

Science Fiction and the Imagined South African and Other Worlds in Lauren Beukes's Novels

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Abstract

This article examines the cityscapes, residents' experiences and different temporalities depicted in Lauren Beukes's *Moxyland*, *Zoo City* and *The Shining Girls*. The analysis considers the cityscapes and everyday life experiences in the depicted cyber and futurist Cape Town, futurist fantasy Johannesburg and a cyclically time-travelled and crime-ridden Chicago. It also evaluates the role of the science fiction genre in presenting the sense of space in the different cities and in the process establishes possible comparable visions of urban experiences. Hence, the article argues that the link between space and time and genre assists in mapping the city's and other worlds' landscapes and the residents' experiences vividly, and in that way enables the reader to imaginatively establish the social, spatial and other thematic commonalities between Beukes's cyber and futurist Cape Town, futurist fantasy/magical Johannesburg and a crime-ridden Chicago that is explored through cyclical time-travelling.

Keywords: South Africa; science fiction; Cape Town; Chicago; Johannesburg; urban commonalities

Introduction

Lauren Beukes's science fiction and fantasy novels, *Moxyland* (2008), *Zoo City* (2010) and *The Shining Girls* (2013), are all set in urban spaces and different temporalities. *Moxyland* is set in a Cape Town of 2018 marked by residual elements of an apartheid past and futurist cultural geography defined by high-tech companies and cybernetic connections. *Zoo City* is set in a futurist and fantasy Johannesburg defined by a globalised consumer culture and an Afro-futurist world of the spirits *mashave*. In addition, *The Shining Girls* is set in a Chicago whose space and temporality stretch from America's 1930s depression-era urban infrastructure, with its decay and bleak life

experiences, to the violent, crime-ridden and drab domestic and work-related daily experiences that mark the 1980s and 1990s. This article examines the ways in which the cityscapes, residents' textual journeys and different temporalities create the possibility of decoding linkages between the fictional cities' geographies and other worlds.

The assumption guiding this article is that paying attention to the link between space and time and genre offers a possibility to imagine geographical connections in the textual spaces. Furthermore, this consideration assumedly also enables the reader to imaginatively map the commonalities between Beukes's cyber and futurist Cape Town, a futurist fantasy/magical Johannesburg and a crime-ridden Chicago that is explored through cyclical time-travelling. The settings of these texts underscore the significance of space and time in the depiction of everyday life, a condition that invokes Lefebvre's (2004) views that time and space are interlinked and cannot be separated in the everyday. Further invoked by the depicted setting is Bakhtin's (1981, 84) idea of the "*chronotope* (literally, 'time space') [which is] the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature." Hence, I argue in this article that Beukes's depiction of the fictional cities enables us to establish connections between spatial images and experiences of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Chicago and the other worlds that constitute these cities.

Genre is a further key factor in mapping the mediated possible linkages between the different city spaces, temporalities and sense of everyday life constituted in textual Cape Town, Johannesburg and Chicago. The novels are written mainly from a science fiction, Afro-futurist and fantasy genre that also incorporates the investigative genre. The science fiction and fantasy aesthetics in the texts under study facilitates the use of various setting from other worlds/universes or the fantastical. The aesthetics also enables the treatment of tropes such as human experiences in relation to new technology, and humanity's fate under threat from new technologies and forces from other worlds—past, present or futurist (Murphy 2009; Seed 2005). The aesthetics creatively suggests the possible connections existing in the future or depicted speculative worlds as postulated by Eric D. Smith (2012, 2–3) in his statement that science fiction connects "discontinuous realities" in new ways and ultimately opens new possibilities to perceive and describe the world. What intrigues me, however, is the way the three texts draw on the genre's trope of the future, the fantastical, breaking of time into the cyclical, and in a typical Suvinian (1979) paradigm, describe familiar settings in a defamiliarised and estranging way. Thus, I argue that the science fiction and fantasy narrative streak allows the reader to construct different meanings and possible linkages between the different textual city worlds. As a consequence of my argument, I draw on the elements of science fiction and fantasy, and the writer's detailed depiction of the city and other worlds' landscapes in my analysis. In addition, this analysis focuses on how Beukes maps and sustains possible links between the different spatial temporalities and textual spaces of the fictional South African and American metropolis.

