

Whose city? (De)colonising the bodies of speculative fiction in Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City*

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the (de)colonisation of the body and body boundaries in contemporary South African speculative fiction, paying particular attention to award-winning author, Lauren Beukes's, second novel, *Zoo City* (2010). I will apply Lara Cox's (2018:317) argument that 'Haraway's cyborg resembles the liminal view of identity presented by queer theory, which seeks to blur strict divisions between sexual and gender categories, dissolving binary oppositions such as woman/man and heterosexual/homosexual', to my reading of *Zoo City*. By centring the novel around Zinzi December, a resident of 'Zoo City' (the marginalised underbelly of Johannesburg), and situating the novel in the cradle of humankind, Beukes reacts against South Africa's colonial history and its colonisation of the body by blurring the animal-human boundary and challenging the colonial construct of body binaries. The novel can be read as a decolonial feminist text as it re-writes South Africa's apartheid history and critiques its division, separation and bodily segregation. Furthermore, I explore how fictional bodies are imagined and constructed in the text; I ask what kinds of boundary-breaking bodies predominate; and consider their thematic, narrative, and political significance in the post-apartheid imaginary in relation to speculative fiction. I examine how new boundaries (particularly between 'normative' society and 'Zoo City') are formulated. *Zoo City* pulls into focus Kristeva's (1982) notion of the abject body as a central to its concerns, while also bringing attention to Foucault's (1992) notion of the 'disciplined' body. It foregrounds questions about the formulation and destabilisation of identity, with a particular focus on the construction of female identity. This article builds on the critical literature on the dystopian post-apartheid state by examining *Zoo City*'s depictions of

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marginalised people and its construction of the body and body boundaries, as well as by extending the examination of representations of the body in speculative fiction.

Keywords: cyborg, gender, the body, speculative fiction, Lauren Beukes, *Zoo City*.

Introduction

Lauren Beukes's second novel, *Zoo City* (2010), is a multi-generic novel that traces the survival of one woman, Zinzi December, who experiences a socially imposed marginalised life within the novel's reimagining of Johannesburg as a 'Zoo' (Beukes 2010:15) in 'Zoo City'. Her body is physically marked by her mangled left ear, which was damaged as a result of the murder of her brother, Thando. This event that 'marks' Zinzi as 'animalled', as a result of being convicted of and imprisoned for Thando's murder.

Zoo City explores questions of dystopia and the post-apartheid imaginary through its depictions and representations of the body with a particular focus on depictions of marginalised people(s). Critics such as Cheryl Stobie (2012:368) read Beukes's novels as forms of 'critical dystopia', an approach which tends to place emphasis on the texts' redemptive qualities and the possibilities of 'social dreaming'. For Stobie, what is also valuable about Beukes's work is her characteristic mixing of modes. *Zoo City* stages an intriguing combination of African traditional belief systems and the genre of film noir, what Stobie (2012:375) refers to as '*muti*-noir'. The body is an important focus for this article because of the ways in which Beukes uses these bodily inscriptions to explore the breaking of boundaries which (de)colonise the body and body boundaries. Others, like Louise Bethlehem (2013) and Konstatin Sofianas (2013), draw attention to the novel's dystopian re-visioning of the post-apartheid South African city, paying particular attention to the depiction of social divisions and fractures (now based on class rather than race), the social regulation of space and the repressive operations of technology in what emerges as a sophisticated new treatment of Foucauldian 'biopolitics'. For Sofianas (2013:115), much of the pleasure of *Zoo City* is located in the possibilities of 'spatial trespass' and the glamorous repackaging of the inner-city ghetto. Critics such as Henriette Roos (2011) — also fascinated by Beukes's rendering of the post-apartheid city as a dystopian space — offer a reading of dystopia, an imagined state or society in which there is great suffering or injustice, typically one that is totalitarian or post-apocalyptic (*Dystopia*), as the collapsing of the boundaries between the human and

the non-human. This then creates a foundation on which one can argue that the novel's objective is similar to Jenny Dixon's summary of the main objective of queer theories as to 'dissolve concrete identities' (Cox 2018:319). Severe and solid boundaries are erected between 'marked' and 'unmarked' bodies in the novel, which evokes questions about the formation of urban identities and the links between bodies, identity, gender and urban space.

