “gutted by scrap rats who ripped out the floorboards, the pipes, the fittings – anything that could be sold for a hit” (Beukes, 2010:2;5). Zinzi identifies her accommodation as a vertical “slum” where “[e]ven the stuff that’s nailed down gets repurposed” as drug paraphernalia (Beukes, 2010:5). Residents do not have legal electrical connections and live in squalor, but their social position as criminals on the fringe of society does not allow them to enact any real changes on a municipal level.

Zoo City’s proverbial watering hole, Makhaza’s Place, is a run-down department store that has been unofficially refurbished as a bar famous for its view and Lagos-style chicken. The bar is situated “on the second floor of what used to be a shopping arcade back when this part of town was cosmopolitan central, with its glitzy hotels and restaurants and outdoor cafés and malls packed to the skylights with premium luxury goods” (Beukes, 2010:42). None of this luxury remains in Zoo City and residents alter the worn-out shells of the buildings to fit their needs. In terms of updating the aesthetic of the dilapidated old store in the crumbling building, Zinzi comments:

There was big talk about comebacks and gentrification a few years ago, which led to months of eviction raids by the Red Ants, with their red helmets and sledgehammers and bullhorns, and bright-eyed landlords buoyed up on the property boom bricking up the lower storeys of buildings. But the squatters always found a way back in. We’re an enterprising bunch. And it helps to have a certain reputation (Beukes, 2010:42).

The process of “un-hijacking” these buildings has proved to be a difficult task as the residents within these buildings are deprived of service delivery and sanitation, which often results in “mountains of rubbish to remove - which have occasionally been found to conceal dead bodies”, a lack of water and electricity, rat infestations, and the floors being “covered in faeces” (The Economist, 3 August 2017). Aptly, even the fictional Elysium Heights’ tenants get electricity supplied through “shared illegal hook-ups” which involve “jerry-rigged wiring running between flats, sometimes between buildings” (Beukes, 2010:53).

Martin J. Murray argues that the gentrification of inner-city Johannesburg cannot take place without “the blunt instrument of brute force” (2008:214). Residents are cast out and their survival strategies are criminalised in the name of the corporate vision of Johannesburg as a world-class city. Murray explains: “[t]he driving force behind these military-like campaigns to uproot and dislodge homeless squatters from the insecure niches they carved for themselves in the interstitial spaces of the inner city is to restore the glitter to the City of Gold by ‘bleaching

away' the urban poor" (2008:214). Logistically, clearing a high-jacked building is a long process, and it typically involves the participation of the Red Ants, a security company and forced eviction squad.

The Red Ant Security and Eviction Services is real: it was founded in 1998 as Wozani Security by local entrepreneurs and the firm is hired by both private property owners and the government to evict individuals from illegally occupied buildings or lands (Laccino, 2016). Beukes mentions the eviction squad by name and her critique is pointed: the company has become associated with the use of excessive force and is now the posterchild for proxy authority, regulation, allocation and use of space, and has earned itself the nickname of *Rooi Gevaar* (translated from Afrikaans as Red Danger), despite their painstaking attempt at positive branding (Murray, 2008:91). The Red Ants have become the militant arm of the capitalist enterprise and undeniably victimise the underprivileged for a profit; they often handle evictions by carrying crowbars, riot shields and rubber bullet guns (Murray, 2008:212; Postman, 2019:¶1). The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) has noted that this security firm "often [violates] people's rights when they carry out evictions" and the commission has vowed to take action against the eviction squad "if needs be" (Nqola, 2019:¶1;¶6).

The Red Ants are given unchecked power by anyone willing to pay them in a collaborative effort which often results in the entrenching class differences. Louis Althusser notes that the whole of the political class struggle revolves around "the possession, i.e. seizure and conservation of State power by a certain class or by an alliance between classes or class fractions" (1971 [1984]:14). In this way, the government (represented here by the South African Police Service (SAPS)) and the property owners have allied with the private security firm as agents of gentrification to carry out their undesirable task of displacing the poor so that they can retain their position of power and control. This alliance protects the state as it casts responsibility onto the Red Ants and thus maintains a workable level of plausible deniability if the evictions or raids do become violent (as they are prone to do). The Red Ants and property owners exchange capital for the displacement of the poor and the state simply casts the squatting as illegal and can therefore be lethargic in their handling of the underlying issues of space and poverty all while they collect rates and taxes from the propertied.

Martin J. Murray asserts that this "criminalization of survivalist strategies of the urban poor" is simply a part of the process of "hardening the urban landscape" which involves city planners calling for a "reinforcement of boundaries and distinctions" to maintain a certain aesthetic (2008:25). Darko Suvin comments on similar phenomena in "Theses on Dystopia 2001" as he communicates that all humans "live in highly endangered times" and that "the

richer among us ... have been cushioned from realizing it by the power of money and the self-serving ideology it erects. But even [the rich] complain loudly of the 'criminality' and general 'moral decay' of the desperately vicious invading their increasingly fortress-like neighbourhoods. We live morally in an almost complete dystopia ... and materially (economically) on the razor's edge of collapse, distributive and collective" (Suvin quoted in Baccolini & Moylan, 2003:187).

Differential policing is also evident in areas with high territorial stigmas and this creates a vicious circle that residents have to navigate: there is no police presence because of the territorial stigma, but there is also a high territorial stigma because of this lack of visible policing. Claire Bénit-Gbaffou (2008) describes what she calls "policing fragmentation" (which includes private security services) as "the differential and unequal provision of security services according to place, income and race" and she notes that this is the lived reality of Johannesburg post-apartheid. In *Zoo City*, when witnessing a brutal gang shooting from her neighbour's window, Zinzi conveys her views on the SAPS by musing that "[t]he police are a joke with a punchline you've heard before" (Beukes, 2010:206). Policing is mostly left to privatised security firms who run Zoo City and the surrounding areas "the same way dogs piss on their territory" (Beukes, 2010:206). Moreover, this involvement of the security companies is intended to protect their employers' assets and not the human capital. This can be seen in Zinzi's observation of one of these private armed force units in action: "[t]hey're only interested in protecting their buildings", implying that their interest in the human aspect of criminal activity is negligible (Beukes, 2010:206). The injustice of the matter is that security is employed by property owners to protect their assets and not to contribute to the quality of life of residents, even though it is ultimately the residents paying for this armed force with their rent payments. This reflects the Marxist observation, argued above, that the state has revoked their participation in civil governance and allowed the protection of citizens to either become a capitalist venture or just to simply not exist, leaving citizens to fend for themselves if they cannot afford the luxury of private security. The repressive apparatus in Johannesburg is only sometimes that of the state; more often than not, it has been co-opted by individuals for profit. Here, the novel's entanglement with actual conditions of existence acts as a mere reflection of reality amidst the muti and the supernatural: the fantastic is suspended for a moment of chilling clarity, thus exposing Beukes' moral argument that some citizens are already living in a dystopia by virtue of the fact that they are unsafe and wholly unprotected.

The media/communications ISA or the ideological element of this repressive apparatus²⁰ has been known to respond in kind by fervently highlighting the success stories of the SAPS and hesitating (or sometimes even conveniently electing) to disseminate the less flattering discourses about the national police force and its follies. On the flipside of this same coin: positive action by private security firms is also hardly ever recognized by state-sanctioned news broadcasts and media outlets, as distributing this information would undermine the perceived power of the state and expose its shortcomings. The ideological functioning of the RSA (in this case, the SAPS) takes place through the “‘values’ they propound externally” which ensures the apparatus’ reproduction and maintenance (Althusser, 1971 [1984]:19).

Entrepreneurs and property owners have come to experience what Murray terms “compassion fatigue”, which he defines as “the growing intolerance that alleges a widespread erosion of public sympathy for the homeless and the unemployed” (2008:25). The presence of homeless people, beggars, and idle youth communicates notions of joblessness and criminality, and these elements are detrimental to efforts of gentrification or the flourishing of one’s high-end business. Instead of dealing with the plight of the downtrodden, propertied city residents have simply designed new spatial strategies that keep these undesirable and inconvenient elements away from their places of work, shopping, and living. A sanitised version of Johannesburg exists in areas of high income and suburbia because elements of poverty have been moved elsewhere (not eradicated or solved by residents with the means to contribute to a potential solution). This callous indifference hardens an implicit border between areas with a high territorial stigma and those which have come to symbolise privilege; the division between blue-collar and white-collar work is becoming more distinct and divisions between the two become more pronounced after each labour strike, act of corruption, or enforcement of differential policing.

Terry Eagleton observes that capital is “more concentrated and predatory than ever, and the working class [is] actually increasing in size” (2011:7). Therefore, it is “becoming possible to imagine a future in which the megarich [take] shelter in their armed and gated communities, while a billion or so slum dwellers [are] encircled in their fetid hovels by watchtowers and barbed wire” (Eagleton, 2011:7). Such class boundaries are constantly being redrawn and reconceptualised in the city of Johannesburg, as Loren Kruger notes: “any claim of rights or

²⁰ Althusser specifies that “every state apparatus, whether it Repressive or Ideological, ‘functions’ both by violence and by ideology” and more importantly, RSAs function primarily by repression (including physical repression) but they secondarily also function by ideology. Althusser states that “[t]here is no such thing as a purely repressive apparatus” (1971 [1984]:19).

even of new perspectives comes up against a history of refusal of such claims under the aegis of both official policy and customary behaviour [both of which can be classified as ISAs] during segregation and apartheid, and against the hard facts of violent exclusion as well as habitual marginalization of unwanted others in the present” (2013:7). When Hillbrow and the surrounding suburbs were marked as grey areas during the decline of apartheid, these areas haemorrhaged capital because “as the number of white shoppers declined so did the locational attributes of certain sites and streets” and this capital and spending potential settled in suburbia which is conveniently removed from the “spectre of grime and crime” of the CBD but still in its eyeline (Beavon, 1998:13;17).

To provide an example of this theorisation of exclusion as presented in *Zoo City*, I argue that the Rand Club can be seen as a “spatial envelope” that exists above the financial means of the people who reside around it. The Club has its own code of governance, upholds very strict rules which extend from codes of conduct to a non-negotiable dress code, and serves as a “fanciful illusion” of luxury amidst outrageous levels of crime and poverty (Jameson & Speaks, 1990:32). When pursuing Mr and Mrs Barber, a middle-aged American couple, who are the unsuspecting targets for one of her 419 scams, Zinzi travels to the affluent Rand Club for a meeting with the midwestern pair and Vuyo (who is the broker of the deal and the 419 boss). The Rand Club is chosen as a venue by Vuyo because of its reputation as “a cocoon for the social elite, proudly upholding its sophistication and decorum”²¹ and will thus not raise any red flags for the soon-to-be-conned American guests. The venue has arguably maintained this reputation through the patrons’ “clingy colonial nostalgia” and interest in the building’s history as Johannesburg’s oldest private members club (Beukes, 2010:34); it was founded in 1887 during the gold rush when the city was nothing more than a mining settlement. Zinzi’s perception of the interior is critical: she describes the club as “a relic of Johannesburg’s Wild West days, when it was frequented by Cecil John Rhodes²² and other colonial slumlords who would sit around divvying up diamond fields and deciding on the fate of empires” (Beukes, 2010:33).

²¹ The Rand Club as described by the Gauteng Tourism Authority on their website.

²² Once celebrated as a diamond powerhouse, Rhodes is now largely viewed as an unrelenting racist and fierce colonialist whose legacy sparked large-scale protest with the hashtag #RhodesMustFall in 2015. I argue that Rhodes’ trajectory becomes metaphorical for Johannesburg itself in some ways. Johannesburg, like Rhodes, was initially viewed as a symbol of wealth and aspiration during the gold rush era, but then also became (in)famous for exemplifying racist impulses and policies. Rhodes and Johannesburg both existed, and continue to exist, on the knife-edge between profit and morality, and heightened political awareness has ensured that both have suffered reputational consequences because of this.

Zinzi is described as being markedly uncomfortable in this venue and this can be attributed to the fact that the club's exclusionary policies were alive and well until relatively recently; only in 1990s were women and black men allowed to join the club, a century after its formation (Brodie, 2014:53). Zinzi's positionality as a black female still hinders her from existing comfortably in Johannesburg's relics of colonialism like the Rand Club. Zinzi views the venue as a "hangout for power people" and she is unable to brush off the elitist atmosphere and "clingy colonial nostalgia" despite the country's attempt at democratisation of once-colonial space(s) (Beukes, 2010:33;34).

An analogous hierarchic organization of space is made obvious in *Zoo City* as Zinzi's animal restricts her movement: she is more easily denied entry into affluent spaces, and more easily accepted in the seedier ones. Zinzi harbours resentment towards suburbia where she is not allowed to roam as inconspicuously as she does in Hillbrow, describing the suburbs as having a "rotten heart" and "ten-metre-high walls topped with electric fencing" which she believes serve more to obscure the inner machinations of the upper class than to protect the physical contents of the homes (Beukes, 2010:67-68). Lipman and Harris coin the term "fortress Johannesburg" to describe how the affluent have been able to buy "dubious images of protection" by relocating to the suburbs where they surround themselves with razor wire, high walls, snarling dogs, and alarm systems, to protect themselves from both their "conjured-up, and real, fears" (1999:736). The residents of the suburbs seem to have deemed zoos problematic in terms of property value and safety, so by design these residents become so "cloistered in suburbia that they don't get to see zoos" (Beukes, 2010:11). Zinzi grew up in the suburbs of Craighall, Johannesburg with her family but her crime, coupled with the unshakeable sentence of being animalled, has left her ex-communicated and relegated to Hillbrow.

Relevant to South Africa post-apartheid, Althusser notes that even after serious political change or revolution, the state apparatus may survive despite these changes; that is, the state apparatus "may survive political events which affect the possession of [s]tate power" (1971 [1984]:14). What I aim to illustrate here is that even after the fall of apartheid, repressive and divisive modes of governance have survived and this is how conceptualising Johannesburg as 'neo-apartheid' is feasible. The underlying basis of South African society has remained grounded in separation and disparity, and so even though the state apparatus may now be possessed by a different political party, this basis has been challenging to escape. This argument can be found in Beukes' *Zoo City* where historic divides are seemingly unshakeable and characters exist in a nexus of dichotomy: animalled versus non-animalled; poor versus

rich; native versus immigrant; oppressor versus oppressed. Apartheid divisions on the basis of race have been officially dissolved but these divisions have become replaced with those based on class – the rich retain power and the poor are rendered relatively powerless.

While this analysis may appear reductionist because of the analysis of the Manichean positioning of the rich and the poor, it is important to note that the growing middle class does not occupy the contentious spaces discussed above. The middle class has largely settled in the traditionally less affluent southern suburbs notably home to mine dumps and parts of the highveld. The upper-middle class inhabit the northern “garden” suburbs of Parkhurst, Houghton, Saxonwold, Northcliff, Bryanston, and Sandton (Brodie, 2014:182;207;235). Therefore, when “suburbia” is referenced in the argument above, it is these areas that I refer to. Nechama Brodie differentiates the northern and southern suburbs’ reputations by noting that “[p]eople from the northern suburbs almost never go down south, except perhaps to visit the funfair and casino at Gold Reef City, or to send visitors to the apartheid museum”; moreover, “while the northern suburbs have become characterised by high walls and electric fencing, the southern suburbs still have low garden walls, with only occasional electric fencing, indicative of its lower- middle-class and working-class nature” (Brodie, 2014:182).

Separatist policies live on post-apartheid and Beukes keenly interrogates these through Zinzi’s navigation of these divided spaces. As shown above, Marxist theory is helpful in illuminating how apartheid praxis has continued to survive despite change in political leadership because of its alliance with capitalism. Finally, imaginings of a contemporary dystopia are grounded by Beukes in the lived realities of Johannesburg’s poorest residents, who are frequently evicted, manhandled, and left unprotected by the state.

The “Double Functioning” of Animalling as Repressive State Apparatus

The “double functioning” of Louis Althusser’s theories of ideology and state apparatuses is especially useful to understanding the implication of being animalled in *Zoo City*. This discussion will be organised into three main parts, namely: an analysis of prisons as state-enclosed RSAs; an explanation of punishment embodied in animals and the accompanying self-surveillance; and an interrogation of quasi-religious self-surveillance as manifested in the Undertow.

Althusser argues that state apparatuses function as ideological or repressive predominantly, and then the opposite (either repressively or ideologically, depending on the

primary function) secondarily. This is to say that ISAs also make use of repression, and RSAs make use of ideology to function effectively – an ISA does not function purely by ideology as a repressive element is key to its longevity, and an RSA does not exist only through repression but has to be maintained by some kind of ideological functioning. I argue that the animalling of criminals in Beukes’ novel is an example of an RSA first and foremost, but that this repression also has an ideological component that maintains its functioning.

The overarching philosophy of the treatment of zoos is one of control and management: globally there is an attempt to regulate zoos in some way. This management could involve seemingly permanent prison sentences, scientific testing, or the collection and archiving of individual zoos’ data, as Zinzi explains:

“In the US, Australia, Iran, places like that, they do a full head-to-toe, CAT scans, brain scans, endocrine system analysis, the works. In South Africa, we’re protected by the Constitution.” And the prohibitive costs of all that invasive testing. There are better things to spend government funds on, like nuclear submarines or official pocket-lining. They do a few basic measurements to try and quantify your *shavi*, but mainly they rely on reports from the social workers and cops, along with basic demonstrations of what you can do (Beukes, 2010: 128).

This is to say that zoos are at the mercy of the power(s) of their respective state and they are sometimes stripped of their agency and bodily autonomy for the sake of soothing paranoia or the advancement of human scientific understanding. This then eerily starts to resemble a version of eugenics and ethnic puritanism, but little can be done by the zoos to combat this because of their unfavourable status within the larger bureaucratic systems at work. Althusser positions ISAs and RSAs as implicitly classist: “the ‘ruling class’ in principle holds State Power (openly or more often by means of alliances between classes or class factions), and therefore has at its disposal the (Repressive) State Apparatus, we can accept the fact that this same ruling class is active in the Ideological State Apparatuses insofar as it is ultimately the ruling ideology which is realised in the Ideological State Apparatuses” (1971 [1984]:20). Moreover, the ruling class can “lay down the law” in RSAs “easily” because of their position of power and the proletariat’s inability to resist these repressive measures, and I extend this concept to the zoos’ similar inability to resist repression (Althusser, 1971 [1984]:21). South Africa’s high levels of corruption and dwindling funding of social work actually serve to protect zoos from invasive testing, legislative discrimination and harsh state quantification.

Animalling coexists with the more traditional prison RSA as criminals are subject to both strands of punishment in the South African context of the novel. Zinzi served her prison

sentence in Diepkloof prison in Johannesburg where she spent “three years as a guest of the government” (Beukes, 2010:50). Zinzi notes that prisoners are now called “clients” in line with the growing impulse of prison privatisation, but this label change does little for prisoners’ living conditions.

‘Clients’ still get served slop and *pap*, still have to sleep fifty-seven to a room designed for twenty, still have to exercise in a grim concrete yard with the outside world taunting, only a mesh fence and a gun turret away. Clients still get kicked out onto the street when their compulsory state-funded vacation is up. With zero support except for an overloaded parole system that can’t keep track of who you are, let alone what you’re supposed to be doing (Beukes, 2010: 50).

Beukes’ articulation of prison life is painfully familiar for ex-convicts as South Africa has struggled to traverse issues of prison overpopulation for years. The latest annual report by the Judicial Inspectorate for Correctional Services (JICS) states that in the 2017/2018 financial year, prisons in Gauteng were 48% overcrowded which leads to catastrophize issues such as lack of specialised care, inhumane living conditions, insufficient staffing, and an increase in prisoner suicide rates (Etheridge, 2018). In theorizing the concrete dystopia, Maria Varsam notes that “it is in this fiction that the reader may see what elements of reality the writer deems significant enough to extrapolate from in order to warn the reader of future, potentially catastrophic developments” (2003:209). Prisoner rights are often treated with pitiless indifference as it is believed that criminals deserve their abysmal living conditions because of their misdemeanours, and that these conditions have never been a secret so criminals should have been deterred from their criminal activities.

Althusser argues that ideologies are realized in institutions and their rituals and practices and that the state and its apparatuses only have meaning in “ensuring class oppression and guaranteeing the conditions of exploitation” (1971 [1884]:58): incarceration serves to perpetuate the cycle of poverty that ensures that the powerful remain so. Althusser’s “double functioning” definition of state apparatuses is once more made evident in the example of the prison system portrayed in *Zoo City* as both repressive and ideological elements are prevalent in this inhumane and predominantly repressive apparatus which exists as a mode of punishment alongside the animalling of criminals.