Zoo City not only seeks to break bodily boundaries, but also, importantly, constructs the body in terms of its relationship to the dominant social architecture, with a primary focus on the body's interactions with the laws of post-apartheid society as Beukes imagines it. In this way, the marginalised characters' negative interactions with the law (through illegality or infringement) become the point of social division. Those who disregard social mores and engage in illegal activities are 'marked' with an animal and are relocated to an area known as 'Zoo City' (Beukes 2010:59) on the margins of central Johannesburg. Social divisions, therefore, become a central theme of this novel: an idea explored through the way in which new boundaries (particularly between 'normative' society and 'Zoo City') are formulated.

Lara Cox's (2018:319) reading of Donna Haraway's cyborg, as 'a hybrid version of identity midway between the human and the machine', offers an important lens through which the marginalised characters of *Zoo City* may be read. However, the novel depicts a version of Haraway's cyborg as a hybrid of human and animal, thus 'marking' the body as criminal and, in so doing, excludes them from society, much in the same way as the passbook under apartheid marked the bodies of people of colour and excluded them from access to jobs and urban spaces (among other important human freedoms). Cox's views point to a decolonial feminist reading of these marginalised characters in that these figures dissolve concrete identities such as 'Woman, Lesbian, Gay' (Cox 2018:319). The marked bodies in *Zoo City* break these concrete identity boundaries by being 'animalled': they are no longer simply women or men, because they are forever fused and attached to their animals. The marginalised figures of the novel can be read as figures of decolonial feminism by adapting Cox's reading of Haraway's cyborg manifesto as Cox highlights Haraway's argument that 'women of colour might be understood as a cyborg identity synthesised from fusions of outsider identities' (Cox 2018:324).

Beukes offers an intriguing and valuable formulation of the human-animal cyborg which, like Haraway's cyborg, blurs the strict binaries between the human and the non-human. By creating characters such as Zinzi December, her boyfriend Benoît, music producer Odi Huron and talented singer Songezwa, who blur or challenge this binary, and through placing the emphasis on marginalised and criminalised

figures, the novel can challenge conventional social boundaries by highlighting how those who exist on the margins have their interactions restricted. In *Zoo City*, Beukes writes a novel that can be read as a feminist decolonial text, which not only challenges binaries between the human and the non-human, but challenges and critiques the basis on which social divisions are established, particularly between men and women.

The novel is set in a futuristic version of Johannesburg, South Africa, which still carries the weight of the traces of apartheid. The heaviness of separation and segregation is felt, especially by the female protagonist, Zinzi December, and her boyfriend Benoît. Through an unfortunate series of events, she is marked with her Sloth companion as a result of her brother's murder and becomes a permanent resident of 'Zoo City'. Lara Cox's article, 'Decolonial queer feminism in Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985)', provides a useful framework to understand how *Zoo City* seeks to dissolve the binaries that segregations are based on, regardless of their basis, whether it be class, race or criminality. The novel's focus falls on exploring the ways in which bodies are inscribed, and how bodies relate: both to the spaces they occupy and to the dominant social architecture. *Zoo City* engages with the forging and deconstruction of boundaries regarding the body and space. This endeavour to deconstruct boundaries demonstrates how Lara Cox's argument can provide a useful lens for a reading of *Zoo City* as a postcolonial feminist text. Although the novel is not an explicitly feminist text, I believe it can be read as such since Beukes goes to great lengths to upend the expectations of gender in the speculative fiction genre, and of the female characters. The novel re-writes South Africa's apartheid history and critiques its basis of division, separation and bodily segregation. Furthermore, I will explore how bodies are imagined and constructed; ask what kinds of boundary-breaking bodies predominate; and consider their thematic, narrative, and political significance in the post-apartheid imaginary in relation to speculative fiction. I also scrutinise how new boundaries (particularly between 'normative' society and 'Zoo City') are formulated. *Zoo City* pulls into focus Kristeva's (1982) notion of the abject body as a central aspect of its concerns, while also bringing attention to Foucault's (1992) notion of the 'disciplined' body.

The abject body and boundary breaking in *Zoo City*

The question of bodies in space is connected to the question of identity. The body's identity in *Zoo City* is heavily dependent on its relation to dominant social ideals

and city space. As abject bodies, 'aposymbiots' or 'zoos' are placed in a lower social category, thus pre-determining their geographical location. In this way, a person's identity, the place in which they live and where they may go all depend on their particular social ranking. The physical space of the city is not strictly controlled by physical boundaries; rather, it is regulated by the marking of bodies, which creates social boundaries. In *Zoo City*, the social boundaries are invisible and are not policed, so that bodies are not physically restricted in the same way as they are in the 'real' world. Instead, those who are 'animalled' are psychologically aware of their lack of place in this seemingly normal space, and so choose to avoid engaging with it.

The representation of bodies in *Zoo City* recalls Julia Kristeva's (1982) notion of the abject body as a central aspect of its concerns. The novel foregrounds questions about the formulation and destabilisation of identity with a particular focus on female identity. The abject body, in *Zoo City*, is both marked and 'marked out', as it is that which must be cast out of 'normative' society and excluded from the body politic, because it threatens 'normal' boundaries. This construction of identity draws into focus how the novel can be read as contesting such systems of oppression. By reconstructing the oppressive regime of the apartheid state and reimagining its segregation based on those who are marked by their criminality (through 'animalling') and those who are unmarked and therefore free, Beukes focuses on the political significance of the post-apartheid imaginary state. Social division is an important aspect of the abject body as these bodies are marginalised and stripped of their social autonomy. This is complicated by the process of 'animalling', which I mentioned earlier. By marking these individuals with an animal, the size and nature of which mimics the size and nature of the crime committed (Zinzi is marked with a Sloth for the murder of her brother and Odi Huron is marked with a mature Crocodile for his crimes), the novel creates marginalised human/animal cyborgs that exist on the fringes of urban space. In this way, *Zoo City* can be read as a decolonial feminist text for two reasons. First, it challenges the colonial rule of the apartheid state through its upending of the basis of segregation (this is not race, as in apartheid, but abiding by the law). Second, it also shifts the view of identity: as in Haraway's manifesto, Zinzi and her fellow 'zoos' (Beukes 2010:15) become animal/human cyborg hybrids and their identities are permanently hybridised (Cox 2018:320). Rather than the human/machine cyborg, which favours the machine and enhances the human in some form or other, *Zoo City's* cyborgs are disenfranchised by this hybridisation of identity and in essence lose their sense of self.

Gender, decolonial feminism and the body in *Zoo City*

A further focus of my discussion is on gender and gender dynamics. Gender is important when discussing the body as it has an instrumental effect on the construction of identity within particular social and cultural contexts. Cox asserts (2018:321) that feminists in the 1970s argued that 'gender' was a construct of patriarchy according to, therefore female identity or that which constitutes 'woman' was also constructed by patriarchal rule. The resulting denigration, even erasure, of the body (which is a form of 'somatophobia') has incited various responses from feminist critics who explore the implications of the mind/body dualism for the oppression of women. Critics such as Elizabeth Grosz (1994) and Susan Bordo (1993) point to the correlation of the mind/body opposition with the common-sense distinctions between male and female, where man and mind, and woman and body, become representationally aligned. Grosz (1994:9) points out that the body has been regarded as a tool or machine at the disposal of consciousness, as the possession of a subject. It has also been

considered a signifying medium, a vehicle of expression, a mode of rendering public and communicable what is essentially private (ideas, thoughts, feelings, etc). [The body is] a vehicle for the expression of an otherwise sealed and self-contained, incommunicable psyche, [...] it is through the body that he or she can receive, code and translate the inputs of the 'external' world (Grosz 1994:9).