Animalling is repressive in that it pressures those who have been identified as criminals into restraining or suppressing criminal impulses – it is an extended mode of punishment in that it is permanent and irreversible: one’s animal is never expected to “magically dematerialise” (Beukes, 2010:52). The guilty have to have their animal with them at all times

or else they experience unbearable pain and, in this way, being animalled is physical punishment twofold: firstly, as Zinzi does with Sloth, the criminal must physically transport their animal with them which is seriously cumbersome and uncomfortable for those with larger, heavier, or more dependant companions; secondly, if they forego this inconvenience for a prolonged period of time, they experience excruciating physical torment. In prisons, wardens are known to remove the familiar from the zoo and drive away with the animal; this is used as a form of torture as the separation causes pain that is “unbearable” causing the inmate to “scream”, “vomit”, and most importantly, “say anything” (Beukes, 2010:82).

Ideologically, the animals act as an outward physical marker of criminality and this often results in aposymbiotic prejudice, a kind of speciesism that prevents criminals from slipping under the radar in their everyday lives. Another factor is that many aposymbiots have animals that are difficult to conceal as they are either rare/strange to the criminal’s environment or they are physically just too large, or perhaps even a combination of these two elements. An example is Odi Huron’s albino crocodile that he keeps in a dank underground cavern on his property; or a gangster Zinzi notices who is paired with a large brown bear on the streets of Hillbrow. Unable to conceal their familiars, criminals are stigmatised and Othered despite some of their best efforts at repentance or assimilation into a ‘normal’ life. Zoos occupy a lower rung on the social ladder and as a result are often fetishized, victimised and exploited. A rash of zoo murders related to muti takes place but this does not garner much public sympathy and much of the investigation is left to Zinzi as the SAPS remain conspicuously uninvolved in investigative proceedings. When interviewing acquaintances of a deceased downtrodden zoo, Zinzi is told that struggling zoos, “especially homeless ones” and “streetwalkers”, often fall victim to violent crime because they will not be missed (Beukes, 2010:267). The murder or harming of a zoo is unofficially considered a self-fulfilling prophecy akin to the idiom ‘if you live by the sword, you die by the sword’.

It is also important to note that the ideological functioning of this RSA is prevalent in that the state and its ideological arm of the legal system dictate the laws that govern the country and citizens are expected to adhere to these doctrines. Animalling is based on a larger distinction between what is right and what is wrong (morally, ethically; socially palatable or unpalatable), so citizens exist within an ideological apparatus of predetermined conceptions of what is deemed un/acceptable behaviour. Certain morals and values are largely considered universal constants but these are actually products of socialisation: they are undeniably context-specific and do not function at the level of the individual, but are rather both systemic and systematic in their implementation by powerful ruling bodies such as the government or

religious organizations. Distinctions of right and wrong are inherently ideological and state apparatuses interpellate individuals as subjects to adhere to these distinctions.

Althusser stresses that individuals are “always already subjects” and that this interpellation functions in such a way that individuals are not cognisant of its working(s) or their subscription to these manufactured ways of seeing, thinking, and believing. Although criminals may be aware of their positionality in the legal or penitential system, their cognisance of the underlying moral ideologies that constitute these repressive systems is often eclipsed by the more urgent physical elements of their (criminal) behaviour such as survivalist tactics. This is to say that for criminals, frantic avoidance of detection (and resulting punishment) takes precedence over the more philosophical ruminations of what is right and wrong, thereby leaving this moralistic ideology unquestioned by ‘guilty’ subjects. State repressive tactics thus ensure that underlying ideologies of ethics, morals and values, are allowed to function unquestioned and unproblematised by the very individuals they affect.

On that note of perception and cognisance: animalling is perceived in varying ways by different factions of society but the underlying belief is one of trepidation. In short, the belief is that the animalled are not to be trusted. Religious organizations believe that the animals are the “physical manifestation of [a criminal’s] sin” and the criminals “[attract] vermin because [they are] vermin, the lowest of the low” (Beukes, 2010:51-52). Online the aposymbiots are often not afforded any better treatment, and the anonymity of online forums is helpful to proponents of speciesism who take to vitriolic rants about how “apos aren’t human”. Hence the continuing fight for aposymbiots constitutes a “stealth war on good citizens” (Beukes, 2010: 64). In more rural areas, zoos can be tortured or burned because their animals are viewed as “witches’ familiars” thereby casting the zoo as an agent of the occult (Beukes, 2010:52). Some see the animalled as nothing more than “human lab-rats”, there to advance scientific discovery and potentiate evolution (Beukes, 2010: 128). Ethnographic accounts of the phenomenon describe the *mashavi* as “[h]omeless spirits” who are “on the watch for a living host in whom to reside” as they cannot return to their ancestral homeland (Beukes, 2010:177). Another belief is that of “Toxic Reincarnation Theory” which states that because of the earth’s ecological traumas of pollution and global warming, the spiritual realm has been disrupted and warped just as the earth has, and this trauma causes part of your spirit to break away and return to you as the animal you would have been reincarnated as (Beukes, 2010:154). This metaphysical marker of guilt leads to inhumane and disproportionate acts of violence, as in the case of China where “they execute zoos on principle” (Beukes, 2010:9).

Although the explanation of the prison system offers a more concrete dystopian representation of punishment which is rooted in relatable lived experiences, animalling is notably more fantastical. Despite offering multiple varying accounts about what could have caused this ontological shift and the basis for Acquired Aposymbiotic Familiarism (AAP), Beukes evades specificity and never arrives at a unified, coherent description for readers. The novel includes speculation and musings about the phenomena but lacks clarity – instead Beukes buffers this information by including snippets of fictionalized movie review websites, academic papers, interviews, and blogs²³. There is no methodical or “scientific basis” for the presumed cognitive estrangement to take place and so this technique only serves to expose gaping holes in the plot of the novel (Csicsery-Ronay, 2003:118). This foundational thinness for cognitive estrangement will also be discussed in my reading of *Dub Steps* (2015) wherein Miller does not attempt to provide any scientific element relating to the implied apocalypse. Beukes (with help from ghost writers), however, attempts scientific explanation and acknowledgement but does so unsuccessfully (by means of her elaborate multi-textual distraction technique). Critically, there is a lack of narrative continuity to the explanations of AAP and an avoidance of confronting a solid definition and context. While it might be argued that this is done intentionally to echo the general misunderstanding and speculation of citizens, this defense is thin to say the least.

Omnipresent and yet conspicuously under-explained in *Zoo City* is the element of the “Undertow”, a malevolent spiritual force that preys on zoos who have lost their animal familiars to untimely death, abuse or violence. Zinzi often remarks on her fear of this mysterious force also manifested in the threat of “shadow-self absorption” which is described as “a quantum manifestation of non-existence, a psychic equivalent of dark matter that indeed serves as a counterpoint to, and bedrock for, the principle of existence” (Beukes, 2010:158). While often viewed as having religious elements (sometimes being called “Hell’s Undertow” or the “Black Judgement”), clinicians call for the Undertow to be defined in terms of it being “a necessary part of the fabric of the physical universe” which should be seen to “relieve Aposymbiot individuals of the intense burden of guilt they often carry” (Beukes, 2010:157-158). The anticipation of shadow-self absorption causes the zoos great amounts of trauma which manifests in an “irrefutable and ever-increasing sense of oblivion” (Beukes, 2010:157).

²³ Some of this additional content was penned by Sam Wilson, Evan Milton, Charlie Human, and Bryan Steele - whose piece was not included in the final edit of the novel (Beukes, 2010: 311).

This traumatic threat can be read as yet another aspect to zoo punishment as it has damaging effects on their psyches.

Witnessing a zoo being engulfed by the Undertow, Zinzi notes that “the air pressure dips, like before a storm”, shadows descend from every surface and a howling sound fills the onlookers’ ears. Discourse on the physical manifestation of the Undertow does not often infiltrate official dominant discourse but rather exists as a kind of urban legend with “[s]ome eyewitness reports [describing] teeth grinding and ripping in the shadows” and videos having shown “impenetrable darkness” (Beukes, 2010:208). My reading of the Undertow can be linked to Ashraf Jamal’s work on terror in Johannesburg, which he describes as being a “shadow world” which has produced the “sepulchral ghostliness of the South African imaginary, and, by extension, the sepulchral ghostliness of its cities” (Jamal quoted in Bremner 2010:93). Terror becomes manifested in shadows and “the immanent and circumferential nature of violence” is then all-consuming and all-encompassing which has detrimental effects on city dwellers’ psyches (Bremner, 2010:93). This enigmatic locus of threat creates what Bremner (2010:92) calls “a multiplicity of worlds” in the city and I position the Undertow as existing as one of these worlds: the threat of the Undertow functions alongside Zinzi’s empirical reality in a separate yet parallel world of shadows and ever-present anxiety. Jamal argues that Johannesburg’s inhabitants have been reduced to the “living dead” by this brooding terror: the distinction between the city’s vitality and its threat become blurred and inhabitants are often suspended between moments of living and dying (Jamal in Bremner, 2010:93). Conceptualising the Undertow independent of spiritual and magical elements but rather as a physical manifestation of inner-city (ideological) terror is instrumental in my dissection of *Zoo City* as it is useful in echoing dominant perceptions of Johannesburg as insufferably and preternaturally crime-ridden. I liken the Undertow to Althusser’s definitions of ideology in that it is metaphysical but manifests in possible material effects such as anxiety, evasion, and paranoia.

Additionally, an analysis of the religious conceptions of the Undertow is helpful in developing a fuller understanding of the ideological functioning of this threat of punishment and implied spiritual death. Althusser describes Marx’s conception of ideology as “an imaginary assemblage ... a pure dream, empty and vain, constituted by ‘the day’s residues’ from the only full and positive reality, that of the concrete history of concrete material individuals materially producing their existence” (1971 [1984]:34). By this it can be understood that ideology is the process individuals partake in to produce meanings, signs, and values in social life; additionally, and importantly, ideology may be made up of false ideas which help

to legitimate a dominant political power (Eagleton, 1991:1). This is why Althusser's notions of ISAs are valuable: within the novel, the Undertow being perceived as having religious and moralistic elements directly links to religion and socialisation as mechanisms of control which have been developed by the dominant social structures to ensure compliance. Let me clarify: the Undertow itself becomes a repressive apparatus as it comes to represent terror, amorality and the physical threat of violence, and this function is facilitated by its secondary ideological functioning through its religious explanation as "Hell's Undertow" or "The Black Judgement" (Beukes, 2010:65;157). The existence of the Undertow thus becomes twofold: it exists as a mysterious force which serves to absorb zoos if they do not comply with their zoo-hood, and it then also manifests materially in the manufacturing and dissemination of religious discourses which attempt to explain it. This second form of existence is no less malevolent than the first, as it is used by religious practitioners and fanatics alike to rationalise the ill-treatment of zoos and cast them as perpetually threatened by some force that has become inscribed with spiritual signifiers and values. While the Undertow is not controlled by policy-makers or community leaders, the religious ideologies which serve to justify and explain its paranoia-inducing existence are. One of the definitions of ideology provided by Terry Eagleton (1991:2) is "the medium in which conscious social actors make sense of their world": with scientific knowledge of the Undertow obviously lacking, this religious perception of the phenomenon can be seen to be a way in which individuals come to understand its functioning and its purpose.

Discussions of punishment and markers of criminality have been useful in illuminating Althusserian conceptions of RSAs and their double functioning. Primarily, animalling, in conjunction with imprisonment, constitutes the repressive functioning of this state apparatus; secondarily, the Othering, victimization, and avoidance of zoos constitute the ideological working of this mode of punishment. The phenomenon of shadow-self absorption or the "Undertow" has been discussed as a physical manifestation of psychological terror as well as a religious or spiritual ideology through which zoos can relate to the material conditions of their existence. Aposymbiots' existence is riddled with intersecting modes of unrelenting punishment; I argue that this is Beukes' attempt to hold a mirror up to the nation's neglect and sometimes deliberate ill-treatment of criminals through both repressive structures and ideological stigmatisation and alienation. These punishments, both fictionally and realistically, do not serve to curb criminal acts, nor do they address the desperate circumstances which lead to the committing of these crimes. Thus, I read *Zoo City* as echoing Eagleton's argument: in the crisis of capitalism, it has become more feasible to imprison individuals than to develop long-term strategies for their employment – issues of poverty, waste, and slump are more easily

dealt with when the vulnerable are imprisoned and removed from the workings of everyday life (2011:29).

The City of Migrants: Examining Xenophobia in Inner-City Johannesburg

For the urban poor of Johannesburg, life is characterised by insecurity. African immigrants settling in the inner city experience this insecurity along with having to navigate the prevailing xenophobic discourses and the violence these discourses have been known to provoke. There has been a steady influx of destitute immigrants into Johannesburg, and some have termed this unstable and ever-growing influx of African immigrants who are fleeing persecution a “refugee crisis” (Robinson, 2018:1). By 2018, a recorded 586 000 asylum seekers and refugees inhabited impoverished spaces in South Africa (Robinson, 2018:1). These individuals have not always been welcomed into the new spaces they inhabit and they often become the scapegoat for pre-existing socio-economic woes.

Kudakwashe P. Vanyoro uses Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence to conceptualise xenophobic discourse in South Africa. Vanyoro argues that discursive violence is “wielded with tacit complicity between its victims and its agents and both remain unconscious of submitting to or wielding it” (2015:2). This is to say that this “symbolic violence” of xenophobia is implicitly ideological: if we conceptualise ideology in its simplest form as “the system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of [an individual] or a social group” (Althusser, 1971 [1984]:32), then xenophobia fits snugly into this definition. Ideologies have histories, which is to say that this xenophobia did not come about in a miraculous moment of groupthink, but rather that ideologies depend on “the history of social formations, and thus of the modes of production combined in social formations, and of the class struggles which develop in them” (Althusser, 1971 (1984):33). Xenophobia became an outlet for disgruntled citizens’ frustrations and blame for general infrastructural, political, and economic decline and instability was cast onto these migrants. Newcomers placed unmanageable pressure on local municipalities who were unable to effectively handle the housing crisis which had existed even before these immigrants arrived; their arrival compounded overcrowding, the acute housing shortage, and failure to deliver social services – including healthcare, education, and governance procedures (Murray, 2008:29).

Initially, individuals’ interpellation into the ideology of xenophobia proved less troublesome than the acknowledgement of governmental failure and the resulting

disillusionment with the government that had freed the country from apartheid. The efficacy of this top-down strategy of ideological diversion from the issues at the core of the nation (these issues being an overall lack of state policy to deal with this influx of people or engagement with underlying social issues) was short-lived as parts of the country exploded in a wave of xenophobic violence in 2008. Vanyoro (2015:3) argues that state institutions “embrace migration evidence under dire circumstances of ‘xenophobic crisis’ to suit their political agendas and reconfigure their power, legitimacy and global reputation” and that the South African government has been lethargic in their acknowledgement of any such crisis, except when it threatens to taint the manicured and global image of the country as the Rainbow Nation. Moreover, similarly to Donald Trump’s politics in the USA, the South African government can be seen as having co-constructed this crisis: crisis construction “is often a prelude to securing political consent or material support for emergency migration measures” including iron-fisted immigration restrictions, border closures, and mass deportation (Lindley, 2014:17; Vanyoro, 2015:3).

During the transition to democracy, South Africa was ambiguous with regard to their commitment to refugee rights with a volatile history reaching back more than a century (Kirsten, 2018:3). The Aliens Control Act (No. 76) of 1991 grossly lacked protection for asylum seekers, and was a last-ditch effort by the apartheid regime to keep the country free of migrants and refugees. The Act allowed for indefinite detention of undocumented foreigners and a general lack of judicial review over proceedings (Klotz, 2013:192). Post-apartheid, the Refugees Act (No. 130) of 1998 allowed for asylum seeker permits, and it limited detention time to thirty days. Furthermore, a refugee could receive an identity document, work in the country, and receive benefits such as state medical care and access to education. Section 27 of this Act also states that after five years, the refugee could receive the opportunity of permanent residence in South Africa (Klotz, 2013:193). Although philanthropic, this has proved problematic as the social, infrastructural, and regulatory bodies of the country have become over-burdened, resulting in diluted efficacy for both locals and foreigners across the board.

In May 2008 dramatic displacements took place in Alexandra Township and the surrounding areas of Johannesburg because of the culture of violence towards foreigners. The targets of this violence were predominantly foreigners, but many of these victims did not qualify for international aid and assistance because they were not officially refugees (Klotz, 2013:198). These xenophobic attacks constitute “the first sustained, nationwide eruption of social unrest since the beginning of South Africa’s democratic era in 1994” (Steinberg, 2008:1). In an interview with Sarah Lotz included in the Bonsela edition of *Zoo City* (2010), Lauren

Beukes acknowledges that she draws inspiration for the novel from these attacks and attempts to “distil the humanity from the headlines” by introducing characters like Zinzi’s love interest Benoît Bocanga.

Benoît is a charming and even-tempered refugee from Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country which has been ravaged by the atrocities of systemic violence including the prevalence of child soldiers, brutal rape, widespread killing and genocide, dismemberment of civilians, and cannibalism, according to United Nations reports (Miles, 2018). As a refugee, Benoît is often referred to as “*mkwerekwere*”, a derogatory term for foreigners which originated as a Zulu slang reference to their speech which is dismissed as supposedly mimicking an animal sound (Buxbaum, 2017:79; Culbertson, 2009:vii). Benoît attempted to flee his country with his wife and three children but was intercepted by the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR)²⁴ who separated him from his family and then “beat him to the ground with their rifle butts, poured paraffin over him and set him alight” (Beukes, 2010:56). Upon arrival in South Africa, Benoît settled into a flat in Elysium Heights, Zoo City, where he fit in as a zoo himself.

Benoît makes money by covering shifts for Elias (a Zimbabwean security guard with a private security company, Sentinel Security) when Elias is ill. This happens regularly as Elias has “been sick, coughing his lungs up in the squalid room he shares with six other Zimbabweans” (Beukes, 2010:115). Elias’ condition is cause for speculation though, as he does not have access to medical care and so a proper diagnosis cannot take place – some think he is suffering from tuberculosis but Zinzi believes he is ill as a reaction to the “black mould” in his squalid accommodation (Beukes, 2010:115). Migrants are often left no option but to live in these constricted and constrictive spaces of the inner-city slums because they fear registration for grants or outreach as this has oftentimes resulted in arrest or deportation (Murray, 2008:156).

Similarities between the empirical reality of Hillbrow and the city space depicted in Beukes’ novel are so acute that the character of Zoo City often does not read as fictional. Zoo City is home to ex-centric subjects like the animalled and the immigrants because, as Jessica Dickson argues, Hillbrow is ex-centric in and of itself: Zoo City is described as “a ghettoized ex-centric space at the heart of Johannesburg and a well-known stopover for migrants hailing from other ex-centric spaces” (2014:69). Immigrants and refugees can more

²⁴ The FDLR is a rebel group and politico-military movement aimed at fighting “the post-genocide Rwandan regime” from bases in the forests of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Rafti, 2006:4).

easily exist freely in Hillbrow because of the zoos' pre-existing and socially ascribed 'Otherness': Zoo City becomes the place for outcasts and Others, just as Hillbrow was an enclave accessible to non-whites (the apartheid Other) during the 1980s. Moreover, South Africa does not house refugees or asylum seekers in camps, but rather expects them to integrate into society independently which often results in refugees inhabiting Johannesburg's high-density inner-city areas like Hillbrow, Berea, and Joubert Park. This process of integration and assimilation is not facilitated by any aid organizations and so these vulnerable groups are often subjected to "intense verbal and physical abuse, police harassment and racial profiling" (Bremner, 2010:171). Lindsay Bremner argues that "[t]he body of the refugee has become the site upon which new categories of disqualification that define the limits of the post-apartheid nation state and post-apartheid citizenship are drawn" (2010:171). The legacy of apartheid lives on in the Othering of refugees and migrants, as Bremner states: "[a]partheid is not over, it has simply been deferred" (2010:171).

Although Zinzi discovers Benoît's turbulent journey to Johannesburg piece-by-piece in "snapshots, images caught in a strobe", she uses similar narratives of war-torn countries and their desperate refugees as the basis for her 419 scams (Beukes, 2010:56). Johannesburg-based hustlers prey on the stories of the *mkwerekweres* in a bid to make money off of unsuspecting good Samaritans who give these scammers money under the pretence of the money being a short-term loan that this person (the scammer) will pay back as soon as they reach safety or are able to contact the right people. Scammers succeed in this con thanks to their meticulous formation of heart-wrenching narratives which serve to manipulate the affluent into forking out the cash to help an imaginary prisoner of war, or orphan, or desolate refugee. Zinzi describes her scam tactic with a fictionalized character named Frances:

Frances is a refugee in a camp in Côte d'Ivoire. Twenty-three years old. Suitably flirtatious if the *moegoe*²⁵ on the other end of the line is a man, a good chaste Christian girl if it's a woman. More or less. Most characters are designed to be slightly flexible depending on the operator, although Frances is fairly one-dimensional. After the rebels attacked, she fled to safety, got stuck in the refugee camp, and now she can't access her father's fortune. Bog standard format (Beukes, 2010:31).