From such a standpoint, it is clear that the basis on which misogynistic thought and patriarchal oppression rests is problematic. The resulting alignment of 'women' with the body/irrationality/biology and 'man' with the mind/reason/rationality sparked works that call for unity among women. Cox (2018:321) mentions: "A Cyborg Manifesto" is as critical of second-wave feminism's universalising narrative of a "unity of women" as Butler's *Gender Trouble*'. This is problematic as, for Butler, the opposition of woman vs man 'erased differences of sexual orientation and united women under the spurious assumption that they were all heterosexual'.

Relationships between the sexes are important in understanding the social constructs of power in *Zoo City*. In Cox's (2018:322) view 'all women are reduced, in the second wave model, to "radical non-beings" as objects of patriarchal appropriation'. This view is useful for this study particularly regarding the way female characters (Zinzi in particular) are inscribed as having the ability to progress in society, whereas their male counterparts (such as Benoît) are unable to do so. Not only does Beukes's

novel challenge colonial constructs of historical oppression, but the text also engages with gender roles and upends the gender expectations that obtain in strictly controlled segregated societies. Cox (2018: 321) argues that:

Haraway not only problematised the identity category of “Homosexual” but also “Women”, and this forms another way in which “A Cyborg Manifesto” may be linked to queer foundational texts such as Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) and de Lauretis’s *Technologies of Gender* (1987).

This argument provides insights into the way Butler has queered the ‘gender vs sex’ debate during the 1970s and is important in understanding how Beukes treats gender in *Zoo City*. We need to explore questions of identity and identity construction, with particular emphasis on the construction of female identity. The issue of identity is a prominent theme throughout the novel. Identity, in the imagined world of *Zoo City*, is fluid, interchangeable, and transferable; the authenticity of individualism is rendered unimportant. Several people in the ‘Zoo City’ area display the fluidity of identity. Benoît, for instance, is an illegal immigrant in South Africa, originally from the Democratic Republic of the Congo and thus he has no official identity, enabling him to move easily in and out of others’ identities. He often assumes the identity of Elias (a Zimbabwean immigrant living in ‘Zoo City’, who asks for favours from Benoît on account of being critically ill with tuberculosis). In Benoît’s case, the self is not important in the generation of identity, and the body, apparently, becomes the sole source of identity construction. Individual identity is no longer important; rather, where you are placed in the city space determines your social value. In this way, the body is inscribed, in *Zoo City*, as a site of disempowerment, thus reinforcing the idea that the segregation experienced during the apartheid regime has simply shifted in the post-apartheid imaginary.

The theme of identity is also explored through Benoît’s need to document his life through photographs (Beukes 2010:135). As a refugee, Benoît’s identity within the city is unknown. He does not exist in the system and therefore his need to document his journey photographically may be read as a need to construct a concrete existence. It is in these ways that *Zoo City* engages with the body in terms of space, discipline, marking and identity. Benoît’s character can be read in terms of Haraway’s description of a ‘liminal identity “liv[ing] on the boundaries” of two colonial languages without a claim to “original wholeness”’ (Cox 2018:325). Although Benoît does not necessarily live on the boundaries of languages he lives on the boundaries of civilian belonging, and in this way can be read as lacking, as Haraway puts it, ‘original wholeness’. Benoît is not only an unofficial occupant of ‘Zoo City’: he must also rely upon Zinzi for his survival in a foreign land. This strips him of any patriarchal dominance over

his existence and situates him in a space between forms of belonging and between national and personal power. He is a unique character whose past is a mystery, his body marked not only with his Zoo but also by physical scarring from lashes or some form of corporal punishment. His disenfranchisement and displacement force Benoît into a space not yet defined by social hierarchies. He is a man, yet he is unable to embody the traditional gender role assigned to males in cultural paradigms. This upending of traditional gender roles in speculative fiction offers a reading of *Zoo City* as a decolonial feminist text where women of colour occupy relatively more dominant roles than their male counterparts.