It is ironic that the refugees are not socially accepted by most, but their stories are used to garner profit from largely first-world foreigners. For example, Vuyo, the sleek scam boss, never

²⁵ Afrikaans slang for someone who is generally dim-witted.

mentions Benoît by name in his correspondence with Zinzi, electing rather to call him “[yo]ur [Zinzi’s] *mkwerekwere*” (Beukes, 2010:122): in this way, refugees are prejudiced, but their stories have value so long as scammers can profit off them. When Benoît happens to find this scam material on Zinzi’s laptop, he expresses his profound disappointment in her as well as how one of her scam formats resonates with his past. A mournful Benoît describes his subjection to “*Muti*. Drugs. Rape. Killing games” in the forests of the Congo, where he used to sleep in a church until a splinter group attacked and “[u]sed their rifle butts to smash in the heads of the little ones too small to walk” (Beukes, 2010:228). As a refugee, specifically at this point in the narrative, Benoît experiences a profound sense of un-belonging and liminality: he has been cast out of his own country by violent rebels, and now his closest confidant in his adopted home has betrayed him by exploiting the stories of those like him.

Benoît leaves Elysium Heights for Central Methodist Church with renewed determination to depart from the country and find his family. When discussing xenophobia and the related violence in Johannesburg, mention of the Central Methodist Church is mandatory as this actual institution has become well-known for its unwavering provision of safety to refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers during times of crisis (Steinberg, 2008:1). Nechama Brodie elaborates that this church has “long been known as a place of peaceful (but vocal) protest against oppression” and has been involved in granting refuge to individuals on the run from threats including apartheid security forces, as well as providing protection for illegal African immigrants during xenophobic outbreaks (2014:79-80). During the xenophobic protests of 2008 the church housed thousands of foreigners who had fled their homes after weeks of violence and intimidation and has since maintained its reputation as a sanctuary for refugees and illegal immigrants. Martin J. Murray notes that “[a]nywhere from five hundred to eight hundred homeless people, including large numbers of politically stranded refugees from Zimbabwe, find nightly refuge in the halls of Central Methodist Church in the central city” (2008:173). The church’s conditions are far from luxurious or comfortable, but it caters to desperate individuals who sleep there as a means to survive: the church absorbs the people on the fringes, the excluded individuals who do not benefit from governmental social support policies or strategies. Its doctrine of inclusion does however leave the church overcrowded, and at Benoît’s leaving, Zinzi rebukes his decision to go there for his final days in South Africa because he will presumably have to “fight over a piece of concrete floor to sleep on” or alternatively find rest “on the edge of a staircase” (Beukes, 2010:226).

Benoît’s journey back to his native country will be one punctuated by corruption, fear, and bureaucratic hurdles as his status as a refugee does not guarantee him the ability to leave

the country. As a refugee, he will have to collaborate with smugglers “who will get [him] across borders, sneak [him] under barbed-wire fences, ferry [him] across crocodile-infested waters, [and] pay off border guards with cases of beer or bullets” because the workers at the Department of Home Affairs are said to believe that “being a refugee means you can never go home again” (Beukes, 2010:119-120). To preserve his refugee status, Benoît must make the journey without collecting stamps in his passport in the event that he needs to return to South Africa.

At the novel’s conclusion, Zinzi too makes this journey out of the country but does so on a fake Zimbabwean passport with a new identity: Zinzi leaves as Tatenda Murapata and does so to escape a particularly needling SAPS inspector who is eyeing her for a slew of crimes including a murder she did not commit. In a sweeping redemption arc, Zinzi is intent on travelling to Kigali in an attempt to locate Benoît’s family for him while he recovers from a particularly nasty run-in with Odi Huron’s alligator which leaves him in a critical condition, alternating between “fevered moments of wakefulness and unconsciousness that’s borderline coma” (Beukes, 2010:308). Zinzi is now also a migrant and has been inadvertently cast out of her own society and is forced to assume a new identity.

I argue that this journey out of the country will simply be a continuation of Zinzi’s unbelonging with Hillbrow in the rear-view mirror: Zinzi’s fall from the “comforts of [her] parents’ Craighall house with the pool and the gardener and the char lady who made [her] bed” to the vertical slum of Zoo City left her permanently an outsider, never quite fitting seamlessly into her context. Now Zinzi is an animalled black female migrant with “counterfeit currency” and the adopted narrative of “a full-time nanny going home for a holiday” and she will have to survive the nexus of oppression that accompanies these social markers (Beukes, 2010:308). As a character permanently having to navigate some sense of liminality and unbelonging, Zinzi has had to traverse many social and contextual boundaries before this attempt at unselfishness for the sake of her ill lover. Beukes’ protagonist has navigated these varying situations successfully thanks to her ironic charm and adaptability and this departure seems a fitting step in her trajectory.

Beukes’ concern with the rights of refugees is prevalent throughout her text and she handles this subject with sensitivity: migrants in Zoo City are constantly struggling to survive in this harsh metropolis, but they do so with a deep-seated sense of dignity and self-possession. The insidious ideology of xenophobia in South Africa, the rights of refugees and the infringements thereof, exploitation of refugee trauma narratives, as well as the notion of un-

belonging in terms of ex-centric subjects and how they navigate their fluid and contentious context(s) has been discussed above.

Cheryl Stobie's (2012:367) call for socially aware writing is now more urgent than ever, especially with regard to (im)migrants living in South Africa: as recently as the 1st of September 2019, a violent bout of xenophobic attacks took place in Gauteng, leaving ten dead and hundreds of foreign nationals fleeing the country. Anti-migrant rhetoric can now spread more easily over social media and ironically, this online ideological connectedness serves only to exacerbate divisions at a grassroots level. Beukes' writing-back to the 2008 attacks now reads almost as prophetic as over a decade later, ill-conceived nationalist ideologies still prevail and escalate, thereby exposing the fact that the nation is everything but a neatly-packed post-apartheid utopian rainbow.

Conclusion: (Failing) Attempts to Tame the Zoo

Beukes' novel is especially nuanced in its critiques of the country's shortcomings in terms of the pronounced lack of workable and human-centred housing solutions for the poor; discrimination against convicted criminals and the multifaceted modes of punishment which serve only to remove downtrodden individuals from the everyday; and how xenophobic sentiment and resulting violence has inadequately been dealt with or recognised as the epidemic it so clearly is. Through an Althusserian lens, I argue that Johannesburg is a fitting setting for this witty, critical work of sf as the city has historically been the epicentre for the shortcomings and failures outlined in *Zoo City*: the city's trajectory from mining settlement to contemporary neo-apartheid metropolis has been punctuated, and perhaps even pushed forward, by oppression and controversy. Moreover, Johannesburg's reputation (and reality, to an extent) as a crime-riddled danger zone makes projections of a dystopian future distressingly tangible.

Zoo City shows that neoliberalism has stacked the odds against the (urban) poor and as a result, many individuals do not have to suspend their reality to imagine themselves as living in a dystopian space. By intertwining the real and the fantastic, the novel extends real-life situations into fantastic/futuristic visions of dystopia. Commenting on the role of the dystopian text in enacting actual socio-political change, Jennifer Robinson argues that "dystopic narrative strategy might well be an effective means to provoke critical responses and stimulate imaginative reactions to what is, by all accounts, a global emergency" (2010:221). The sheer amount of scholarly attention *Zoo City* has received is proof that this text has started a

conversation and 'provoked critical response'. There has been noticeable theoretical engagement with Beukes' projections and concerns; therefore, I argue that *Zoo City* has fulfilled its prophetic, critical role as a dystopian novel, cognisant of context-specific nuances and socio-historical influences.

Chapter Two: Money, Machines, and Morality in *Chappie*

On his show “Last Week Tonight”, British comedian and critic John Oliver mentioned *Chappie* (2015) with reference to the American medical device industry: “It turns out that when metal rubs against metal, bad things can happen, which sounds like the tagline for a movie about a masturbating robot. You’ll notice that we didn’t actually come up with a funny fake name for that movie because the perfect name for a movie about a masturbating robot already exists, and it’s *Chappie*” (2019). While there is no masturbation scene in the film, this jab is indicative of the film’s reputation as crude and over-enthusiastically vulgar.

Neill Blomkamp burst onto the scenes, both local and international, with his 2009 film *District 9* – the film has been recognized as South Africa’s first feature-length sf production and thus garnered and sustained both popular and critical attention. Therefore, when Blomkamp announced his second sf film set in Johannesburg, the industry was abuzz with excitement and expectation. But *Chappie* did not deliver. If anything, *Chappie* has become the butt of many jokes in popular media and has developed an unshakeable reputation of a clumsy and shallow quasi re-make of *Robocop* (1987). The film’s poor reception and resultant box office flop have led to a lack of critical study of the themes and representations within the work; however, I suggest that this artistic work’s lack of popularity should not be the sole determinant of its value for a study of Johannesburg’s representation as a contemporary African dystopia.

Chappie lends itself to an Althusserian analysis in that the state’s repressive apparatus (that is, the military and police force) is depicted as largely privatised and modernised, and this raises issues of corporate greed, corruption, and the safety of citizens. *Chappie* depicts a society so riddled with crime that the South African Police Force (SAPS) can no longer control it. Human police officers are thus systematically replaced with insentient law enforcement droids. The droids’ efficacy is initially tested in Johannesburg, but the project is halted when it becomes apparent that one of the droids has achieved sentience by means of reprogramming.

Similar to his narrative technique in *District 9*, Blomkamp makes use of a documentary style interview format and snippets of news broadcasts in his opening scene of *Chappie*. The opening scenes of *District 9* depict an alien aircraft hovering inexplicably over Johannesburg in 1982. Visuals of the projected dystopian setting consist of traffic, mine dumps, pollution, protest, and overcrowding; all of which can be seen as real, tangible issues in Johannesburg (Kirsten, 2019:4). *Chappie*’s opening scenes follow this same formula almost exactly: various individuals are interviewed about their perception of the droid police force, slow-motion shots of the droids in action take place between interviews, and newsreel imagery of shootouts,

victim resuscitation, and bloodied streets punctuate this archetypal introductory sequence. While this technique could be considered repetitive or lacking in originality, I argue that it serves a key function in terms of sf theory and that is why the presentation of the abovementioned elements is placed at the beginning of the film.

Darko Suvin's notion of the novum is set up in this opening sequence as the novum is totalising²⁶ and "appears as an invention [in this case, the police droids] or a discovery around which the characters and setting organize themselves in a cogent, historically plausible way" (Csicsery-Ronay, 2003:119). Blomkamp is able to develop the novum by contextualizing the plausible existence of, and perceived need for, the insentient droids. The novum is said to be fundamentally hopeful in impulse as it is intended to "awaken human collective consciousness out of a static present to awareness that history can be changed" by referring to concrete innovations in lived history (Csicsery-Ronay, 2003:119). The novum contains the most important distinctions between the world of the story and the world of the reader (or the real, known world). In this case, unchecked policing, ever-rising crime rates, the prevalence of violent crime, and the paranoia of the general public is depicted thoughtfully and with the ultimate intent of cognitive estrangement. The recognition of these concrete issues helps introduce the automatons and the artificial intelligence they house in a conceivable way and this is what the plot of the movie hinges upon.

In summary, *Chappie* narrates the collaboration of the SAPS with a multinational weapons and software development corporation called "Tetraaal", which is tasked with the introduction and maintenance of police droids which are intended to support human police officers in life-threatening encounters with criminals. This collaboration is sparked by the rising mortality rate of police officers in Johannesburg due to gun violence and tense SAPS-public relations. The chief of the SAPS passionately explains that these droids are intended to "usher in a new day, one that represents the end of crime, the end of corruption, and the start of the rebirth of [the] city" (*Chappie*, 2015: 00:01:27-00:01:48) – this sentiment is hopeful in impulse and ushers in the development of Suvin's novum. These droids, known as "scouts", are framed as the world's first robotic police force when they are implemented in 2016 and their inclusion initially boosts the efficacy and worldwide reputation of the SAPS (known in the film as the RSAP – presumably, Republic of South Africa Police). Crime levels are reported

²⁶ Suvin describes the novum as "totalising" because "it entails a change of the whole universe of the tale, or at least of crucially important aspects thereof" and this change comes about as a result of an invention or intervention (1979:64). The introduction of the droids serves as the catalyst for the change which affects 'the whole universe of the tale' (in this case, the governance and functioning of South Africa).

as having plummeted and naturally, Tetravaal's stock skyrockets which leads to increased production of the locally-manufactured police droids. The droids' vulnerability to hacking is foreshadowed in a news broadcast by American journalist Anderson Cooper in which he communicates general public concern regarding the automatons' potential weakness. Tetravaal ensures investors and citizens alike that their products are safe from threats of cyber-terrorism as the software is heavily protected and allows only them to alter coding.

This security protocol is far from flawless though, as the initial code altering or 'hacking' is initiated by ambitious robot developer and Tetravaal coder Deon Wilson (portrayed by Dev Patel). Deon, the scouts' creator, is unsatisfied with the relatively basic artificial intelligence (AI) that the droids are equipped with; rather, he is interested in "true intelligence" which would allow these robots to "think and feel" which would ultimately equip them with human emotional responses (00:03:25-28). When Scout 22 (a particularly unlucky droid prone to harm, described as a "bullet magnet") is retired after receiving an anti-tank rocket launcher blast to the chest during an intervention of a failed drug deal, Deon steals the metallic carcass with the intention of installing the newer, more refined software. Scout 22's brain architecture is left intact after the blast, allowing Deon to run the new program on the written-off scout hardware, which he does without the permission of Tetravaal executives.

A parallel narrative unfolds alongside Deon's well-intentioned experimentation: criminals Ninja and Yo-landi²⁷ begin targeting Deon in an attempt to usurp his "remote control" for the droids. The desperate pair owe the drug lord known as Hippo twenty million Rand for botching the last job they carried out for him, and they intend to make this money by means of a heist. Yo-landi suggests that the only way they stand a chance at success is through incapacitating the scouts, hence the pair's interest in Deon. Ninja and his compatriot, Amerika (a self-styled banjee gangster complete with American accent and slicked hair), hijack Deon when he is in the process of transporting Scout 22 for reprogramming. Upon discovering the damaged droid in the back of Deon's Tetravaal van, Yo-landi asks Ninja and Amerika: "You know what? What if we get [Deon] to reprogram this bad boy to fight for us?" (00:23:04-09). Despite his initial protest and refusal, Deon is forced to turn Scout 22 into an "indestructible gangster number one" when his life is threatened by the criminal trio (00:23:10-12). Much to Ninja's disappointment, because the more refined AI is designed to mimic actual human development, response, and learning, once Deon installs it on Scout 22, the droid exhibits the

²⁷ Portrayed by subversive South African musical duo Yolandi Visser and Watkin Tudor Jones of *Die Antwoord* fame.

characteristics of a toddler and has to be taught the skills that would contribute to his maturity. Frustrated that the droid has not been instantly altered into a hardened criminal robot, Ninja is inclined to scrap it once more, but Deon strives to protect his creation and Yo-landi convinces Ninja to let her ‘raise’ the droid which she names “Chappie”.

The eponymous droid, intended to be “the illest gangster on the block”, starts his second life as “a human baby, but smarter” whose organic intelligence develops much faster than that of a human, but like a human, needs to be taught and trained (00:23:34; 00:23:56-59). While Deon attempts to nurture Chappie to test the limits of his coding and potential for good, Ninja introduces Chappie to the seedy underworld of Johannesburg and instils an alternate set of values. A succinct example of exposure to these alternating schemas is when Deon teaches Chappie that it is wrong to kill someone, but Ninja overrides this moralistic impulse by convincing Chappie that he will not be killing individuals for them, but rather simply making them “relax and go to sleep”; this soothes Chappie’s newfound sense of right and wrong. By redefining death as something that “feels nice”, Ninja and Amerika convince Chappie that using violence is a kindness (01:02:01-06). Moreover, Chappie is forbidden by Deon from using guns so Ninja and Amerika teach the droid to use knives and shuriken instead as a means to an end. The malleability of the newly installed AI allows for exposure to, and implementation of, various ideologies, and Chappie chooses which of these to pursue based on the gratification he will receive for doing so, as is human nature.

In a rare example of praise for the film, Bryant William Sculos (2015) argues that Blomkamp’s depiction of Chappie’s journey from an infantile and irreverent droid to an archetypal gangster is sensitive in that it fosters a sense of empathy in the audience. The audience forges an emotional connection with Chappie almost instantly when he is reprogrammed and genuine sorrow is elicited from viewers when harm comes to the droid. Ironically, this is what Sculos believes Blomkamp’s core message to be: humans have a greater capacity for empathy than sometimes acknowledged, yet a marked lack of empathy for fellow humans persists (2015:5). Chappie’s development into a violent criminal is viewed with empathy by the audience, but when the same trajectory manifests in countless young South Africans’ lives, it is viewed with contempt and condescension. This differential reaction to a similar emotion cue leads Sculos to conclude that “[i]t is the mystification of how criminals become criminals which Blomkamp’s film destabilizes” (2015:5). It is in this way that “[t]he veil is lifted and our capacities for understanding and empathy are reinvigorated” and so “[t]he ideology of individual blame is incompatible with the series of events we are shown that turn Chappie from an innocent child into your average gang-banger. We see a sentient being with

no knowledge of the world turned into an instrument of destruction because of the material conditions and social structuring he experiences” (Sculos, 2015:5).

In his review’s conclusion, Sculos notes that “[t]he message is clear, if still unstated in the film: love for our fellow man is incompatible with violence, but when faced with immediate and structural violences, counter-violence may be the only practical means of ensuring we all still exist to love each other at a later point” (2015:5). Blomkamp’s work emphasises Johannesburg’s portrayal in the popular imaginary similarly to Lindsay Bremner’s observations of “violent crime, fear, uncertainty and death, a landscape of terror, of violent ghettos, defensive architecture and splintered urbanism” (Bremner, 2010:89). The director’s portrayals of the city often stress the prevalence of violence, but more importantly how counter-violence has become necessitated as a means of survival.

While this film fits the scope of this thesis naturally, it is important to outline the main criticisms of the film before embarking on a more detailed discussion. I have organised the film’s main criticisms into four categories, namely: the deployment of clumsy technological solutions to complex issues; presentation of questions which are ultimately left unanswered; what I call the film’s “un-Africanness”; and the film as an example of dystopia porn. Firstly, the navigation of the technological borders are laughable at some points in the narrative as it totally lacks nuance or even a basic understanding of the technology selected. I will illustrate this with two main examples. First, the scouts’ entire code, their digital make-up, which is supposedly protected from the possibility of cyber terrorism and theft, is simply stored on a USB drive, which seems a ridiculously naïve solution to a genuine safety concern as almost every digital device can access files stored on a USB drive, including most smartphones. The second example of this digital *faux pas* is Chappie’s ability to extract and store his consciousness on nothing more than a tower of stolen Sony PlayStation 4 gaming consoles. In a brilliant marketing plug for one of the film’s main funders (Sony), the recreational consoles are shown to be able to process data as complex as AI and the ever-developing consciousness of the droid.

A second criticism concerns how the characters in the film raise poignant questions about the ethics of creation and the consequences of consciousness. These ideas, which seem to be crucial issues underlying the whole plot, are never actually addressed, or are dismissed in throw-away dialogue. While Blomkamp stresses that the film is not actually about AI or technology, but rather a rumination on “humanity and the ever-ephemeral soul” (Asher-Perrin, 2015:¶9), this is not entirely achieved and any attempt at profoundness is overtaken by 1980s nostalgia, blasting music by *Die Antwoord*, and teaching Chappie to swear.

Although the film is set in South Africa, the only residues of Africanness that make it into the final cut of the movie are images of brutality and the seemingly irreparable socioeconomic woes of the country. This is evidenced in the problematic casting of members of *Die Antwoord* as main characters, a white ex-soap opera actor as the crime lord Hippo (complete with inflections of *tsotsitaal* and dreadlocked hair), and the very obvious lack of black actors in even secondary roles. Blomkamp becomes lazy in his contextual immersion and presents a film that is somewhat tone-deaf in terms of race, identity politics, and cultural nuance. This critique echoes the director's xenophobic impulses in *District 9* where stereotypes of Nigerians as gangsters and drug dealers are emphasised and conveniently used as a plot device (Kirsten, 2018).

Lastly, I put forward the notion of dystopia porn, based on and linked to the idea of poverty porn, and I suggest this to be a money-making enterprise closely associated with disaster capitalism. Blomkamp superficially engages with this idea through Tetravaal (the multinational arms manufacturer is seen to take advantage of national pessimism and paranoia for foreign profit), but I argue that the film itself serves as a larger example of dystopia porn. In my analysis, I will briefly discuss Blomkamp's cinematography as an exercise of poverty porn, meaning that *Chappie* problematically situates present-day Johannesburg as dystopian for an American cinematic gaze. Poverty porn can be described as media's tendency to sensationalize some of the more negative aspects of life in disadvantaged communities with content that is primarily recession-focused and arguably exploitative (Mooney, 2011).

Blomkamp relies heavily on the aesthetics of decay in much of his cinematography. Shots of derelict architecture, vulgar graffiti, and inner-city slum punctuate the narrative in moments between dialogue. The film casts Johannesburg as an unaesthetic, crumbling space complete with the modern ruins of decaying infrastructure. A specific example of this is the visual sequence that introduces Ponte Tower. The 54-storey tower has come to symbolise the apocalypse because of Hollywood's frequent use of its eerie hollow core as the site of everything from zombie hordes in *Resident Evil: The Final Chapter* (2016), to the hideout of Congolese warlords in *Seal Team 8: Behind Enemy Lines* (2014). In *District 9*, alien spaceships hover ominously over the apartment blocks, and in *Chappie*, dogfights are staged at the base of the hollow core. Ryan Lenora Brown (2017:¶9) notes that the common motifs associated with Ponte are "fire, garbage, garbage on fire, and of course, lots and lots of gunshots" even though the apartment block has largely been refurbished and is home to many middle-class families. Blomkamp uses the recognisable architecture to depict Ponte and its surrounds as a desolate, lawless place where society's rules have little meaning. The brutalist architecture

combined with the building being the tallest apartment block in Africa make it so recognisable that it becomes a kind of caricature of urban grit and inner-city dirt. The scores of middle-class families, students, and migrants very rarely make it into the newspapers and they do not seem to stimulate the aesthetics that have made Ponte so central in the popular imaginary as a post-apocalyptic movie set. Pertinently, Alexandra Parker asserts that “[m]ost filmmakers in South Africa are still white, so films do often track white perception of the inner city, not necessarily the personal experiences of people living there” (quoted in Brown, 2017).

The aforementioned criticisms can be linked, in varying degrees, to Lindiwe Dovey’s work on conceptualising African cinematic production. In *African Film and Literature: Adapting Violence to the Screen* (2009), Dovey comments on America’s monopoly over local film especially in terms of exhibition circuits, stylistic influence, and funding. Hollywood’s involvement is said to remain “an impediment to the development of a truly independent national cinema” and as a result, “South Africa is not unique in Africa in occupying a fragile relationship to the development of its own images” (2009:44). Similarly, Dave Calhoun (2007) notes that films with an African backdrop which are produced by foreigners have become increasingly popular but remain problematic. Calhoun argues that these films reflect the attitudes of foreign filmmakers who perceive Africa as nothing more than containing “stunning landscapes, a fascinating past, but ultimately a continent whose people and politics are too difficult to get to grips with” (2007:35). Furthermore, Calhoun argues that “[t]he reluctance of international filmmakers to engage fully with African reality can be partly blamed on ignorance or complacency, but some of it is definitely because of crude commercial pressure” (2007:¶11). Domestic cinematic production has experienced a boom boosted by foreign investment and critical and commercial success at home and abroad (Calhoun, 2007:¶16), and so African-born filmmakers like Neill Blomkamp return home to capitalise on the misery and the exoticized beauty of their homeland. Their African nationality gives such filmmakers licence to make harsh judgements about their own people, as Dave Calhoun critically asserts (2009:¶17): “[f]amiliarity breeds fearless filmmaking” in his discussion of Gavin Hood’s 2005 film *Tsotsi* and Darrell Roodt’s *Yesterday* (2004). Although *Chappie* has been directed by a South African, it is very much the product of the Hollywood movie machine and thus its navigation of local themes is prone to falling short.

This chapter will consider *Chappie* in terms of three main arguments which relate to issues of repression, representation, and the film’s classification as South African sf. Althusserian theory will be consulted in my discussion of the politics of post-apartheid policing and the development of the deep state in which the clout of corporations buys them a say in the

governance of the country. This analysis will also include discussion of South Africa's history in order to assess the effectiveness of Blomkamp's 'future history' in *Chappie*.

The Déjà Vu of Policing: Repressive Practices Post-Apartheid

Blomkamp's portrayal of a near-future robotic police force is overtly critical of modern policing tactics, the innate trust we bestow upon technology, and callous public perceptions of how criminals come to be as such. Lindiwe Dovey (2009:50) describes the nature of South African crime as inextricably tied to the country's political context: "[w]hen South Africa became democratic in 1994, South Africans faced a decrease in political violence but an escalation in violent crime, which has led to South Africa's reputation as the crime capital of the world". With reference to the thematic impulses of *Chappie*, Dovey notes that "South African films seem to share a desire to narrate the nation into being not by means of naïve optimism, but through a critique of contemporary violence. In order to move away from the violence that characterized the 'old' exclusionary nationalism [of apartheid], they critique the cycle that perpetuates violence [post-apartheid]" (2009:51).

Apartheid-era violence has been inadvertently allowed to survive in the post-apartheid social systems through its emergence in technologized forms. As a result, "contemporary filmmakers are showing that it is not sufficient to acknowledge South Africa's history of violence [as] they explore questions about the nature of individual and collective responsibility for violence in post-1994 South Africa" (Dovey, 2009:50). South African filmmakers must thus take this continuing violence seriously in their portrayals of local contexts and socio-political relationships; Neill Blomkamp attempts this in *Chappie*, albeit in gory yet glamorized form. I argue that *Chappie* describes how excessive force could continue to be used in local policing, just as it was during the apartheid era, and that policing and crime management strategies continue to be overtly militarized in times of perceived emergency. In this discussion, I will conceptualise the importance of the terms "force" and "service" to describe South African policing: I argue that these terms are not interchangeable and serve to signify larger structures of State repression. Apartheid's legacy of violence, paranoia, and inappropriate implementation of physical force by police and military corps has lived on post-apartheid and, as contemporary South African sf posits, will problematically continue into the future because of international capital, the growing crime epidemic and inadequate local governance.

Echoing Dovey's notes on South African criminal portrayals in film, Taiwo Adetunji Osinubi argues that sf films' employment of a "near-future scenario" becomes the "glue connecting ... reconfigurations of social and political forces" (2009: 256). Additionally, when analysing Jean-Pierre Bekolo's film *Les Saignantes* (2005), Osinubi notes that the director's "contained insistence on the nation-state in the future asserts the need to rethink incessantly the formations of political interventions on the continent" (2009:272). Blomkamp's film is also an "articulation of alienation from the nation-state's vision of the future [that being the notion of a Rainbow Nation]" and of the idea that the near future only surfaces in moments of shared risk across various socio-economic, political, and spatial brackets (2009:272). When vulnerable sectors of the population are victimised (for example, the urban poor), action is usually not embarked upon by State bodies as the risk is perceived to be relatively isolated; however, when this risk or danger begins to spread to sectors which are usually immune from such risk (such as the suburban middle- or upper-class), there is generally significant repressive intervention. It is only when risk is shared across divisions of privilege that large-scale action is embarked upon. When the droids are first implemented and react swiftly but violently to curb criminal acts in the inner-city, the public is relieved and the project is deemed successful; however, when Scout 22 is reprogrammed and begins wreaking havoc in the suburbs under the tutelage of Ninja and Amerika, Tetravaal is forced to re-evaluate their undertaking more seriously.

I argue, as Jonny Steinberg (2017)²⁸ does, that there is marked continuity from apartheid-era policing in contemporary South African policing practices. Although the police Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) was rebranded from the South African Police 'Force' to 'Service', emphasis was shifted to crime prevention as opposed to (heavy-handedly) quashing existing crime, and the military rank structure had been temporarily discarded, the apartheid era praxis lived on. Steinberg (2017) elaborates:

How interesting then to discover that these newly labelled bottles contained old wine. Under the aegis of such soft-sounding names as crime prevention and community policing, the old paramilitary model of exerting unilateral control over urban space quickly re-emerged: night-time invasions of township neighbourhoods by squads of heavily armed men backed by airborne support; the indiscriminate arrest of young men by the truckload; widespread police violence both against detainees and on the streets. By 2010, barely a decade and a half into the democratic era, even the new labels and bottles were gone. Police

²⁸ Page numbers are unavailable for the digital format of this text.

ranks were remilitarized, signalling a naked return to an apartheid legacy.

During apartheid, policing efforts were predominantly focused on the maintenance of state power; in other words, policing was done with the primary goal of protecting political order and suppressing efforts at state destabilization. This however fostered a deep sense of mistrust for the police force in terms of their political intervention and influence, and so, post-apartheid, the structure of policing was reconfigured away from the political towards the visible and the everyday (Steinberg, 2017).

However, a crisis of confidence steadily began to take form after 1994, attributed to rising crime rates, dropping conviction rates, and ever-surfacing allegations of corruption. Attempts to tackle this growing and seemingly uncontrollable crime problem involved increasingly authoritarian strategies carried out in collaboration with the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) in the name of being “tough on crime” (Rauch, 2000:10). Since 1999, the SAPS has taken a more strong-arm approach to criminals and this has sometimes curried them favour with the general public as crime-centred paranoia continues to escalate within and about the country, but overall this approach has been anything but successful (Rauch, 2000:5). A *Mail & Guardian* exposé by Kamvelihle Gumede-Johnson details the harsh training SAPS officers are subjected to at a Pretoria training facility. This military-style training is implemented to “toughen” police recruits and controversially turn them into “soldiers” who uphold the law (2011:¶5;¶10). Moreover, instructors repeatedly stressed that recruits would constitute part of the police “force” (as opposed to the police service) despite the painstaking rebranding effort undertaken during the transition to democracy (Gumede-Johnson, 2011:¶9). This harsh training situation eerily resembles that of the pre-1994 policing environment and serves as an explanation for the ever-rising rate of incidents relating to police brutality as the normalization of abuse and violence in a training setting then serves to justify this same behaviour when SAPS officials handle the community in a similar way.

This culture of violence within the SAPS is emblemized by their actions on the 16th of August 2012 at the Lonmin platinum mine in Marikana, North West Province, during an unofficial protest by mine workers demanding a wage increase. The events of that day have become known as The Marikana Massacre as the SAPS opened fire on a crowd of striking workers, killing 34 workers and seriously injuring 78 more, then arresting 250 more individuals after the attack. This event struck many South Africans with a profound sense of déjà vu as it so closely resembled the proceedings of the Sharpeville Massacre in which policemen killed

69 protestors and wounded a further 180 on the 21st of March 1960²⁹. The Marikana Massacre served to expose how little had been accomplished since apartheid in terms of developing more holistic and humanitarian strategies for dealing with police-community conflict. Moreover, the obvious militarization of the SAPS was brought to the fore and their use of lethal weapons was sharply condemned by various regulatory bodies (Merten, 2017:¶3). This event cemented the national police as a ‘force’ as opposed to a public ‘service’.

Louis Althusser argues that massacres (like the events of Marikana) make the various orders of repression observable and render visible the processes of oppression which usually function below individuals’ consciousness. These massacres and violent interventions “[cast] light on all the direct or indirect forms of exploitation and extermination of the masses of the people ...; [they cast] light on that subtle everyday domination beneath which can be glimpsed ... the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie” (Althusser, 1971 [1984]:13). In this way, The Marikana Massacre is neither an isolated incident nor independent of historical context; rather, it is symbolic of the continued violent domination enacted by the State and its repressive apparatus (the police force) which inadvertently serves the bourgeoisie. Acts of brutality against citizens by the police (and other RSAs like the army) expose the fact that no concerted effort is being made by these institutions to safeguard their own citizens or engender a sense of trust in said institutions.

The unpleasant image of such mass violence being carried out by national law enforcement does not require much extrapolation for it to be framed as dystopian: the scouts in *Chappie* are shown to cock, load, fire, then reload their rifles *ad nauseum* during an implied protest scenario in the inner-city. While the droids fire at protestors in a scene that resembles popular portrayals of a zombie apocalypse, they issue the instructions “freeze, disperse” but citizens do not comply (01:15:24-51). The city is personified by newscasters during this event as it is broadcast that “[t]he city is tearing itself apart”, when in reality, the use of violence by the State is seen only to provoke counter-violence resulting in sheer pandemonium (01:15:35).

Blomkamp uses this paranoia around police brutality and skyrocketing crime rates as the springboard for his narrative. Considering the violent militaristic legacy of South African policing, the introduction of hyper-efficient, soldier-like, unfeeling police droids is plausible in the context. Johannesburg’s territorial stigma is notoriously high and much of the country’s capital is concentrated there, making it the ideal landscape for the scouts. The opening two minutes of *Chappie* (00:01:06-26) see Johannesburg being described as a “dangerous city” in

²⁹ Death tolls and injury tallies from both massacres garnered from sahistory.org.za.

which “more than three hundred murders and violent attacks” take place daily. Moreover, reference is made to police shootouts and the frighteningly high mortality rate of “men in blue” (SAPS officers) which further serves to contextualise the need for recyclable, programmable and replaceable agents of law (00:01:25). Although violent tactics have been shown to undermine public trust in police, the militarized droid protocol fits snugly into the next step of the evolution of the historically violent South African policing schema: Blomkamp has digitized this previously human violence.

The robotic policing in *Chappie* is also conducted in conjunction with efforts from the SANDF. Visuals of the hangar in which the scouts are developed show overt SANDF markings on machinery and on the walls, along with huge South African and American flags. The American flags are presumably representative of Tetravaal’s involvement in the country as all Tetravaal executives speak with American accents and are led by insatiably capitalist Michelle Bradley (played by Sigourney Weaver), who often prioritises company image over human life. When Chappie goes rogue and the entire scout network is sabotaged by another Tetravaal employee and Deon’s competitor, Vincent (Hugh Jackman), the role of the SANDF in policing becomes more pronounced. Vincent’s SANDF-funded robot, the Moose, is originally deemed expensive “overkill” that would only be deployed if things got “a hell of a lot worse” in the urban spaces now overseen by the scouts (00:21:16-23). When it becomes clear that Chappie has to be captured at any cost, Vincent is given permission to initiate the Moose’s attack protocol which consists of hunting Chappie by any means necessary, including rocket launchers, countless rounds of ammunition and even (somewhat comically) ripping Amerika in half (01:34:17-24).

The impulse to award more control to the military in times of emergency is witnessed by Althusser who explains: “the army, which (the proletariat has paid for this experience with its blood) intervenes directly as a supplementary repressive force in the last instance, when the police and its specialized auxiliary corps are ‘outrun by events’” (1971 [1984]:11). This quote describes the kneejerk reaction of the bourgeoisie to repress the proletariat and its machinations in times of crisis (or as Althusser describes when the State is ‘outrun by events’) as the primary mode of large-scale intervention. This violent and overtly repressive reaction to emergency circumstances only serves to echo notions of the State being “a force of repressive execution and intervention in the interests of the ruling classes” (Althusser, 1971 [1984]:11). This impulse is not unfamiliar to the South African context as can be seen in the increased militarization of the police force and the everyday involvement of the military during both apartheid and more recently. In September 2019, the SANDF collaborated with local police on “an integrated

intelligence-driven operation” which involved “increasing police visibility” in the Mitchell’s Plain policing precinct just outside of Cape Town, in an attempt to more effectively manage gang- and drug-related criminal activity the area has become (in)famous for (News24, 2019:¶1-2). The involvement of the army in everyday policing may not be as pronounced as it was during apartheid, but it has not disappeared since.

During the 1976-1990 period, the South African Defence Force (SADF), was positioned at the centre of a highly militarised country. Despite their heightened socio-political clout, the army was allowed to remain secretive about its reserves, assets, and responsibilities throughout apartheid, thus allowing it to operate with minimal public accountability (Mills, 2008:78). Much of the policy-making during apartheid was heavily influenced by national security forces through their involvement with the social organising principle of the “Total Strategy” which was concerned with the “counter-revolutionary security agenda”, intended to guard the country against communist takeover (Cawthra, 2003:33-34). As a result, the military came to dominate policy-making; much of their work took place in closed, secretive environments and involved little to no public consultation. More visible was the involvement of the SADF in the government’s successive states of emergency in the 1980s: the government’s primary opposition, the African National Congress (ANC), initiated actions to make the country ungovernable through mass protest action and attacks on other black opposition movements. It was during this time that the police force and the army were awarded more power by the government in an attempt to quell the threatened civil war. Gavin Cawthra (2003:34) notes that sections of the SADF and the police force “operated outside of the rule of law and engaged in various actions including assassinations, poisoning and chemical and biological warfare”. The SADF was thus regarded by anti-apartheid advocates and activists as an enemy of the people and this reputation has stuck post-apartheid (Mills, 2008:78).

During the transition to democracy, specifically the multi-party discussions brought about by the National Peace Accord (1991), steps were negotiated and then implemented to reform the national police force, but the SADF remained largely immune to this changing political tone (Cawthra, 2003:32). The new army corps (SANDF) was formed in the 1990s and has not existed unproblematically despite initial optimism about its (re)formation and the collaboration of the seven armed forces which constitute it. Jacklyn Cock (2004:1) has criticised the state demilitarization as “uneven and shallow” and has attributed the rise of “private militarism” (namely, new forms of violence, the privatization of security, and the proliferation of small arms) to this process. Additionally, this emergent militarist nationalism, which sees a strong army as a clear indicator of a strong nation and relies on the military as an

instrument of foreign policy, has aided in the justification of state re-militarization and re-
armament since 1998 (Cock, 2004:1).

Importantly, RSAs can continue to function despite a change in political organization and “may survive political events which affect the possession of State power” (Althusser, 1971 [1984]:14). The formation of the SANDF left key aspects of apartheid privilege and power intact because it came about more as a restructuring of the SADF than a complete transformation thereof, thus the post-apartheid army is still seen to “serve elite interests” and the State’s “basic function” of repression is fulfilled (Cock, 2004:2; Althusser, 1971 [1984]:11). This survival of the hyper-violent army RSA is clearly referenced in *Chappie* where the Moose (with its large SANDF markings) is deployed despite the initial concerns expressed by both the police force and Tetravaal executives.

I argue that this mammoth robot’s deployment is simply a continuation of apartheid era crisis management strategies, as the robot and its operator are allowed to operate with disproportionate violence in response to a threat against the State. Despite Vincent’s seemingly obvious indifference towards violence, he originally motivates the use of his robot because of his aversion to AI, describing that having an “adaptable, humane, moral, human being” operating the machinery would ultimately be more successful to neutralise threats (00:03:00-04). It is ironic then that when Vincent is given permission to act, he does so violently. Vincent’s original motivation then reads as nationalist propaganda: the army has long been regarded as heroic in its adaptable protection of citizens on the grounds of what the State deems moral and humane, even though it functions primarily by violence and repression (and secondarily by this ideology of heroism, nationalism, and protection from perceived threat).

When the Moose is compared to the human-sized scouts, it is described as “an even bigger bad boy on the block” (00:02:46) – the Moose is physically greater in size and greater in repressive potential. The threat of Vincent’s creation is not more urgent only because it is physically larger, but because it is employed to be hyper-aggressive in times of crisis and dormant in times of peace, unlike the scouts who are employed to enact smaller changes through everyday policing. *Chappie* serves to visualise and project into the future what Jacklyn Cock describes as the position of the SANDF post-apartheid: that of being a force serving to “cannibalise scarce resources and wield considerable political, economic and ideological power” (2004:3).

Blomkamp shows acute awareness of the issues regarding the SAPS, specifically the general mistrust that remains post-apartheid, police mortality rates, and use of excessive force and lethal weaponry. Moreover, *Chappie* is set in 2016, which at the time of the film’s release

positioned this droid force as a near-future scenario of shared risk, thus demonstrating that revision of the continuation of repressive state praxis is more urgent than ever.

Dismembering the Deep State: The Privatisation of Control

Raphael Zähringer argues that dystopian imaginaries are “approximations of the actual world”, and their purpose is to “force their readers to pit these two worlds [the fictional and the real] against each other” in such a way that “the difference between the two ... will prove to be productive” (2017:3). In the discussion below, I will define the concept of a ‘deep state’ and highlight how South Africa could be classified as exhibiting the characteristics thereof reflected both in literature and current events, thereby both linking fictional representations to actual instances in the country’s history, and extending or departing from them. The inherently political positioning of both Shukri and Blomkamp’s works serves to echo Zähringer’s argument in that these works expose larger socio-political ills which need tending to – the dramatization within the fictional works allows readers/viewers to question the increasingly-militarized and decentralized status of the nation. I argue that *Chappie* suggests the existence of a deep state within South Africa through the police force’s collusion with American weapons manufacturer, Tetravaal (which I parallel to South Africa’s Armaments Corporation of South Africa (Armscor)). Additionally, I will discuss Ishtiyahq Shukri’s novel *I See You* (2014) alongside *Chappie* to position the notion of the deep state as an emerging focus in the South African popular imaginary.