The preceding exploration has revealed how the body in the novel is redefined and assigned new meanings. Beukes's depiction of characters like Benoît engages with the decolonisation of speculative fiction as it engages with these questions of identity, freedom and portrays a fluidity that does not exist in our current democratic culture in South Africa. I argue that *Zoo City*'s characters experience freedom in their marginalisation. Since these individuals are not integrated into the dominant social architecture, they are able to become hybrids, to move in and out of identities without detection. Therefore, Haraway's cyborg figure, which is represented in *Zoo City* as the 'zoos' (human/animal hybrids), disrupts the idea that any 'construction is whole' (Cox 2018:322). However, there is also a problem with applying the cyborg figure to a reading of the characters in *Zoo City*. Cox (2018:322) alludes to this problem when she explains that Haraway's cyborg is 'a creature in a post-gender world'. This concept of the cyborg figure in its application to this reading of the novel is problematic since the cyborg figures in the novel are certainly not in a 'post-gender' world. Rather, they are hybrids, blurring the boundaries between the animal and the human, and can even transcend identities in their relative freedom of mutability. A more applicable reading would consider Haraway's cyborg as Cox does; as 'post-human' (a being that is beyond human). Haraway refutes this classification, though, suggesting instead that cyborgs are 'people who refuse to disappear on cue, no matter how many times a "Western" commentator remarks on [...] another organic group done in by "Western technology"' (Cox 2018:323). According to Cox (2018:323), 'these individuals who 'refuse to disappear on cue' are more often than not women of colour in "A Cyborg Manifesto"'. Zinzi can be read as an example of these individuals who refuse to disappear on cue.

Despite the 'zoos' occupying a much lower social rung than anyone else, Beukes portrays 'Zoo City' as affording a greater freedom of identity than mainstream society. King (2015:74-75) argues:

An example can be seen in the fluidity of Zinzi's identity as she assumes the identity of multiple people to carry out scams on unsuspecting good Samaritans, for her former drug dealer, Vuyo. Zinzi is seen as being able to move in and out of different identities without any consequences to her own identity; however, she is limited to identities that correspond with her biological make-up (African, female). The fluidity of identity can be seen in Zinzi's detailing of her experience of assuming Frances's identity Zinzi describes the whole affair as 'grotesque' (2010:45), yet she enjoys the thrill of being someone else.

King (2015:75) continues:

What is important to note here is how Zinzi exploits a feminine gender identity in order to manipulate others: she will adapt her mode of communication in order to gain sympathy. From this, the novel can be said to attest the theory put forward by Shiebinger, that the body is gender-specific and can also be used as a manipulative tool in the construction of social identity.

This is supported by Cox's interpretation of Haraway and Butler, who, according to Cox (2018:322) both 'reject an abiding and stable identity of Woman'. In this way Zinzi, a woman of colour, can be read, through Haraway, as inhabiting 'a cyborg identity, a potent subjectivity synthesised from fusions of outsider identities. The notion of "outsider identities" evokes the queer project and positions women of colour at its heart' (Cox 2018:324).

Despite the problematic nature of the concept of Haraway's cyborg as 'post-gender', the cyborg figure can still be useful as it foregrounds questions of social division and hierarchy in the novel. In *Zoo City*, bodies are organised into socially categorised spaces on the basis of whether or not that body is 'marked'. 'Marked' bodies are allocated social living space outside of normative society, known as 'Zoo City' (Beukes 2021:15), and are thus excluded from the body politic. This representation of social division in the novel is reminiscent of the material effects of the Group Areas Act of 1950 (Group Areas Act 1950), as enforced during the apartheid era. *Zoo City* depicts a post-apartheid imaginary which is divided between those who obey the law and those who do not. The boundary created through this division suggests that the post-apartheid state may not be an improvement on apartheid; instead, the novel demonstrates that segregation has not ceased, but has simply shifted to another domain of exclusion. The novel could thus be seen as social commentary, hinting that post-apartheid South African society is not better or more progressive than the apartheid regime. Rather, post-apartheid society is characterised by a new ruling regime, which simply seeks out a different basis on which divisions can be made. Social segregation is still very much a part of the way post-apartheid