While there is no universal scholarly definition for the deep state, or ‘state within a state’, as it is often dismissed as an elaborate conspiracy theory, Anthoni van Nieuwkerk describes the phenomenon as “a political situation where an internal organ or organs, such as the armed forces and civilian authorities (intelligence agencies, police, administrative agencies and branches of governmental bureaucracy) do not respond to the civilian political leadership” (2018 44). Broadly, this term is used to describe collusion between state organs and private or criminal enterprises with the goal of undermining official discourses of governance (van Nieuwkerk, 2018:46). Peter Scott (2014:13) argues that while all countries have a visible state that can be analysed and felt by everyone because citizens expect it to meet some standards of transparency and accountability, almost all democracies also contain a deep state to varying degrees. Moreover, Mike Lofgren (2016:13) notes that this political policy continuity is seen to exist and function regardless of which political party is seen to officially control the levers

of government, thus rendering official control a façade. Furthermore, van Nieuwkerk notes that proving the existence of a deep state is near impossible, as its functioning is discreet by design and it gains strength from its ability to operate below the radar (2018:50).

South Africa's history of political violence and the recent shift towards the prioritization of private security becomes inextricable from the notion of the deep state. As I elucidated in my discussion of the déjà vu of apartheid policing strategies, the culture of systematic and disproportionate state-public violence continues to thrive post-apartheid and this is (in part) thanks to the state's reliance on private, partly hidden, highly militarized security forces to execute state interests. Arjun Appadurai (2002:24) uses the term "privatization of the state" to describe this appropriation of the means of instruments of violence by non-state groups. Lofgren argues that it is irrelevant who the elected officials of a state are: the deep state "operates according to its own compass regardless of who is formally in power" (2016:31), and this could be offered as an explanation as to the continuation of policing practices from apartheid into the democratic, ANC-run state.

In his book *Apartheid Guns and Money: A Tale of Profit* (2018), Hennie van Vuuren describes the deep state that existed during apartheid, most notably during P.W. Botha's presidency in the 1980s. The deep state is believed to have begun with the establishment of Armscor, a state-owned company charged with research into and development of arms, as well as the procurement of arms despite international trade sanctions (van Vuuren, 2018:181). This was then followed by the state's purchase of media companies which would distribute positive propaganda defending the status quo and concealing the covert channelling of oil to South Africa through various networks of suppliers, traders and transporters who charged huge premiums. Additionally, the maintenance of the deep state involved the destruction of tonnes of documents containing evidence of state-sanctioned misdemeanours, acts of terrorism, sabotage, and evidence of local and international banking allies who facilitated extensive acts of money laundering (van Vuuren, 2018:1;180). The aforementioned processes were protected and lubricated by the invisible networks of the Broederbond, a self-described "secret society" intent on preserving white Afrikaner supremacy, which concealed the effects of political power and the emergence of a deep state (van Vuuren, 2018:25). In summary, van Vuuren (2018:23) concludes that the deep state involved the military, Armscor, military intelligence, business people, and the international business sector, and these role-players executed their actions despite the fact that they "diverted from the views of the electorate" (van Nieuwkerk, 2018:51). The core of the state was therefore seemingly irredeemably corrupt, and this praxis can be seen

to have continued post-apartheid, or as Mark Heywood elucidates: “[t]he new power spread through the localisation, beneficiation and diversification of corruption” (2012:¶16).

In discussing crime in the postcolony, John and Jean Comaroff agree that since the 1980s, civil society has been instrumental in “a move from increasingly rationalised, increasingly bureaucratised, increasingly elaborate regimes of rule towards ever more outsourced, dispersed, deinstitutionalised, constitutionally ordained governance” (2006:3). Western allocation of financial aid and foreign investment often serves to pressure new democracies (like South Africa’s) into deregulating in ways that privilege the private sector over the state; this creates the niche opportunity for the development and thriving of a deep state, or a “bandit quasi state” (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2006:4;5). Moreover, in this political climate, criminal activity is seen to mimic the government’s racketeering structure and practices, specifically in terms of “provision of protection” whereby states provide fee-for-service security and social order (Tilly, 1985:170). Charles Tilly (1895:169) argues that state making is nothing more than a “quintessential protection [racket] with the advantage of legitimacy”, and this should be regarded as the “largest [example] of organised crime”.

Tilly’s branding of politicians as “coercive and self-seeking entrepreneurs” rings true in Shukri’s lamentations on the South African democratic state in *I See You* (1985:169). Protagonist Dr Leila Mashal describes South Africa’s constitutional structures as being “hollowed out” as they serve to withhold “power from the electorate and their elected officials and [concentrate] it in the grip of a secret and unaccountable cabal of oligarchs whose names and faces the electorate will never know” (Shukri, 2014:24). Leila is a medical doctor who has embarked on a political campaign after the kidnapping of her photojournalist husband: her campaign is aimed at eliminating the secrecy of government procedures and calling for heightened transparency and accountability at a state level. In an address at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, Leila argues that since apartheid, there has been “no transition at all” in that “[t]here are forces of deep power now at work in this country, manipulating its institutions, its systems and its structures” just as there were during the years of apartheid (Shukri, 2014:26-27).

Leila’s concerns about unchecked external forces influencing the South African state³⁰ are mirrored in *Chappie*: as an American weapons manufacturing corporation, Tetravaal’s

³⁰ Historically, these ‘unchecked external forces’ seen to influence the South African state are emblemized by the “Third Force”: a mysterious and violent third-party independent from both the ANC and the National Party but presumably containing members of the national security forces. In the early 1990s, this nebulous force became known as a kind of covert death-squad and spates of murderous attacks on black people were attributed to it (Ellis,

capital and political clout allow the company to function relatively independently from state oversight, and it does so in the name of profit. Appadurai notes that since 1989, the world has become particularly vulnerable to an insidious strain of neoliberalism, and this has been accompanied by “the ubiquitous presence of the United States” and has been sustained by “the common openness to market processes of regimes otherwise varied in their political, religious and historical traditions” (2002:23). The situation in *Chappie* is strikingly paralleled to that in *I See You*, as can be seen from Leila’s address during her campaign:

[w]e are not ruled by government. We are overseen by a cabal of deeply powerful conglomerates and our elected leaders are merely their enforcers ... That invisible cabal of deep power has no truck with constitutions or manifestos or binding documents enshrining civil rights and liberties. Its only concern is the protection of its own interests, whatever the cost (Shukri, 2014:27).

In the same vein, *Chappie* depicts a large sector of the South African police force as being provided, managed, and overseen by Tetravaal’s CEO, Michelle Bradley. The public policing institution has shifted to the private sector and a large corporation is tasked with redesigning and implementing cutting-edge policing practices. It is crucial to note that the role of Tetravaal also exceeds that of consultancy as the corporation manages its products (the Scout droids) daily, and this is done from their warehouse where the SAPS governing body is conspicuously absent.

The procurement of weapons in times of socioeconomic crisis is something South Africa has become involved in before. Formally known as the “Strategic Defence Package”, then more commonly by its notorious nickname, “the arms deal”, was a multi-billion-Rand military acquisition project finalised in 1999 by the South African government (Cock, 2004:1). The arms deal has become a mark on the face of the developing democracy and a cautionary tale of corruption, bribery, and the administrative miscarriage of justice. Mark Heywood argues that the effects of the arms deal are still felt today because it “gave to secretive people a secret power over parts of our government and state, as well as over some of our most powerful politicians” (2012:¶12). Both Blomkamp and Shukri engage with this saga by highlighting that this weapons procurement takes place amidst rife poverty and an economic slump. Shukri’s protagonist posits that “[t]he default response of the ‘legacy of apartheid’ to explain away the suffering of most South Africans when this country’s largest

1998:261). In *People’s War: New Light on the Struggle for South Africa* (2009), Anthea Jeffery goes so far as to say that this force operated so covertly that it basically did not exist.

post-apartheid expenditure has not been on housing, or education, or health, or development, or any of those safe electioneering issues you will soon hear bandied about, but on the illegal and corrupt purchase of weapons” (2014:28). In *Chappie*, Blomkamp seems fixated on the aestheticization and fetishization of poverty while contrasting these visuals to the hyper-corporate, sanitary, technologically advanced spaces of Tetravaal headquarters. Police officials are depicted discussing their next large-scale weapons investment while scoffing cheese scones in a Tetravaal warehouse in one scene, while in another, Blomkamp characterises Ponte Tower as a reeking slum awash with crime lords, gangsters and dog fights in a visual sequence that greatly resembles an act of poverty porn.

Moreover, in her address, Leila’s concerns can be directly linked to Blomkamp’s film, specifically when she asserts that “[i]n South Africa today, the state no longer has exclusive rights to the use of force against its citizens. In fact, force has become the prerogative of giant national and multinational corporations of privatised military and security expertise” (Shukri, 2014:29). Especially apt is Leila’s rhetorical question to the crowd: “[w]hat comfort do you take in the fact that your government, having transformed state responsibilities into market opportunities from which only a small elite profits, has privatised nearly every basic state responsibility, including its responsibility to protect you?” (Shukri, 2014:30). The Johannesburg in *Chappie* is not far removed from Leila’s address at the University of the Witwatersrand: Tetravaal employs the scouts in an attempt to curb crime through indiscriminate violence and militarization, but the corporation’s main concern is how they profit from this exploitation of the state’s inadequacy to provide reliable security for its citizens.

The transaction of droid officers for cash has far larger implications for the power relations of the country and legitimises third-parties who resort to excessive force and autonomy. This legitimisation of third-party security forces in the interest of profiteering and shirking responsibility then comes to indicate a form of deep state in the Johannesburg of the narrative. Personal profit is granted more priority than the safety of the city’s inhabitants, as can be seen from what later transpires in the plot when over-reliance on the automatons, who are ultimately not totally in control of Tetravaal, leads to chaos when the droids are overcome by glitches planted by Vincent to sabotage his colleague’s career and further his own.

Van Nieuwkerk argues that “[t]he logic of the deep state is that members of the executive are often used by or collaborate with elements of the deep state to do its work [thereby] directing state affairs from the shadows” (2018:52). Shukri extends this notion through Leila who notes that “in South Africa today, elected officials are the enforcers of multinational conglomerates whose neo-colonial agenda for a new world order controls all the

major institutions of this country” (2014:31). Shukri describes this state collusion with multinational corporations as a “private, unaccountable and unconstitutional force” (2014:31). I link this notion to the large-scale introduction of droid police scouts in Blomkamp’s film, as this privatised intervention also then comes to represent foreign capital controlling the means of violence and repression, thus steering state power.

Linking the concepts of deep state and dystopia can be done with reference to Erica Gottlieb’s writing in which she states that a dystopia is comprised of a parasitic ruling class that feeds on its own people in a context where violence is justified and glorified by law (2001:41). Moreover, dystopian society is “dysfunctional” in that “it reveals the lack of the very qualities that traditionally justify or set the *raison d’être* for a community” (Gottlieb, 2001:41). Gottlieb notes that while Sargent’s view of dystopia³¹ may work for fiction in the west, it does not always suffice elsewhere as non-western authors may inhabit contexts that are deplorable to begin with (2001:5). This leads Gottlieb to extend Sargent’s definition to include the “dramatic rendering of a particular aspect of [the] authors’ lived experience in a society *as is* and as it *should not be*” (2001:42). I argue that both Blomkamp and Shukri choose Johannesburg as the space in which notions of a deep state can be explored because of the perceived dysfunctionality of the metropole and its symbolic obviousness of exposing a society *as is*, but as it *should not be*. Johannesburg is infamous for its unequal distributions of wealth and these inequalities lead to skyrocketing crime levels, counter-violence, and disparities of socio-political clout. Ingrid Woolard (2019:¶3) argues that high wealth inequality creates an imbalance of political power between citizens as the wealthy can potentially influence the political process unfairly, thus compromising the functioning of democracy at the expense of the poor. Johannesburg’s reputation as a crime-infested, unpleasant cityscape naturally calls for increased paranoia, private security, and the foreseeable weaponization of the law in the form of law enforcement droids; this ultimately serves to further enrich the wealthy and leave the urban poor even more vulnerable.

Corruption and exploitative agreements with huge foreign capital can therefore go unhindered as the privatisation of policing acts as a “shield” behind which the “relations of exploitation” can function undisturbed (Althusser, 1971 [1894]:24). Moreover, Althusser argues that the primary function of the State (and its apparatuses) is “repressive execution and intervention ‘in the interests of the ruling classes’” (1971 [1984]:11); Althusser suggests that

³¹ Sargent defines a dystopia as a “social structure that is worse than the present social system” (Sargent in Gottlieb, 2001:5).

this repression and retention of power is accomplished through powerful networks and alliances (thus echoing primary definitions of a deep state). Class division is entrenched by the functioning of a deep state as the ruling elite stand to get richer while the poor become poorer. The pilfering of state funds and the stuffing of personal coffers is an issue that has plagued the country's government for decades and helps situate local literatures and cinematic productions as dystopic. Ruth First famously wrote that "power lies in the hands of those who control the means of violence" (1970 [1997]:190), and in this case I argue that a deep state (formed through collusion and increased privatisation) ultimately holds power in the narratives of *Chappie* and *I See You* and this can be said to reflect the socio-political position of the country both during and post-apartheid.

Conclusion: Hacked Projections of the Past

Blomkamp's film casts Johannesburg as the site of hyper-vicious violence and necessitated counter-violence. The city is shown to be the territory of continued apartheid-era repressive praxes, both administrative and physical (shown through violent policing strategies and the workings of the deep state). The general ambiance of Johannesburg is represented by Blomkamp as dystopic through images of police brutality, unchecked capitalism, class divisions and rampant gangsterism. The introduction of repressive AI to this landscape only serves to compound lingering feelings of inescapable surveillance and the obvious corruptibility of police and policing practices. Moreover, the AI serves as the next (technologized) step in the evolution of unethical and overbearing policing tactics and so Blomkamp has projected a bleak future for the city (and by extension, the country as a whole) if underlying issues of violence are not adequately acknowledged and dealt with. I argue that the general anxiety that emerging technologies (like AI) are usually met with simply echoes the general apprehensiveness South Africans largely feel towards the SAPS, so this futuristic scenario serves to illustrate existing fears about repression, corruption, power, and control.

The film is uncomfortable as an example of a South African dystopian film as its Africanness is consistently problematic. I argue that *Chappie* is very much an American movie set in South Africa (despite the obvious rebuttal that Blomkamp *is* actually from South Africa). The narrative exposes and exploits the nation's shortfalls through dystopic imagery of Johannesburg for an American cinematic gaze, thus rendering it an example of dystopia porn. Furthermore, Blomkamp suggested that *Chappie* was set in the city because "Johannesburg can

be both township and completely urban and almost American” (Blomkamp in Kriedemann, 2015:¶3). Here Blomkamp problematically reduces Johannesburg’s uniqueness and context to a global monoculture, thus compromising any real nuance. Moreover, Blomkamp awkwardly contrasts the aestheticization of township life with the ‘Americanness’ of consumerist culture in urban spaces. In this vein, I argue that the contemporary African dystopia is inherently capitalist and potentially culturally repressive as can be seen in both Blomkamp’s ‘un-African’ South African-set dystopian films *District 9* and *Chappie*.

Chapter Three: Navigating the Concrete Jungle in *Dub Steps*

In conceptualising apocalyptic fictions, Anton Kaes argues that the end of a civilisation “does not come as a predictable consequence of historical forces or personal actions but as rupture, shock, and unexpected intervention – a traumatic event that can only be explained after the fact” (2010:17). Big cities are sites of both decadence and poverty; instability and governance; and panic and recreation. These (sometimes contradictory) elements of urban life lead Paul Virilio (2007) to note that metropolises are naturally vulnerable and inviting targets for destruction. Texts often convey that post-apocalypse, “the city of planning and order gives way to the unsettling influence of dark mysteries and memories” (Prakash, 2010:13); the city becomes haunted by the spectres of civilization(s) past and characters have to simultaneously navigate these ghostly remnants and build anew upon them.

Andrew Miller’s debut novel, *Dub Steps* (2015) narrates the mysterious and inexplicable disappearance of people from the sprawling Johannesburg cityscape as well as what seems to be the planet as a whole. This study of *Dub Steps* will interrogate what I argue to be Miller’s central question: namely, what would happen if societal constraints were to be removed from a community, and how would this liberation ultimately affect characters? Another crucial question will be: how would the disappearance of the foundation of capitalism itself affect the re-establishment of a society that was once desperately entrenched in the pitfalls of this oppressive system?

Unlikely protagonist and seemingly sole survivor, Roy Fotheringham, a washed-out forty-something advertising professional, sets out to explore beyond the city with his newfound sense of “curious liberation” once the initial shock and overwhelming disorientation fades (Miller, 2015:24). Self-described as “radiating survivor vibes” and indulgently believing that this catastrophe was somehow his fault because of his alcoholism and unprofessional behaviour at a dinner party two nights prior to the fall of humankind, Roy sets out to assess the magnitude of this apocalypse (Miller, 2015:25-27). During the first few days after the ‘end’, “[t]he air buzze[s] with the futility of a million abandoned alarm systems – cars, houses, offices – and their desperate decaying batteries”, “the last power trickle[s] out of the grid”, and enormous free pigs³², described as “strange genetic cocktails”, roam the streets of Johannesburg in a state

³² These genetically engineered pigs are somewhat derivative of Margaret Atwood’s ‘pigoons’ (or “*sus multiorganifer*”) in her dystopian novel, *Oryx and Crake* (2003). Unlike Atwood, who laboriously describes the pigoons’ origin and reason for creation, Miller does little to elaborate on, or contextualize these wild mammals, and their purpose within the narrative is largely unknown. If anything, the free pigs come to represent unbridled nature and the uncontrollability thereof – however, this device lacks narrative substantiation.

of eerie isolation. The disappearance of humans leaves the streets bare and exposed, and for the first time in decades the general infrastructural collapse of the city is made evident: “[d]ecay, [c]racking walls. Rivers of damp, creeping, swelling. Pipes falling off the walls, cable ties and piles of bundled wiring” (Miller, 2015:22).

Roy stumbles upon a cash-in-transit van and fills it with ten foraged barrels of diesel and decides to explore beyond the “orange Cresta horizon”, more out of existential unbelonging than pragmatism or a survivalist impulse (Miller, 2015:30). Roy gets as far as Port Elizabeth and only finds one other person, a young woman named Babalwa Busuku. Together they live somewhat comfortably at the seaside for a while, but Babalwa remains intrigued by the idea of Johannesburg as a bustling metropolis. Babalwa also fears that they will be “swallowed up” by the untamed nature that is overtaking them at the coast and is concerned about their inability to farm with the scrubby sea sand (Miller, 2015:63). After some convincing, Roy agrees and they return to Johannesburg in an attempt at settlement amidst the confusion and metaphysical terror of being alone together. The Johannesburg they enter is a “teeming jungle” where nature has relentlessly overtaken the now “faded”, “slumped”, and “decaying” architecture of the city. Where they were “previously bulletproof” in Port Elizabeth, Roy now sees them as “suddenly lost” in his home city (Miller, 2015:74-75). In this “hellish Eden” (Van Wyk, 2015), the improbable pair are spotted by two scouts from a small group of seven remaining survivors³³ whom they join at their established settlement in a mansion in the northern suburb of Houghton. Together this group wrestles with living through an apocalypse and the question of what it means to be alive once society has collapsed.

Miller never supplies a definitive explanation as to what happened to the world, or why characters (specifically Tebza, Roy, and later Fats) remain fixated with the idea that this whole catastrophe only takes place in a Virtual Reality (VR) simulation that they are stuck in. Even though the VR technology at the time is “inherently fake” and “scratchy, the resolution pixelated, [and] the interface prone to breaks” (Miller, 2015:11;9), they remain convinced that the apocalypse did not, and could not, really have happened in objective reality. Instead, they are adamant that the apocalypse has taken place in some far-removed, glitchy technological framework. Another way they reconcile this fixation with a VR explanation is the development of a “cognitively revolutionary” nanobot drug known as “hack” which transports users to a VR landscape that is seamless and more refined, and which Tebza believes is at the heart of

³³ This group consists of Tšhegofatšo ‘Fats’ Bonoko, Teboho (also known as ‘Tebza’), Lillian, Beatrice, Mudyathlari (or ‘Gerald’), Andile, and Jabulani ‘Javas’ Khumalo. They then include Roy and Babalwa, and this group of nine are credited by future generations as founding the settlement.

their current situation (Miller, 2015:145). This drug was developed pre-apocalypse and was popular in the city's club scene where Tebza first encountered this cognitive interface. Tebza believes that they could all be "flat on [their] backs somewhere, not moving" and that their environment could all be a mammoth software interface unfolding in their over-stimulated, drugged brains (Miller, 2015:147). Ultimately, Roy dismisses this idea, as he investigates: "I also paid attention to the small details. I looked as deep as I could into the orange of the setting sun. I tasted things with a triple slap of the tongue. I hunted for any kind of pixilation, visual, auditory or otherwise. I needed a crack within a crack. The tiniest hint of fissure, a fold within a fold, within an opening. But there was nothing" (Miller, 2015:288). From this point on, Roy is more inclined to accept the end for what it is: a catastrophe of global proportions from which they have to rebuild and redefine themselves as old schemas are no longer valid.

In an attempt to envelop the reader in the confusion of the characters of the text Miller's gritty realism artfully neglects to offer the reader comfort in terms of markers of time or explanations as to this 'end' of humankind. The exposition is similar to the structure of the American dystopian text, *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy, in which disorientation reigns supreme in a post-apocalyptic world devoid of explanation or answers. A note of difference is that Miller's narrative is far more fragmented than McCarthy's more temporally coherent text. The only orientating factors within the South African narrative are the references to Johannesburg before the collapse of society: descriptions of recognizable landmarks, typical day-to-day behaviours in which the characters partook, and the social climate in the city pre-apocalypse. This disorientation is a validation of Darko Suvin's observation that an sf text presents aspects of a reader's empirical reality "made strange" through a new perspective "implying a new set of norms" (Suvin, 1979:6). Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr strives to untangle Suvin's dense theoretical work by explaining that "[t]his recasting of the familiar has a 'cognitive' purpose, that is, the recognition of reality it evokes from the reader is a gain in rational understanding of the social conditions of existence" (2003:118). This cognitive estrangement must be "logically consistent and methodical" and "scientific", lending credibility to the narrative for the sceptical reader/viewer of the material – in other words, this object of estrangement has to be plausible in terms of the context of the narrative, and must have a coherent basis for occurrence (Csicsery-Ronay, 2003:118). Similarly, Bertolt Brecht proposes that this estrangement is an explicitly political act, as it draws the receiver's attention to the fact that the spectacle they are witnessing, or the narrative that is unfolding, is in fact an illusion, which then stimulates the readers to question their situation as passive receivers of information. Brecht argued that this phenomenon would then bleed into other facets of

receivers' lives and soon they would be questioning their role(s) as mere receivers/observers of the manipulated and fundamentally illusionary world of bourgeoisie ideology, and in turn, domination. This alienation effect makes the reader aware of reality in an intensely fresh way by "subverting and 'roughening' the habitual responses [an individual] develops in the routines of everyday existence" (Csicsery-Ronay, 2003:118).

Miller tries to achieve the abovementioned cognitive estrangement through the postmodern structure of the novel which is fractured by dozens of chapters – some of which are only a page long. These brief and sometimes seemingly irrelevant chapters are contained within five major divisions or parts in the novel which roughly signify the passing of time. However, the narrative is temporally non-linear, and jumps between 'present day' futuristic Johannesburg (post-apocalypse) and past Johannesburg (pre-apocalypse) with abandon, leaving the reader disorientated, just as the text's characters are. This fragmentation is a way in which the newfound chaos of the post-apocalyptic context can be conceptualised and explored – there is no grand narrative, no clinging to order and literary formulae. The text's introduction is an aged Roy lamenting his regrets and delivering the warning that the text is more of a product of his remembering than a carefully curated story, hence the scattershot structure: "So there it is. That you are reading this, whoever you are, wherever you are is enough. I have spoken. You have heard. The rest is up to you" (Miller, 2015;243-244). This metafictional self-awareness in Roy's narration also calls attention to the process of reading and writing, that is, the creation or maintenance of specific ideologies.

In this way, Miller invites us to question our interactions with other human beings, our role(s) in society, and the degree to which our lives are regulated by capitalism, government, social expectations and monitoring. Being presented with a world (one which we recognise in the form of Johannesburg, or even South Africa) that is devoid of state regulation or bourgeois ideology illuminates just how advanced the permeation of these two systems into society really is. While characters reflect on the Johannesburg that once was³⁴, they are seen to build a community from the ruins of the once-turbulent city, a community that would not have been likely to exist in Johannesburg past or present. The group lays claim to a cluster of mansions on a ridge overlooking a few of Johannesburg's most prestigious private schools without incurring the financial hurdles they typically would have. The settlers are able to lay claim to this posh cluster of mansions without social or financial restrictions, and they do so because

³⁴ "I allowed myself a couple of flashbacks. Images of shining cars and the glinting Highveld sun, traffic jams and metro roadblocks. Fat cops hustling for lunch..." (Miller, 2015:74).

these homes are already equipped with the paraphernalia needed to use solar power and acres of arable land. Initially, the end of the world is accompanied by a suspension of privilege and social stratification and so characters need not navigate once-existent boundaries of class. These divisive socioeconomic elements (class, social stratification, and issues of privilege) are symbolised by this type of property in Johannesburg: pre-apocalypse, this opulent mansion served as an Eden for the rich nestled between ever-encroaching townships. Post-apocalypse, the mansion is a site of bare-boned reconfiguration and pragmatic redefinition of traditional modes of division of labour, family, and governance; it has been stripped of its pre-apocalyptic symbolism of decadence.

The post-apocalyptic ambition and collaboration of the group of settlers is soured over time, so much so that the ending of the novel is markedly dystopic, thus I argue that *Dub Steps* represents a fundamentally flawed utopia. Marxist critic Frederic Jameson maintains that “a utopian notion of a desirable alternative future is necessary to empower meaningful political action in the present” as it is aspirational in impulse (Jameson in Booker, 1994:3). Ruth Levitas and Lucy Sargisson conceptualise the strongest focus of a utopia as being “the exploration of alternatives in a way that supports or catalyses social transformation”, and at its core, utopian writing is simply the “expression of desire for a better way of living” (2003:13). However, some sf presents future imaginings of transformed living, but lack elaboration as to how these proposed agents of change can reasonably manifest this transformation; these texts “may be located in the future, but without any convincing account of transforming agents and processes that could turn wishful thinking into political action” (Levitas & Sargisson, 2003:14). This articulation links to Lyman Tower Sargent’s work on flawed utopias, which he defines as “[w]orks that present what appears to be a good society until the reader learns of some flaw that raises questions about the basis for its claim to be a good society, or even turns it into a dystopia. The flawed utopia tends to invade territory already occupied by the dystopia, the anti-utopia, and the critical utopia and [critical] dystopia. The flawed utopia is a sub-type that can exist within any of these sub-genres” (2016:¶9).

Miller’s representation of a Johannesburg that has been reclaimed by nature is an allusion to the utopian notion of the Garden of Eden as set out in the Bible. With reference to the biblical tale, Lyman Tower Sargent elaborates that the Garden of Eden is the first flawed utopia, and Eve is its lynchpin (2003:230). Eve’s contravention of the rules leads to an overreaction from God, who then punishes (wo)mankind and banishes them from their paradise. In *Dub Steps*, Roy is introduced to a shamanistic figure whom he calls “Madala” (meaning ‘old man’; usually an affectionate form of address) who is presented as a vector for

indigenous knowledge. In the novel, this figure is said to be responsible for the apocalypse. Madala is credited with “ensuring that the collective legacy of man doesn’t just dribble into the soil” and is recognised by Roy as a god-like figure who gives mankind the opportunity to rebuild a society that is better than the one that existed before (Miller, 2015:316). Roy’s conversation with Madala essentially casts him out of Eden, and the aged Roy is driven to a state of madness after the encounter.

This religious subtext is used to dramatize humankind’s mistakes and relies on old narratives to convey contemporary notions of sin and punishment. Anton Kaes (2010:17) studies modern dystopian cultural production alongside readings of the Bible and suggests that apocalyptic fiction can be related back to the Book of Revelation as it can signify “a new utopia” through “complete devastation and erasure of the old assures”. Kaes argues that most apocalyptic texts “try to ‘restart’ the program that crashed: the catastrophe is usually followed by a brief glimpse of a new beginning, one that holds the promise of an alternative to dystopia” thereby casting the pre-apocalyptic world as dystopian (2010:17). Absolutely critical to note is that utopian and dystopian impulses and visions are not necessarily diametrical opposites; this Manichean thinking misses the nuance that one individual’s utopia may be another’s dystopia, and vice versa. Furthermore, utopias also function as social criticism; this role is not only reserved for dystopias, as M. Keith Booker suggests: “utopian visions of an ideal society often inherently suggest a criticism of the current order of things as nonideal”, and “dystopian critiques of existing systems would be pointless unless a better system appeared conceivable” (1994:15). *Dub Steps* presents a utopia flawed and failed; an initial utopian concept bastardised and reconfigured to suit the needs of the few while capitalising on the labour of the settlement’s inhabitants. The narrative comes full circle in that it begins with the dystopic event of an apocalypse, then morphs into a quasi-utopian attempt at a just and egalitarian community, but then regresses into a socio-political model of oppression that seems all too familiar to the characters who lived through the apocalypse and recognise the markers of elitism and hierarchical governance that existed in Johannesburg pre-apocalypse.

Tied to this notion of place and self-conceptualization, it is interesting to note that the new settlement also remains unnamed throughout the narrative. This is as bizarre as it is intriguing: by not naming the settlement, Miller avoids the sometimes-uncomfortable process of naming, or even renaming, which has become quite a contentious issue within in post-apartheid South Africa (see Mjo, 2018; Mtshali, 2017; Webb, 2018). Reconciling with the traumas of the past under the apartheid regime is seen to unfold in the reclamation of the power of naming in contemporary South Africa; much of this renaming has been done for the purpose

of ridding the country of its “colonial, [a]partheid past” (Webb, 2018). Miller does not engage with this notion in the least, and as a result somewhat generalises the settlement structure; by this I mean that Miller removes this new settlement from its uniquely South African political context, and suspends it in this liminal mode of being unnamed and unnameable. This new settlement could be developing anywhere in the world and contains few anchoring factors to the geographical and sociohistorical context that Miller initially takes pains to communicate to readers. In *Taming the Disorderly City*, Martin J. Murray states that “[c]ity futures are immanent in the past”, but Miller has chosen to varnish over the “involuntary memory” of Johannesburg which creates the knock-on effect of decontextualizing the future of the site (2008:39). A critical reading of this element shows a lack of nuance and commitment to specificity, and as I elaborate below, this is Miller’s Achille’s heel throughout *Dub Steps*.

I will focus on three central aspects of this emerging community and its culture as well as its past, namely: the ideological potential of graffiti as a tool of resistance and disruption in Johannesburg pre-apocalypse; evolving systems of governance and survival in this new settlement post-apocalypse; and the introduction of music as religion as a means of control once the settlement is well established. The use of Althusserian theory will illuminate these elements in the study of the South African dystopia in its corrupted ‘City of Gold’.

The Power of Disruption: Graffiti as Ideological Resistance

By definition, graffiti is a subversive act that serves to challenge notions of authority and ownership. Miller engages with the act of graffiti in *Dub Steps* through the inclusion of “graf rebels” (an ideologically unified band of activists who use graffiti as a means of dissent pre-apocalypse). This graffiti exposes the ills that plague near-future Johannesburg and reflect that they are not very different from notable contemporary issues. The graf rebels position themselves as living in a financially disparate, dystopian Johannesburg and are thus incisive in their messaging and deliberate in its positioning. The critical nature of graffiti will be discussed alongside Althusser’s arguments on ideological resistance and struggle. These theoretical elements will supplement my literary analysis of graffiti as a tool of ideological resistance in *Dub Steps*.

Althusser’s most prominent essay, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)” (1971), outlines the notion that ideology acts as a mediator between systems of power and individuals (subjects of ideology). Ideology allows for hegemonic power

to reproduce itself by obscuring traditional forms of repression and incorporating individuals into the power structure. Generally, Althusser argues that the proletariat submit to ideologies that interpellate them as passive, and are thus compliant with their own unending and multi-faceted domination. Althusser does however account for acts of rebellion and ideological confrontation: he argues that ISAs “may not only be the *stake*, but also the *site* of class struggle” (Althusser, 1971 [1984]:21). Althusser elaborates:

The class (or class alliance) in power cannot lay down the law in the ISAs as easily as it can in the (repressive) State apparatus, not because the former ruling classes are able to retain strong positions there for a long time, but also because the resistance of the exploited classes is able to find means and occasions to express itself there [in the ISAs], either by the utilization of [the ISAs’] contradictions, or by conquering combat positions in [the ISAs] in struggle (Althusser, 1971 [1884]: 21).

In summary, the class struggle is thus expressed and exercised in ideological forms. Althusser carves out space for resistance in his theory, asserting that the exploited class(es) have potential to “turn the weapon of ideology against the classes in power” (1971 [1984]:21).

Andrew Robinson writes that “[i]deology interprets social conditions so that people can relate to their conditions. It is not a way people represent their real conditions, but rather, the way in which their relationship to their real conditions is represented to them” (2011:¶12). Counter-hegemonic ideation and resistance serves to constitute an oppositional ideology which can take hold in the ISAs. I argue that counter-cultural acts such as graffiti act as ideological resistance to systems in which discrepancies or individual qualms are evident. Individuals partake in this ‘socially unacceptable’ behaviour because they experience discrepancies between the dominant, widely-accepted ideology and their lived experiences (or perhaps even their utopian imaginings). Graffiti can be used by artists and activists to challenge abstract notions of power and ownership, and to “assert their fleeting presence over a wide geographical area” (Bloch, 2016:440); moreover, this form of expression is a declaration of authority over place identity. Brian Gonnella states that “[g]raffiti is the artform of the proletariat”: it is an artform that cannot be exploited by those who own the means of production, because the graffiti exploits them first, as artists use the property of the bourgeoisie as a canvas (Gonnella, 2008:¶5).

In her study of South African graffiti, Sue Williamson (2004:6) states that the country’s graffiti has built upon the resistance tradition of the apartheid era by desiring to “make work based on reality” and that the artistic impulse retains “an instinct to go for the jugular, not to hold back” in terms of political criticism. In the foreword to Williamson’s text,

Archbishop Desmond Tutu writes: “in being creative [people] become more than just consumers” and “[people] can transcend their often-horrendous circumstances and bring something new into being” (2004:7). Tutu adds that graffiti becomes a marker of “proud defiance of hostile forces” that serve to dehumanize citizens specifically within the context of the apartheid regime and its multitudinous after-effects (2004:7).

In her essay “Graffiti, Street Art and the Divergent Synthesis of Place Valorisation in Contemporary Urbanism”, Andrea Mubi Brighenti links ‘place valorisation’ to Marx’s writing on ‘*verwertung*’ in *Capital* (1867). Place valorisation is the process by which certain sites or places are ascribed certain (economic and ethnographic) value, and this notion is useful when considering graffiti. That is, in urban spaces “the sheer economic side of value actually precipitates and condenses a number of scattered, convergent or divergent, social forces which include discourses, repertoires, representations, imaginaries, reputations, judgements, position-takings, conflicts, negotiations, resistances, [and] justifications” (Brighenti, 2016:159). The production, circulation, and transmutation of these elements is seen to be just as important as Marx’s study of the same processes with regard to material commodities. Despite an apparent integration of graffiti into urban spaces as a marker of trendiness and urban creativity, it has remained unaccepted and unacceptable by cultural and economic establishments. Graffiti artists are still perceived to be “extreme vandals” and even “enemies of society” (Brighenti, 2016:160). In capitalism’s attempt to achieve higher profits through production and metamorphosis, graffiti has been marketed as “edgy” and “gritty”. Graffiti has become the posterchild for the “alternative aesthetic of subversion” which is fashionable and trendy, and yet graffiti artists who contribute to this valorisation of place have not been able to shed their criminal reputation: this is what Brighenti calls the “divergent synthesis” of gentrification (2016:161). In this way, capitalism can swallow up and exploit even graffiti, thus robbing it of its power as a counter-hegemonic mode of expression, yet it maintains its subversive potential nevertheless due to its strategic placement and targeting of a specific audience/viewership³⁵.

Martin J. Murray (2010:22) notes that individuals that constitute these disruptive statements such as graffiti are typically socially marginalized peoples (such as migrants, informal workers, the unemployed and the unemployable), and so they lack the institutional capacities for “sustained, coordinated, and collective demand-making protests” as they are not

³⁵ This tenuous relationship between counter-cultural expression and the capitalist enterprise can be evidenced by Banksy shredding his best-known artwork at its auction, thereby making a statement against the commodification of expression and public space. The artist had the image shredded in front of the auction audience as soon as its sale for \$1.4 million had been confirmed (Pownall, 2018). A video of the shredding has been made available on YouTube, a free-to-view streaming platform, thus solidifying the act as counter-capitalist spectacle.

in possession of “the organizational power of disruption” (more specifically, they do not have the means to withhold critical resources on which others depend because of their marginalized position in society). Therefore, by infringing on the laws dictating the possession (and use) of space and property, groups of disenfranchised individuals can carve out a means to assert themselves through defacing these sites in messages of protest. Protesters’ misgivings are easily disregarded by legitimised power structures until those oppressive institutions are directly confronted and offended, and in turn, their ideological functioning is disrupted.

In *Dub Steps*, Andrew Miller focusses on this artistic mode of resistance in the context of a technologically advanced projection of Johannesburg pre-apocalypse. The purpose of the inclusion of graffiti seems to be critical in nature as it illuminates Miller’s perceptions of pre-apocalyptic Johannesburg. By including this resistance, readers are made privy to Miller’s articulations of discontent with the problematic status and machinations of the city. Vandals, known colloquially as “graf rebels”, make use of “transmission paint” (a cheap, brown tar-like medium that can be spread onto concrete surfaces) to remotely project digital messages onto landmarks from a cell phone. The use of transmission paint forms part of an ever-expanding “fight for control of the city canvas” (Miller, 2015:141,230). The graf rebels’ prime fixation is that of capital and its historically unequal distribution which has resulted in the class divides and income disparities that have become difficult for the country to shake. Roy describes the first large-scale use of transmission paint that he had witnessed as such:

They painted the bottom half of an under-maintenance cooling tower on the N4 to Mozambique and the Kruger Park. The video flashed from a hundred kilometres out, a crudely cut mash-up of squatter camps and mine workers going down the shaft. Gardeners in blue overalls walking dogs. Maids in pastel pink pushing prams, little white heads bobbing inside. Open Free State farmlands, rich with crops. Sandton parking lots, replete with luxury vehicles.

Democracy is digital
The text flashed. Then
Land was taken
... then
People will not be quiet
... then
*Reparation | Return | Revolution*³⁶

This articulation of dissatisfaction cuts to the core of modern political qualms in South Africa, namely: the invisibility of black labour, the grossly unequal distribution of wealth, neo-

³⁶ Miller, A. 2015:9-10. Italics are author’s own.

colonialism, land redistribution, and a call for reparations for years of colonialism past. Because invasive visual art has replaced go-slows, toyi-toyi action, and boycotting, South Africa's protest culture has been depicted by Miller as technologized. Pertinently, this protest unfolds ideologically and avoids the more physical large-scale protest action of the past which has often led to violence, troublesome police involvement, and destruction of public property. Democracy is described as being "digital" just before the apocalypse (roughly, the early 2030s) because technology allows citizens to assert themselves equally no matter their social positionality. Moreover, this 'digitization of democracy' ensures that citizens can express vehement opposition to the state while minimizing the threat of state-sanctioned violence and the potential counter-violence it incites.

Although this new vein of protest is deemed safer, when graf rebels are apprehended by police, brutality ensues: "[graf rebels'] lives were hard as stones – they were arrested and beaten, their nails were pulled, their balls shocked...No glamour" (Miller, 2015:61). South Africa is widely regarded as the protest capital of the world, recording the highest rates of public and labour protests globally, making repression of popular protest one of the key roles of the SAPS. Historically, protesters have been met with excessive force, and in the 2009/2010 financial year alone, the Independent Complaints Directorate recorded that 40% of charges laid against SAPS officers were for assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm (Hosken, 2011:¶5). Miller communicates the harshness of the SAPS as well as their heavy-handedness in terms of extra-judicial exertions of force through his description of what graf rebels suffer for committing their fundamentally non-violent crime(s).