society is imagined within the novel. In *Zoo City*, the post-apartheid community that is constructed simply mirrors apartheid; only the focus of distinction has shifted either from race to class, or from race to legality. What could be suggested is that Beukes is attempting to highlight the fact that the segregation of humans will not cease, but rather will adapt itself to new conditions, formulating new boundaries according to which bodies can be categorised and consequently marginalised. A possible reason for the new modes of division is that despite the advent of democracy, poverty, and inequality both still persist. In this way we can read *Zoo City* as a decolonial feminist text, as not only does it re-write or rather re-imagine South Africa's colonial history in order to deconstruct and critique it, but the novel also creates marginalised female figures, such as Zinzi and Songweza, two African women who challenge the traditional female *bildungsroman* and create a space where African women are heroines. Furthermore, Cox suggests that Haraway's cyborg concept focusses on the fact that women of colour, cannot separate race, class and ethnicity from the oppression rising out of sexual activities and identities (Cox 2018:327). In *Zoo City*, Zinzi, as a woman of colour, marginalised, segregated, disciplined, cannot separate her race from her experiences and that which shapes her as an individual. This is an important issue Cox (2018:327-328) highlights as a failure of the white-centered feminist texts of 'Judith Butler and Teresa de Lauretis which systematically [ignore] the ways that race, gender and sexual orientation *construct each other*', (original emphasis). In this way, novels like *Zoo City* are important as they exemplify the decolonisation of speculative fiction. *Zoo City* centres its narrative in a real history, which, although re-imagined in speculative fiction, can communicate lessons about the ramifications of colonial rule for those who are oppressed, marginalised or excluded from the dominant social sphere.

Marginalised bodies and power in *Zoo City*

The marginalisation of the characters in *Zoo City* is important to examine more closely in this article, particularly in relation to power dynamics and social hierarchies. Drawing on the works of Foucault (1992), Bordo (1993), and Bartky (2000), I explore the ways in which *Zoo City* engages with the notion of the 'disciplined' body and will examine the ways in which subjects in the novel regulate their bodies in relation to the dominant social ideals. I will explain how the disciplined body creates social divisions, which, in turn, formulate new boundaries (particularly between 'normative' society and 'Zoo City') in the novel, as well as exploring the possible ways the novel can be read to be breaking such boundaries.

In *Zoo City*, 'discipline' is imposed upon bodies in a subtle, yet powerful way. 'Discipline' is used here as the practice of training individuals to obey rules and orders and punishing them if they do not; the controlled behavior or situation that results from this training is imposed upon the consciousness of the subject in addition to its corporeality. Although the presence of the animal with those found guilty of criminal acts is an example of corporeal 'discipline', in that it forms an extension of the body, it is important to examine the way power operates in this society to regulate bodies and whether they conform or do not conform to the dominant social norms. Here Foucault's conception of the operation of power – as taken up by Bartky – is important to note, as it is more complex than the model of victim and victimiser. As Bartky (2000:326) explains: 'subjectivities including, of course, gendered subjectivities, are constituted through individual surveillance and obedience to norms that arise with "regimes" of knowledge/power – "discourses"'. In this view gross violence is not necessary to subjugate women, just a gaze'.