After the cooling tower presentation, transmission paint was being used by "street protestors, red berets³⁷, political challengers", and not long after, it was being sold to "small-time advertisers, the floggers of products, remedies, solutions" (Miller, 2015:10). The versatility of the medium ensured "[that] if you had a wall you had a stage. If you had a phone you had a broadcast" (Miller, 2015:10). The public space became digitized and free for all to use by means of transmission paint, but the government did not take kindly to these expressions and insisted that large-scale presentations were to be "scraped away with wire brushes and solvent, hoses and solutions" even after these broadcasts had ended (Miller, 2015:10). Martin J. Murray notes that exclusion in urban spaces revolves around the central tenet of legality, that

³⁷ This is a possible reference to the socialist political party, the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF), whose uniforms famously include the donning of a red beret. The party is known for its vigorous protest activity, specifically with reference to: the call for the redistribution of land; the annulment of tuition fees at tertiary education institutes in the #FeesMustFall movement; and their sustained demonstrations against systemic racism and the retention of capital by white-owned businesses and organizations.

is, the categorization and differentiation of urban space(s) in terms of which city dwellers are allowed to legitimately use these spaces and which are not – this leads to the criminalization of some individuals while ensuring the incorporation of others (2008:19).

Although digital spaces can be toxic, and are not without their limits and failures, there is a prevailing optimism in the digital age as to the internet and technology's role in giving voices to the historically voiceless and those excluded from the dominant discourse. An example of this would be the advent of transmission paint in the novel – those excluded from legitimate power structures can exert clout in a digital space free from bureaucratic boundaries. In theory, the digital realm is a space that is supposed to be relatively free from state interference and the prevailing capitalist agenda. This can be seen in the “[d]emocracy is digital” excerpt quoted above: from one hundred kilometres away, citizens could witness this statement unfolding and declaring intent, as Roy describes: “[t]he scope of the cooling-tower broadcast was so extensive anyone could park on any road – primary or secondary – and enjoy the view” (Miller, 2015: :10). This assertion in a central public space then turns the dissatisfaction of the artist(s) into a focal point for all citizens, thus ensuring that there is no escaping this message, unlike physical protests or blockades where the fray can be conveniently avoided by those not directly involved.

Post-apocalypse, Roy embarks on a well-intentioned and benevolent snoop through Tebza's belongings after his untimely death in a failed flight mission. (This mission came about as a result of the group's plan to repair a Boeing and then have Tebza pilot the craft to a nearby country on a reconnaissance mission, but the plane crashed and Tebza was killed). Roy finds a folder on Tebza's laptop that contains information pertaining to the graf rebels. Roy had fostered a special relationship with Teboho, more affectionately known as “Tebza”, a fellow settler who exists on the fringe of the group as a pariah figure (just as Roy does). The information Roy finds on Tebza's computer does not confirm whether he was involved with the group of young activists or just an avid follower of their work(s), but he has collected photographs, documents, and campaigns which have been directly connected with the group over the years. In a folder labelled “2033 Potentials”, Roy finds the graf rebels' plans to transmit messages onto the side of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). The proposed graffiti reads as such: “*If not now, when? / Money is the only freedom / Release capital now*”³⁸.

Truman posits graffiti's core function in a public space as exposing how this space is constructed and controlled by the state and/or the private persons who own the defaced property

³⁸ Miller, 2015: 230. Italics are Miller's own.

(2010:3). Graffiti is only successful if the artist is mindful of the context of the work within the broader social and economic systems. Confronting financial disparities on the stock exchange is a blatant affront to the capitalist system that ensures the prosperity of some and the suffering of others. This graf rebel JSE material includes footage of “men in rags digging through suburban garbage bins” (Miller, 2015:230). This content (the text combined with the footage) acts as a call to end capital retention which is perceived to be at the core of this financial disparity between suburban life and people who have to scavenge to survive. It is critical to consider graffiti’s link to criminal and antisocial behaviour as it is a typical reflex of the capitalist prioritization of property over people. The state protects big businesses and those who control the money, and this corporate-political hybrid has become the site for social struggles and transnational aggressions in recent history in South Africa and abroad (Gonnella, 2008:¶9).

Another image included in this material that was to be projected onto the JSE is “a Woolworths bag in one of the graf boys’ hands [as he overlooks the men in rags], inside [the bag] a lot of bright-looking apples” (Miller, 2015:230). Woolworths is a multinational retail chain made up of upmarket retail outlets which sell clothing, homeware, and grocery items. This brand, however, has become associated with a certain level of elitism and privilege and is by no means accessible to the majority of South African citizens. By showing a graf rebel presenting homeless men with a bag of “bright-looking apples” presumably from Woolworths, the activists are embodying a redistribution of wealth (and the privilege which accompanies it). They are providing the homeless with physical sustenance of a high symbolic calibre. Graffiti’s intention is practical in nature and unlike street art, it is not intended to beautify or appease; rather, it is confrontational and a marker of resistance towards the dominant ideology.

Essentially born out of a class war, graffiti is the only really free artistic vehicle through which the lumpenproletariat can express their lamentations. I argue that the ‘graf rebels’ are members of the working class who have embarked on this criminal activity either as a means to survive within the current class structure on their own terms, or to “provoke the state towards social reform”, specifically the redistribution of wealth (Gonnella, 2008:¶6). In *Dub Steps*, Miller’s recognition of graffiti as a powerful tool for vocalising political dissent and forcing an ideology into a public forum is nuanced and significant, especially considering the author’s extensive work in Johannesburg’s art scene and its political undertones. This also echoes Althusser’s argument that the ISAs become the site of dissent (or “the class struggle”) as confrontation is “expressed and exercised in ideological forms” (Althusser, 1971 [1984]:21).

Miller's projection presents us with a South Africa catapulted into an uncertain political future, a country unable to shake its traumatic past and economic misgivings. *Dub Steps* depicts a pre-apocalyptic future in which economic uncertainty and poverty remain rife, disgruntled citizens known as 'graf rebels' can express themselves in digital ways which ensure their physical safety, and the world is anything but utopian. There is a heart-breaking irony in realizing that the graf rebels' calls for equality can only be manifested through apocalypse and the almost total erasure of the existing society. Pertinently, when Roy is studying at university, his advertising lecturer laments during a seminar:

“I believe in change,” he said, deathly career-serious. “Not that it is often very likely, in a deep, fundamental sense, but rather that it is our true hope as a species. The desire to change is all we have” (Miller, 2015:5).

It is only once oppressive systems of governance and trade are totally obliterated that any real attempt at a just society can take place, as can be seen in Miller's apocalyptic articulations of the future. The graf rebels have to maintain their counter-cultural articulation of dissatisfaction because they truly believe that a better version of society is not only possible, but plausible. This rebellion is then a signifier of hope amongst the downtrodden and the marginalised in a dystopian Johannesburg. Ultimately, Miller shows that, while hopeful, “resistance has no bearing on an overpowering and uncontrollable system” (Kaes, 2010:28). Post-apocalypse, Miller shows that divisive social structures gain power once more, just as they had pre-apocalypse, thus solidifying Johannesburg as the site of repression and disunion.

“Indecipherable Intellectual Potential”: Rebuilding after the End

In his study of Papuan peoples, Jared Diamond explores the evolution of societies since ancient times, and tracks and extrapolates modes of governance, social stratification, organization, trade, as well as biological and environmental influences. Diamond studies the rise and fall of ancient civilizations as a means to provide insights into human nature and how we have organized ourselves for thousands of years. Diamond's text, *The World Until Yesterday* (2012), will be used to theorize the formation and organization of an emergent society post-apocalypse in *Dub Steps*. Additionally, Althusser's theorization of the education ISA will guide my analysis of Roy's archiving and curation of information, as well as his teaching the new generation of settlers.

Diamond relies on American anthropologist, Elman Service, for his four rough categories or shorthand terms to conceptualize societies and how they evolve. These terms are “band”, “tribe”, “chiefdom”, and “state” – each of which is larger (in terms of population size, political centralization, and social stratification) than the last (2012:14). Although these categories are somewhat fluid to compensate for certain unique societal deviations or inconsistencies, they are helpful in that they follow cross-cultural patterns and correlations that are so far-reaching that they allow for some generalizations to be made.

At its conception, the settlement which takes shape in *Dub Steps* post-apocalypse can be classified as a “band” in that it consists of only a few individuals that are clustered into a small group that is relatively egalitarian and democratic. As Jared Diamond explains: “[t]he band members are sufficiently few in number that everyone knows everyone else well, group decisions can be reached by face-to-face discussion, and there is no formal political leadership or strong economic specialization” (2012:14). The unnamed settlement is home to only nine survivors and there is no formal hierarchy or mode of social organization. This is evident when Roy and Babalwa arrive, as Roy enquires as to whether there are any rules, or a chief decision-maker in the group, unsure of his social position in this new space. Fats replies that the settlement is a “collective” based on the notion of Ubuntu, and that “[they] all do what needs to be done. We agree on what we can. But really it’s about everyone taking responsibility” (Miller, 2015:96).

Barbara Nussbaum describes the African social philosophy of Ubuntu as “a code of ethics” that is “deeply embedded in African society” (2003:1). Ubuntu is described by Nussbaum as “the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community with justice and mutual caring” (2003:2). Ubuntu relies on interconnectedness, shared responsibility, and empathy, and this is achievable in smaller settlement structures like Service’s “band” as depicted in the early stages of post-apocalyptic settlement in *Dub Steps*. Upon Roy and Babalwa’s arrival, the “collective” was able to divide into small groups to discuss “the situation [the apocalypse]” (Miller, 2015:96). In this way, settlement members are able to conceptualise the apocalyptic events of the narrative by relying on their interconnectedness, personal communication, and shared experiences. As utopian as this is presented to be, Ubuntu is seen to be hindered in larger settlement patterns as this philosophy is logistically most successful in smaller communities in which one-on-one bonding and organization is possible. Although the settlement may have started with the idyllic premise of Ubuntu, the social structure soon outgrows this.

The notion of personal accountability for the development of the group is carried through to the initial division of labour in which each individual is allotted tasks and a timeframe in which to complete them. Fats takes the role of facilitator upon himself and he becomes what Jared Diamond terms “a big man”, that is, a kind of weak leader who “leads through their powers of persuasion and personality rather than by recognized authority” (2012:15). As Roy describes: “Fats ordered and prompted and planned, and the rest of us, each for our own reasons, followed dutifully” (Miller, 2015:106). Fats remains the “big man” until his and Babalwa’s child is born and he had “begun to slowly let go of his ideas of himself as a leader of men” and “his control centre grew stale” (Miller, 2015:168). It is Babalwa who suggests this effort at repopulation and the formation of what Roy dismissively labels “a breeding colony”, and she who coordinates the insemination proceedings through intricate charts and schedules. The fellow settlers “[accept] their duty”.

Once the first child is born, the division of labour becomes more gendered and a “collective of mothers” is formed as an effective child-care strategy, while their male counterparts are tasked with the more physically intensive labour of milking cows and managing the farming efforts (Miller, 2015:216). The settlers are compared to ever-building weaver birds once the children arrive, as they are involved in an “endless series of domestic compulsions” and their focus shifts solely to the farm’s maintenance and their offspring, which Roy identifies as their “arcing, noble aim” (Miller, 2015:222). As the babies begin arriving in closer intervals, they create “a natural realignment of labour. To wit: heavy shit for the men, cooking and cleaning for the ladies” (Miller, 2015:223). This new society reverts to traditional gender roles which have historically encoded inequality in patriarchal societies. However, Jared Diamond notes that this infant-care strategy has ancient roots and the involvement of fathers is “partly related to a society’s subsistence ecology” and is based on pragmatism and not necessarily emotional factors (2012:187).

Diamond also discusses the concept of “allo-parents” which are “individuals who are not the biological parents but who do some care-giving”; in traditional societies, biological parents play a less dominant role, and allo-parenting is granted heightened importance as this allows an egalitarian division of labour to go mostly unencumbered (2012:187-188). Moreover, as children of small-scale societies grow older, they are inclined to spend more time with other branches of the society as opposed to just their family unit and their biological parents. In this way, responsibility for children “becomes widely diffused beyond the child’s parents in small-scale societies”, and the allo-parents are “materially important as additional providers of food and protection” (Diamond, 2012:189). The family, including allo-parents, is therefore a site of

ideology in that Althusser identifies the family as an ISA because families facilitate the process of a child's socialisation and resultant belief system. Furthermore, allo-parents are influential in terms of the psychological development of the children as they provide additional social influence and models beyond the parents, that is, children are interpellated into an ideology through the social organization of a family (Diamond, 2012:189).

The family is considered by Althusser to have huge implications for socialisation and is therefore a primary site of ideological interpellation. This notion becomes obvious in Miller's novel through his protagonist's fascination with the storage of information and the eventual dissemination thereof: Roy builds a library in the basement of his home on the Houghton ridge with the help of the offspring, and he soon becomes tasked with general archiving and the education of the upcoming generation. A few years into the settlement, "Fats started organizing [the children] into units to be applied to various tasks, including [Roy's] archiving project" (Miller, 2015:256). The selection and storage of information is directed by Roy and he has "final editorial call on what was picked and what was left behind" (Miller, 2015:257). In this way, Roy curates the content (and knowledge) that the future generations will be exposed to, thereby setting the tone for the maintenance of his ideology and perceptions of "estimated intellectual worth" (Miller, 2015:258). In this vein, when writing about the re-production of labour power, Althusser notes that:

[t]he school (but also other State institutions like the Church, or other apparatuses like the Army) teaches 'know-how', but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its 'practice'. All the agents of production, exploitation and repression...must in one way or another be steeped in this ideology in order to perform their tasks 'conscientiously' (1971 [1984]:7).

As an allo-parent, Roy disseminates this information and is responsible for the formalization of the young group's schooling which is facilitated through information he has collected and deemed appropriate. The intellectual potential of content is determined and moderated solely by Roy. Through this, the move from a collectivistic approach to a divided, individual one is made evident: the settlement grows too large to support the act of consistent group decision-making and determination of an ultimate path or plan. Furthermore, the division of children into teams intended for specific tasks under the supervision of a founding member (a figure of authority) begins to mimic the bourgeoisie/proletariat social model in that labour is contributed by the children and they are left little self-determination in terms of their tasks or goals and

their socialization (that is, their interpellation to the familial ISA) allows them to believe that this is natural and correct.

Althusser argues that the education apparatus is the dominant ISA and has replaced the church as the primary hub of socialization. The education apparatus is regarded the chief ideological arm of the state (and I extend this notion of ‘state’ to include the settlement, thereby casting the founding members as proto-statesmen). Althusser explains: “for years, the years in which the child is most ‘vulnerable’, squeezed between the family State apparatus and the educational State Apparatus, it drums into them, whether it uses old or new methods, a certain amount of ‘know-how’ wrapped in the ruling ideology” (1971 [1984]:29). As an allo-parent, Roy is directly involved in the operation of both of the family and education ideological apparatuses and therefore becomes instrumental in the casting of the children as “workers or small peasants” by sending them on information collection missions (Althusser, 1971 [1984]:29). The education the children receive is largely dependent on what Roy chooses to archive, which includes novels to his taste, textbooks (technical texts are favoured over narratives), ten fifty-terabyte music servers, and six more servers for photographs scavenged from surrounding homes, libraries, universities, and office parks (Miller, 2015:232).

The children are divided into scavenging groups when the unit embarks on an archiving mission and they compete to see who can find texts or artefacts with the highest “estimated intellectual worth” or “EIW”. Ultimately, Roy retains “final editorial call” on what is selected and the EIW that is assigned to the particular object (Miller, 2015:256-257). Large EIW finds (scored out of ten) are celebrated by parents and competition steadily grows between the children in the ever-growing scavenging pack. This competition is taken seriously by the participating children, amongst whom Sthembiso (‘Sthem’), son of Javas and Babalwa, soon becomes the frontrunner in terms of valuable EIW finds. Sthem is identified as Roy’s favourite and is an energetic reader who “read as he did everything else, as if the vitally important was at stake” and this endears him to Roy greatly (Miller, 2015:260). Sthem is also the only offspring who is genuinely intrigued by the idea of a former world, as Roy notes: “[t]he story of our little group gripped him in a profound way, and once he had wrapped his mind around the notion of a prior world, a prior existence with tools and people and buildings and machinery and businesses, he became unstoppable” (Miller, 2015:260). Sthem begins accessing the depths of the archives with “manic gusto” and easily outperforms his peers (Miller, 2015:260). This interest in the past and the insatiable nature of his fascination with knowledge then becomes the springboard for Sthem’s trajectory towards authority and leadership.

This ideological model is continued years later when Sthembiso emerges as the leader of the settlement in the 2060s in a seemingly organic process of self-selection. Although there does not seem to be a formal, officially sanctioned process for the nomination of leadership, Sthembiso is “at the head of it”, and as for any other governance structures, Roy finds it “impossible to tell” who is in control and who makes the decisions for the good of the community (Miller, 2015:351). Sthem, as “big man”, controls food production, education, religion, the implementation of policies and rules, as well as the division of labour. In describing the division of labour as laid out by Sthem, one of Roy’s great-grandchildren explains: “Fixed hours. Everyone. Every day. Compulsory. You ken mos. Four-hour minimum. Normally is not my jol. I don come close to decisions. I jus do” (Miller, 2015:347). Obvious in this excerpt is Marx’s notion of alienated labour and loss of agency. Decisions are made for this new proletariat by the new bourgeoisie, namely Sthembiso, and the proletariat’s compliance is enforced by Sthem’s “lieutenants” through various means of intimidation. The emerging proletariat’s consent is manufactured through the dominant ideology’s mechanisms of intimidation (ISAs and RSAs).

In a show of his force, Sthem orders the culling of the free pigs even though they are not a direct threat to the settlement and its inhabitants’ wellbeing. Roy explains that Sthem had “whipped [his lieutenants] into a killing frenzy, which manifested in all the hallmarks of a genocide”, dispatching “small squads” to not only kill the pigs, but to “explicitly [savage]” them (Miller, 2015:335). This brutal mass killing is done to make the surviving pigs understand where the new boundaries have been set by Sthembiso. The pigs come to symbolize an element of nature which Sthem cannot control or repress without violence, and is therefore an affront to his growing power and influence over the land. The pigs have to be eliminated so that Sthem can be seen to be in control of every element or perceived threat within the society. As absolute leader, Sthem has to be observed as unrelenting in his resolve, and the slaughter and burning of the porcine corpses is simply violent proof thereof. By awaiting the fulfilment of utopian promises, the settlement allows for the rise of a false messiah: state dictatorship. Sthem becomes cast as the “High Priest” of the emergent dictatorial political system – he comes to represent the real face of dictatorship that is hiding behind the messianic mask (Gottlieb, 2001:6). The settlement’s leader is paranoid, controlling, and unafraid of violent means of control, and in this way, the dystopia of totalitarianism is fully realized and the original promise of egalitarianism and shared responsibility is discarded. Human brutality and fallibility are exposed, despite the chance at starting over that the apocalypse initially granted.

The narrative therefore comes full circle in that there is a return to the dystopian. The utopian promise of Ubuntu has been abandoned, and an oppressive totalitarian government is presented as being somewhat inevitable, much to the dismay of the settlement's founding members. There is a manifestation of Jared Diamond's perception that all idealistic efforts to minimize inequality within societies have failed: Marx's formulation of the communist ideal of "[f]rom each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs" has not been able to successfully manifest itself (2012:12). The artistic effect of the apocalypse then soon becomes purely symbolic of historical change in leadership and social organisation: Miller projects a future society riddled with many of the modern-day ills such as hierarchical, self-serving governance and the accompanying lack of agency for the everyman. Even once "wiped clean" by the apocalypse, Johannesburg's dividedness and corruptibility simply re-emerge stronger than ever, thus cementing its status as overtly dystopian both pre- and post-apocalypse.

The Cult of Dub: The Beat as Religion

In an attempt to achieve absolute power over the settlement, particularly the younger generations, Sthembiso introduces dub music as a mechanism of control. I argue that the nature of this incessant dub music comes to symbolise the formation of a religion which interpellates inhabitants to a (religious) ISA, thereby securing their compliance to Sthem's authority. I contextualise Marxist conceptions of religion and theorise dub music, and then use these two elements to examine Sthem's trajectory and implementation of music as a kind of religion. Pre-apocalyptic Johannesburg's intoxicating club scene has re-emerged decades later in the settlement post-apocalypse. This re-emergence is made possible through Roy's meticulous archiving which was intended to be helpful and harmless, but ultimately has had huge effects on Sthem's chosen mode of leadership. My focus on dub music and its effects in the novel is prompted by the novel's title; Miller clearly regards this element of the narrative as important and has centralised it in the settlement post-apocalypse. I examine the role of religious thinking in oppression and show how oppression is presented by Miller as inevitable in South Africa's "future history".

In his early writings, Karl Marx was clear in his position towards and about religion: he believed Feuerbach's anthropological view that "man makes religion, religion does not make man" (Feuerbach quoted in Padover, 1978:283). Marx was overtly critical of both Judaism and Christianity, and posited the latter as responsible for the justification of slavery,

the glorification of medieval serfdom, and the upholding of oppression and abasement. To Marx, religion was an illusion, or “the sigh of a distressed creature” being both an escape from reality and the misery of the world, as well as a protest against this wretchedness (Padover, 1978:283). Since religion was seen by Marx as a mere illusion, he argued that it cannot be said to solve individuals’ problems, only aggravate them through scapegoating and delusion. For Marx, to achieve true fulfilment, the social mechanisms which perpetuate these illusory inclinations must be dismantled by eliminating the very conditions that require such escapist mechanisms or techniques.

In the early stages of his academic career, Louis Althusser was more optimistic about religion, and believed that Christianity and communist action could be reconciled. Growing up Catholic, Althusser’s essay, “A Matter of Fact” (1947) communicates his views about Christianity and suggests the necessity of socialist means for realizing Christian ends. Though some critics have argued that Christian and Catholic values and modes of reasoning inform all of Althusser’s philosophy, any explicit consideration of a practical and theoretical reconciliation between the two was abandoned in Althusser’s trajectory in the early 1950s (Lewis, [2009] 2018:¶16). Later in his career, Althusser outlines the process of ideological interpellation and argues ideology to be omnipresent and all-encompassing in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)” (1971).

In this essay, Althusser also puts forth his argument that regimes or states are able to maintain control by reproducing subjects who believe that their position within the social structure is a natural one. Specific socio-economic structures, however, require particular ideologies: these ideologies are instantiated by ISAs which provide the developing subject with categories in which they can recognize themselves (Lewis, [2009] 2018:¶50). When an individual embraces these institutions, they are seen to have been successfully interpellated by the dominant bourgeoisie ideological structures – this process is important as it ensures the maintenance of existing (oppressive) social structures. And so, by the final stages of Althusser’s academic career, he too subscribed to Marx’s notion that religion is “the *opium* of the people”³⁹ and is a means for the ruling class to control the proletariat and guarantee their submission to, and acceptance of, the dominant ideology.

Miller grapples with ideological structures of control in *Dub Steps*: in the concluding chapters of the novel, there occurs the introduction of a form of religion. This religion is a mechanism of control over the younger generations of their settlement post-apocalypse. After

³⁹ Marx quoted in Padover, 1978:283. Italics added by Padover.

the founding inhabitants' careful plans to essentially repopulate the earth, they are slowly ushered out of control by the newer generations (that is, their descendants) as time passes. Roy explains that he has "great-great-grandchildren – too many to count, too many names to try to file and match with faces", and in this way, the original settlers achieve their goal of "perpetuation of the species" (Miller, 2015:338;132). The younger generations take it upon themselves to care for the original settlers in their old age, as Roy observes that "[o]ne or two of the others will come by and check on me. They feed me and make sure that the provisions are all in the right place and that I haven't cracked my nut on the basin or crashed into a heap in the shower..." (Miller, 2015:334). During one of these obligatory care routines, Roy finds himself wondering "[w]hen did dub become the enemy, and trance the master of all things, the very meaning itself?" (Miller, 2015:335).

Dub is a reggae sub-genre that is seen to be instrumental in the formation of technological innovations that make genres of technologically-forward dance music possible (Katz, 2014:¶3; Bradley, 2013:10). Laura Bradley defines dubstep (a sub-genre of dub) as a "genre of bass music (electronic [dance] music⁴⁰ that places heavy emphasis on bass as an aesthetic and rhetorical tool)" (2013:6). The genre grew as the internet became more accessible to the everyman, and pirate radio stations and downloading sites played a huge role in its dissemination. The genre's established online presence, along with the internet's effortless mechanisms of information exchange, played a pivotal role in the genre's later development, especially in terms of international input and influence.

Common characteristics of EDM include a constant beat and repeating rhythmic motives, and this repetition and the volume at which this music is traditionally played can sometimes create trance-like feelings among listeners. The music becomes hypnotic and heavily engaging to the extent that listeners can supposedly experience a certain level of dissociation from their physical selves and enter into a "powerful ecstatic state" (Sylvan, 2005:20). This hypnotic state can be paralleled to a transcendental religious experience, so much so that global rave culture can be said to have spiritual and religious dimensions which are shared as "powerful group experience[s]" (Sylvan, 2005:20). Sylvan likens EDM to the social model of the church in that large groups of individuals transcend their realities in a state of quasi-worship. In this way, as listeners experience the music, "the dance venue becomes a small version of ... a social 'utopia' where music and dance become vehicles of individual and collective affirmation and celebration ... which for many participants is comparable in style

⁴⁰ Known commonly by its acronym, EDM.

and dynamics to actual worship” (Sylvan, 2002:120; 2005:20). Through a study of trance/rave culture in America, Sylvan garners the following from a veteran San Francisco raver: deep trances that have been induced over a long period of time “completely [alter] your state of consciousness” (2002:127). Moreover, this music “tries to sculpt your experience in some way, by manipulating those mechanisms in your mind” (2002:127). I argue that this genre of music can thus be viewed as a rudimentary religious ISA as it directly affects individuals’ locus of control and seeks to unify groups of individuals to embark on a specific ritual or activity aimed at some kind of higher power.

Throughout *Dub Steps*, dub music is a way in which Roy can reconcile his troublesome relationship with his father, a once-prominent South African cricketer, Russle Fotheringham, who died from a brain haemorrhage after years of excessive drinking and drug abuse when Roy was twenty years old. After his premature retirement from professional cricket, Russle reinvents himself as a DJ in the greater Gauteng area while “[falling] into a fluffy trance” (Miller, 2015:19). In relative solitude, Russle composes “standard four-to-the-floor trance, a simple, never-ending bass underneath a litany of equally simple, rising candy synths” (Miller, 2015:19). At first, Roy is dismissive of his father’s musical venture, but post-apocalypse, he sees this as a strand of connection between them, and starts listening to his father’s work with more enthusiasm and reserved awe. The music is a way in which Roy can reflect on himself in relation to his father, and the music becomes a signifier of nostalgia, not only for human connection, but for a world that once was. Russle’s music collection becomes the soundtrack to the new settlement, absorbing everyone, especially the children, with its catchy rhythms and simple, recurring beats.

From a young age, Sthem is particularly fond of Roy’s collection of music. Roy describes Sthem’s initial interest as industrialist: “Sthembiso would lead the selections [of music amongst the children], ostensibly offering a range of options but ultimately limiting the choices to suit his own ends”, foreshadowing the style of leadership he would later adopt (Miller, 2015:296). Sthembiso’s favourite music is ultimately trance, and this fascination with the beat carries through to his adult days as leader of the productive and generously populated settlement. This trance music, selected and determined exclusively by Sthem, becomes the soundtrack to daily life and plays incessantly through huge speakers which are strategically scattered around the grounds. By design, the music becomes inescapable: “[w]herever you are, whatever you’re doing, the thump is there” (Miller, 2015:323). Playlists are determined solely by Sthem and maintained by his lieutenants, and no variation in genre occurs, which creates an environment in which every citizen is entranced without end. Inhabitants’ listening is

regimented and controlled, rationed even. It is only on Tuesdays and Saturdays that some silence occurs and Roy can enjoy the “scheduled call of birds” (Miller, 2015:323). Like the killing of the free pigs, Sthem has also confined the audible chirping of birds to specific set hours in an attempt to exert power over the natural world that surrounds the settlement.

The “party area” or dancefloor is also the site of their religious gatherings on Thursdays – these gatherings are led by Sthem who is the “preacher” who “leads his prayers and his lectures” overlooking a mass of young bodies, eager to listen and learn (Miller, 2015:353). Thursday mornings see “the volume [of the music turned] right up, bass cranked, from the early hours, incessant” (Miller, 2015:346). Thursdays are “church days” and “holy days” where citizens are mandatorily present at Sthem’s deliverance of a doctrine of his own creation, and this doctrine ensures their compliance to his rules and instructions (Miller, 2015:346). Sthem retains his power and authority as leader through the citizens being cast as subjects to his religious ideology (or in Althusserian vocabulary, the religious ideological state apparatus which ensures the proletariat’s compliance and reverence that he has created as sole leader of this new ‘state’). Roy questions this “cult of their religion” and why they need to cast an image of a god to conceptualise their lives as they know them (Miller, 2015:342). Furthermore, Roy is critical of the maintenance of the trance canon of music and the accompanying autocratic style of leadership which finds a foothold in inhabitants’ eagerness to follow Sthem as the deliverer of ultimate truth and as mouthpiece of some God.

The woman whose duty it is to look after the older generation of settlers (the remaining four who are now in their nineties – Roy, Andile, Fats, and Beatrice), known affectionately as “Matron”, expresses hushed hesitation to Roy about Sthem’s leadership:

“...I resent as well. Like a bit angry.” Matron shrugged, about to cry. She breathed deep and rumbled on. “An also da beat. Da beat an pills. Is hard to keep going all the time. Dis I know you know, né?” She chuckled, too nervous to look at me. “He so hectic bout the beat. Bout the dub thing. He won even let the kids mix de own trance. Even if ut fast and hard like Schulz. Only wot he say. An def no other beat. Neva. Neva neva neva anudda beat but we all know dere’s more...He control it all. Always.” (Miller, 2015:348)⁴¹.

This mode of control is perceived by Matron as threatening, but also fundamentally restrictive – the citizens have been robbed of their agency in terms of what media they may consume, what they are allowed to do with their time, and ultimately, their ideological stance. The music

⁴¹ It is only Sthembiso who still communicates in “[t]he Queen’s language” with a “crisp, clean” accent, and Roy sees this as another one of the ways he shows his authority over his progeny (Miller, 2015:360).

is intended to induce a trance-like state which will ensure their acceptance of Sthem's demands; the music is a pragmatic device employed by their domineering leader, and not just background noise. Matron's anxiety to share her feelings about Sthem is not unfounded: as he gains more power, Sthem becomes more tyrannical and punitive in his governance and ensures that he is surrounded by his lieutenants who are heavily armed and fiercely loyal, intended to quell dissent (Miller, 2015:366). At the novel's conclusion, the aged Roy is apprehended by Sthem's lieutenants because he mixes a DJ set that does not include Sthem-sanctioned music.

In this vein, Roy describes this trance music, something which he has enjoyed his whole life because of his proximity to the club scene, as having new dimensions in that the music is now "the sound of authority...of power and meaning" (Miller, 2015:350). The act of interpellation in this religious ideology is possible only because of the existence of an Absolute Subject (that being the constant music); individuals become subjects of ideology when they are hailed by the Subject (this music which induces a trance-like state) that precedes them. The listeners have been interpellated into the religion of the dub, and it is through this that they can find ways as a group to understand and conceptualise the post-apocalyptic world as they know it. Moreover, just as the religious ISA would, the dub music functions to manufacture compliance of the proletariat for the gain of a stern, unrelenting leader.

Conclusion: The Hellish Eden of Johannesburg

In a 2015 interview on an SABC morning show, Andrew Miller refers to South Africa as "vrot" (translated from Afrikaans as 'rotten'). The perceived rottenness of the state influences Miller's apocalyptic imagination as both pre- and post-apocalyptic Johannesburg is decidedly "vrot" with issues of race, social capital, and commodification. Pre-apocalypse, graffiti is shown to be a way in which the disgruntled and marginalised can assert themselves outside of bureaucratic channels of state control and ISAs. While this subversive act is hopeful in impulse (as it presents alternatives to the dystopic version of Johannesburg the graf rebels inhabit), it is ultimately futile and does little to enact any real change.

I use Althusserian theory to discuss the importance of Roy's involvement with the ideological grooming of the future generations of the settlement post-apocalypse. While Roy munificently archives, Sthem begins quietly asserting himself and years later, Sthem takes his place as authoritarian "big man" of the settlement, in part thanks to Roy's well-intentioned but misguided influence. Finally, Sthem uses the titular dub music to control and oppress the

individuals of the settlement and I propose this to be a form of religion. The dub involves mass participation, answering to a central authority, and a charismatic leader who acts as a mouthpiece for a higher power.

Michael Titlestad (2015:36) argues that South African post-apocalyptic fiction published after 1999 “generally comprises despondent reflections on the decline of the post-apartheid South African nation ruled by an incompetent government riddled with corruption and nepotism, and beset by lassitude”. Miller proposes monumental shifts in the social and actual terrain of Johannesburg in *Dub Steps*. Pre-apocalypse, post-apartheid Johannesburg is marked by corporate greed, addiction (to both substances and technology, and sometimes where they intersect with drugs like ‘hack’), illegal hustling, corruption, and incompetent policing. Post-apocalypse, the utopian vision is fleeting as a new oppressive regime asserts itself thus solidifying the dystopian elements (such as totalitarian rule, oppression, marginalisation, and loss of agency) of the new settlement.

While Miller’s cognitive estrangement is rooted in multifaceted descriptions of Johannesburg before the apocalypse, his attempt at estrangement typical to sf is lacking in terms of a methodical, logical, and consistent approach to scientific credibility. While the author’s retention of orientating information may serve a larger narrative purpose (as discussed earlier), I contend that the novel is somewhat incoherent or insubstantial at times, and this retention flaws the text, as opposed to deepening it. A generous reading of the text would posit the disorientation as apt and context-specific to the characters; however, I read this lack of information as being critically thin and leaving many aspects of the novel unresolved.

Conclusion: The Incisiveness of South African Science Fiction

In this thesis I have shown how contemporary South African sf set in Johannesburg acts as political criticism. I have argued that sf authors and filmmakers turn to this metropolis as the most readily symbolic site of engagement with the legacies of apartheid, spatial and socioeconomic divides, as well as narratives of xenophobia, problematic policing praxis, and sustained resistance. The South African sf that I have analysed is inherently critical in its projections of the country's future and its ruminations on its past.

South Africa's past will not engulf its future and literature is central to this, as literature has "the capacity to return to the past precisely in order to leave it behind and, in so doing, usher in the future" (West-Pavlov, 2014:8). Moreover, Sarah Nuttall acknowledges the country's persistent histories but argues that "investigation of such complex and contradictory formations may be the only way to write ... Africa out of a past and into a future, while always remaining mindful of what is actually happening" (2004:748). In this way, dystopian invocations of the past are constructive because they aid the ushering in of a new age of renewed critical awareness.

The thrust of this thesis has been to explore the real-world political dimensions of these local sf texts. That being said, the fantastical elements of these texts are instrumental in defamiliarizing (local) readers from their socio-political milieus so that they may reflect on the disparities contained therein. Sf texts contribute to the education of their readers as they expose readers' distorted perceptions of real life; these distorted perceptions may come about as a result of "ignorance, misinformation, mystification, or class interest" (Angenot & Suvin, 1979:169). In other words, the fantastical elements of these texts wake us from our "ecologies of ignorance" (Nuttall & Mbembe, 2007:282) to warn us against the potentially catastrophic outcome(s) of benign neglect or malign agendas. Critically, Marc Angenot and Darko Suvin (1979:169) posit: "the world that is excluded [the real world/context of the reader] from the text cannot fail to be tacitly re-inscribed into [the text] by the ideal reader cognisant of that world". Moreover, when reading an sf text, readers are invited to be aware of the extra-textual elements of the fantastical universe: the internal magical or science fictional narrative of an sf text should be read and considered alongside its relation to wider real-life, contemporary social, political, and historical paradigms.

In arguing why sf authors and filmmakers turn to a huge city like Johannesburg as their setting and inspiration, I draw on Choon-Piew Pow who describes how cities facilitate the deployment of singular dystopic narratives because of "the assumption that the urban

conditions in many places are already dystopic to begin with and that such urban dystopia is not an imaginative futuristic elsewhere but an immediate and present geographical elsewhere” (2015:464-465). I contend that this sf has its roots in material conditions and the conditions of Johannesburg (as well as its history as the hub of capitalist investment, racial segregation, ambitious infrastructure and cultural production) make it an ideal site from which to project South African futures cognisant of South African pasts.

In the introduction of this thesis, I briefly summarise and analyse R. R. R. Dhlomo’s *An African Tragedy* (1928), Peter Abrahams’s *Mine Boy* (1946), Alan Paton’s *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1948), and Ivan Vladislavić’s *The Restless Supermarket* (2001). My discussion of these four texts shows that while not traditionally classified as sf, these realist texts can also be seen to invoke conventional sf themes (most prominently: the notion of the ‘alien’, interactions with ever-changing modernity, an ideological ‘war’ between the oppressed and an elitist minority ruling body, the effects of technology, and the navigation of strange and otherworldly landscapes) and dystopian aesthetics in order to refocus poignant political criticism of the authors’ contexts. The analysis of the dystopian aesthetics of these four Johannesburg-set texts serves to contextualise and contribute to the contemporary non-western sf ecologies that have flourished, and continue to flourish, in South Africa. While the terminology of classification may be relatively new, it is evident that South African authors have made use of dystopian speculative fiction aesthetics and motifs to critique the socio-political environment of Johannesburg since (at least) 1928.

I then move from past literatures to the consideration of contemporary Johannesburg-set examples of critical South African sf texts. In my analysis of *Zoo City*, I have explored Beukes’ intensely divided and cut-throat Johannesburg. The city of the novel is extremely closely paralleled to the actual living conditions and spatial categorisations of actual Johannesburg, and I have used sociological and anthropological approaches alongside my Althusserian analysis to illuminate this hyper-real element of the text. *Zoo City* critically engages with spatial politics, clandestine modes of punishment which only serve to further alienate the ‘inconvenient’ urban poor, as well as prevailing and ever-emerging narratives of xenophobia which take hold in acts of physical and symbolic violence in this metropole. Beukes carefully attempts to untangle the extremely complex socio-political circumstances of the country as a whole and chooses Johannesburg as the site in which to do so.

My discussion of *Chappie* has shown just how un-African Blomkamp’s second attempt at a local film really is. Rather, I argue that South Africa’s woes are exploited for an American cinematic audience in an act I have termed “dystopia porn”. Problematically, Blomkamp’s film

casts Johannesburg as the site of hyper-vicious violence and necessitated counter-violence. The city is shown to be the territory of continued apartheid-era repressive praxes, both administrative and physical (shown through violent policing strategies and the workings of the deep state). The general ambiance of Johannesburg is represented by Blomkamp as dystopic through images of police brutality, unchecked capitalism, class divisions and unflinching gangsterism. While the film is clumsy at times, *Chappie* acts as (sensationalised) political critique of unethical policing praxis which exposes South Africa's lack of progress from apartheid-era repressive frameworks.

In my reading of *Dub Steps*, made obvious is Miller's bleak perspective of an apocalypse which ultimately only serves to echo pre-apocalyptic modes of oppression, tyrannical governance, and fierce hierarchal social organisation. Pre-apocalypse, post-apartheid Johannesburg is marked by corporate greed, addiction (to both substances and technology, and sometimes where they intersect with drugs like 'hack'), illegal hustling, corruption, and grossly incompetent policing. Post-apocalypse, the initial utopian vision is fleeting as a new oppressive regime asserts itself thus solidifying the dystopian elements of the new settlement. Miller implicitly interrogates (moral, educational, religious) ideology throughout the novel and ultimately shows Johannesburg to be so "vrot" that even an apocalypse could not redeem it.

In contrast to Miller's miserable projections, actual Johannesburg will once more be transformed in its perceivably unending cycle of decay and reconfiguration as the iGoli 2030 plan begins to gain traction. The city will be caught in another narrative of transformation that seeks to boost the quality of life of city residents through sustained economic growth and moving away from the city's historical dependence on mining, manufacturing and other heavy industry. According to the iGoli 2030 plan, the city is projected to outgrow its mining town roots and focus on drawing sustainable foreign investment in tourism and technology, all while solidifying its position as a national hub of trade and commerce. While many residents' everyday reality could be described as dystopian, with poverty, overcrowding, unemployment and crime, it is important to note that there are larger structural and administrative forces at play, meaning that all hope is not yet lost.

Some would contend that the depictions of Johannesburg as inextricably dystopian are simply an offshoot of realism as the city's reputation consistently betrays it, but I have shown that the dystopian genre is helpful in reframing the issues of the present (and the past) so that some form of meaningful change is theorized. The underlying impulse of dystopian cultural production is ultimately hopeful: a worse context is imagined to warn society of its follies so

that these shortcomings and issues can be fixed, thereby avoiding the disastrous world(s) of the fiction. In this way, local sf cannot be said to be prone to the melancholia that thoughts of dystopia bring about, but rather that the country's ever-enduring spirit of change and transformation lives on in the fiction of this emerging genre.

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