In this way, the social construction of the 'worlds' of *Zoo City* comes to the fore. These worlds, each with their own cultural and social ethos governing the norms which are imposed upon bodies, include 'normative' society and 'Zoo City' (the peripheral world existing on the margins of normative society). Power functions in interesting ways in these two worlds. Power can be argued to work in these spaces in line with the understanding of power mechanisms theorized by Foucault (Easthope & McGowan 1992). That is in *Zoo City* (the marginalised world of the novel), power works on the subconscious of its inhabitants, in such a way that it prompts a form of self-discipline (King 2015:54). This can be seen in Zinzi's reaction to the interrogation room of the police department, after the murder of a 'normal' citizen (Mrs Luditsky). Despite Zinzi being accused of the murder, she is almost comfortable in this disciplinary space, as if she is conditioned to accept a level of lack of liberty. In this atypical reaction, the cultural difference between the two city spaces is highlighted. From this perspective, the body is self-disciplined to avoid committing crime or avoid being associated with it (King 2015:54). However, rather than being confined to correctional facilities like prisons, those who transgress the law in *Zoo City* are permanently physically marked with an animal, who is not only an indication of a criminal record but also the severity of the crime. Zinzi expresses the fragile state of this world; 'It's a fragile state – the world as we know it. All it takes is one Afghan warlord to show up with a Penguin, in a bulletproof vest, and everything science and religion thought they knew goes right out the window' (Beukes 2010:29). Thus Beukes brings into question the stability of such cultural and social constructs. By creating a state in the post-apartheid imaginary, Beukes turns the 'normal' world on its head. The novel destabilises the entire structure on which Western or colonial

society is founded and critiques the colonial basis of division and social control through its postmodern imagining of the societal structures, like apartheid, which seek to segregate, divide and conquer.

Gender theorist Judith Butler (1990:182) claims that our bodies are 'disciplined' to correspond to a social ideal, and those which fail to do so are ejected from the 'body politic'. The bodies of 'Zoo City' become part of the rejected social landscape Butler describes, by failing to abide by the law of *Zoo City* these citizens are socially segregated to live in 'Zoo City'. By creating this kind of social structure, Beukes imagines an alternative world, which offers a different formulation of social construction from that offered by dominant Western social and cultural ideals. However, this form of society does not allow its citizens to exist autonomously from normative society: instead, its inhabitants must rely on the tolerance of 'normal' society for survival. Such forms of social exclusion are illustrated in Zinzi's interaction with a man in a carpark; 'He flicks an offcut of rubber at my feet. It's as eloquent a gesture of contempt as spitting. "Fuck off, apo"' (Beukes 2010:204). The term 'apo' (short for 'aposymbiot') is a discriminatory word used by non-zoos to describe those who have been 'animalled', further emphasising their social distancing. Inscriptions of encounters such as these shed light on the social mechanisms of power explored in the novel, where social power is held by those who are untarnished and 'unanimalled'. Social mechanisms of power in the novel, therefore, work on the conscious level of the individual through explicit discrimination.

Paralleling Foucault's theory of the panopticon, power mechanisms are revealed in *Zoo City* to work on the level of individual consciousness, where bodies voluntarily discipline themselves to avoid a life in 'Zoo City'. The social micro-politics of the novel are not based on obvious disciplinary power such as a police force: instead, people are disciplined through the attitudes of others. This is a unique construction of the traditional modes of social power dynamics.

Zoo City can be read as a decolonial feminist text as it deconstructs the colonial modes of power and gender. The power mechanisms of this fictional world are such that once a person is 'marked' with an animal, there is simply no escape from this punishment. Therefore, the power mechanisms, in this world circulate silently and on a subconscious level; however, they also work on a physical level. While the body itself is not subjected to the forms of extreme physical punishment, it is subjected to the inescapable burden of the constant and inescapable companion of its animal. This kind of punishment also works on the level of physical health: although subjects who are marked with animals can leave the animal behind, doing so will result in their suffering from various forms of illness. The way in which

marginalised bodies in *Zoo City* are inscribed creates a Panoptic-like system out of the dominant social formation. Rather than the 'other' being contained in a single cell and persistently surveyed, the 'marked' bodies here are always surveyed everywhere and especially in the city space, allowing these bodies to be disciplined and punished simultaneously (King 2015:61).

Conclusion

The (de)colonisation of the body and body boundaries in contemporary South African speculative fiction, with particular attention to the second novel by award-winning author, Lauren Beukes, *Zoo City* (2010), have been explored through an examination of Haraway's and Foucault's understanding of the cyborg and the Panopticon. Lara Cox's (2018:317) argument, in 'Decolonial queer feminism in Donna Haraway's "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985)' resembles the liminal view of identity presented by queer theory, which seeks to blur strict divisions between sexual and gender categories, dissolving binary oppositions such as woman/man and heterosexual/homosexual', which has informed this reading of *Zoo City*. In her novel, Beukes offers an engagement with issues relating to dystopia and the post-apartheid imaginary by means of a specific engagement with the body. More specifically, the novel assigns new meanings to the body, offering new ways in which the body can be imagined and understood: particularly to the female body, which are evident through the description of the main characters, Zinzi and Benoît, whose relationship challenges conventional notions of the female body as influenced by dualism of mind (male) and body (female). Of interest, here, is the way in which Zinzi assimilates into an elevated position of power, whereas Benoît's body regresses into further forms of vulnerability. Although the elevated position of power assigned to Zinzi cannot be ascribed to other female bodies, such as Songweza and Carmen, I argue that, through Zinzi, the novel can be read as a decolonial feminist text because it offers an opportunity for a radical redefinition of the female body in terms that transgress conventionally gendered readings of body.

The post-apartheid imaginary, and the re-writing of the South Africa's apartheid history in the novel, brings into focus new forms of social discipline which work on an individual level to maintain control. Through the notion of the body 'marked' or 'animalled' and thus marginalised, the novel brings to light new forms of power mechanisms in post-apartheid society. In so doing, it offers an opportunity or space for the decolonisation of the speculative fiction genre. The bodies of 'Zoo City' are rejected and displaced and are only able to exist as a result of the tolerance of conventional society. The relationship between the body and the law is what creates

the margins of the 'Zoo City' space and leads to the rejection, marginalisation, oppression and othering of its inhabitants. Such social division then forces the body to be experienced in new and generally negative ways seen through the extensive physical damage to Benoît's body, as well as in Zinzi's struggle to survive. These characters are all subjected to Odi's cruelty and are thus disempowered by his domination. At first Odi's domination seems to reinforce the privileges which patriarchal culture awards to men, specifically, in that he exerts his dominance and subject others to a complete state of disempowerment without any legal repercussions. However, the novel does in fact attempt to remove power from its male characters as a challenge to the patriarchal culture it imagines. As I have argued, the novel's challenge to patriarchal power is evident in the depiction of Zinzi as having an elevated status. Not only does she save Benoît, in a fantastical show of physical stamina and strength (physically unlikely for a small woman to muster), but she is also able to avoid being disempowered by Odi. Thus, the novel is seen to challenge the power mechanisms held by this patriarchal culture; at the same time, it gives new meaning to the capabilities of the female body, as Zinzi is depicted as not only having physical strength but also the mental ability to save herself, as well as Benoît. Although not all the female bodies are granted power in the novel, I would suggest that through the character of Zinzi, the novel succeeds in assigning new and more positive meanings to the female body. It can then be said that the novel offers a limited challenge to existing philosophical thought in relation to the male and the female body and their conventional associations with intellect/strength and body/vulnerability, respectively. However, I suggest that the novel's exploration of the imagined power dynamics and social control mechanisms in the post-apartheid state not only pulls the body back into focus, but also offer new ways in which the body can be re-imagined and re-defined. Therefore, through the blurring of the animal/human binary in this novel, the challenges to the colonial formulations of power structures and the boundary breaking. By reading *Zoo City's* characters as resembling Haraway's cyborg and its resemblance of the liminal view of identity presented by queer theory, which seeks to blur strict divisions between sexual and gender categories, dissolving binary oppositions such as woman/man and heterosexual/homosexual (Cox 2018:317), Beukes challenges the colonial construct of the body, and the spaces bodies can occupy and therefore providing a decolonial feminist text which examines depictions of marginalised people in speculative fiction.

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