The centrality of temporality and its interlinkages with spaces, lived experiences and the genre of science fiction and fantasy need further discussion here. Time in the form of future, fantastical and multi-directional time-travel temporalities, and space in the form of the built, lived and futurist or fantasy places and spatial nodes in the cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Chicago, are linked and treated in the three texts. Beukes's textual treatment of time and space invokes Bakhtin's (1981, 84) concept of "the interconnectedness of temporal and spatial relationships ... in literature," which he terms the "chronotope." The location of Beukes's texts in the science fiction and fantasy genre demands that I juxtapose the above-reviewed ideas by Bakhtin with critics such as Eric D. Smith (2012, 16–17) and his notion on the genre's ability to map the present and future and to make "a sustained critical engagement with the concept of space and its imaginative and physical production." That is, I draw on Smith's (2012, 16–17) ideas to unpack how Beukes's vivid use of space and time and genre enables us to denote comparisons between the envisioned geographies of the South African city and that of a Western metropolis. As a result, this article considers questions such as the following: What are the depicted cities' major geographic characteristics and what is their impact on the everyday experiences? And how does the treatment of time and space create possibilities to compare the concrete geographical and science fiction and fantasy experiences in Beukes's Cape Town, Johannesburg and Chicago?

The Cyberpunk Mapped Cape Town in *Moxyland*

Beukes's *Moxyland* portrays an imaginary Cape Town marked by an intersection between the near future time, futurist high-technologies and cybernetics. The cyber-based and future temporality is significant in making the readers aware of the geo-spatial and political geography of this city. Readers are transported into a city space of 2018, a futurist space in 2008 when the novel was published, which is dominated by multinational companies and high information technologies. Beukes's Cape Town also has a skyline and city streets, such as Long Street, consisting of neon corporate billboards and other cybernetic glitters, which symbolise the presence of global capital. The corporate companies' advertorials are mostly in the central business district and their glimmer extends to affluent northern suburbs and the poor southern townships such as Delft and Khayelitsha. Furthermore, Beukes's urban youth punks' patronage of the cyberspace and city's social spaces assists in mapping the presence of high-tech companies, such as Inatec Biologica, Vukani and Prima-Sabine Solutions. These companies possess a complex network of CCTV surveillance systems and ICT networks that transmit commercial advertisements, and control the spaces of virtual games, mobile cellular telephony and connectivity as well as spaces of social interaction such as night clubs. Thus, all the futurist technology elements and the associated global corporate finance and high-tech domination assist in showing the cyberpunk geography of Beukes's Cape Town.

Nevertheless, the futurist spatial forms and the imagined lived experiences interlink in a manner resonating with Thacker's (2017) notion of social-spatial connections and

reflect a grim image of the city. This fictional cyber-city seeks to perpetuate corporate dominance and local government repression. Any rebellious behaviour results in a quick and brutal South African Police Service intervention. The novel *Moxyland* (2008, 16) describes how police react quickly to reports about Tendeka's verbal and physical harassment of Kendra, a young female cyberpunk who recently received a green nanotechnology implant as part of the transformation into a Ghost Drink ambassador of the corporate company Inatec Biologica:

With all the shouting, no one notices the bartender reaching under the counter to activate the panic button, or barely more than a minute later, the tromp of big police boots and padded paws mounting the stairs at pace.

The link between a vivid description of the cityscapes, governance infrastructures and its residents' experiences facilitates the mapping of an impacted imaginary Cape Town. Kendra's branding, which Tendeka dislikes, is indeed part of the high-tech companies' designs to manipulate the youth and citizens of future Cape Town and transform them into slaves of global consumerism. Furthermore, the police use "padded paws," which are cyber dogs called Aitos to brutalise citizens, and high voltage electronic diffusers to subdue any resistance, as noted in the way "Tendeka drops straight away, jerking epileptic" after being subjected to a "170 to 180 volts" (2008, 16) taser attack. Any urban youth resistance can result in a huge punishment of disconnection from the ubiquitous city's cybernetic connections, which would marginalise one to the world of the none-connected and equals the status of technological death. Hence, this fictional city is marked by an entwining of a futurist temporality, spatial forms and social spaces all laying bare Beukes's imagined lived urban space that is impacted by future technological advancements and transformed into a repressive and dystopian city. It is this dystopic image, cyberpunk-based as it may be, which creates linkages with the Johannesburg of *Zoo City* and Chicago of *The Shining Girls*, as discussed later in this article.

This Cape Town is, nevertheless, portrayed within the prism of soft city geography, to draw on Raban's (1974) notion of the residents' ability to shape the city according to their needs. The novel portrays some of the cyberpunk youth's actions as they seek possible ways to defy or transcend the existing repression. It must be noted that these subversive activities are genre based and resonate with what Jameson (2005, 286) terms a science fiction representational focus on "the settings and actions ... [that] are the merely possible and conceivable ones of a near or far future." The transgressive possibilities are depicted in various ways by Beukes, the major means being through the residents' resistant traversing of this imagined city. It is ironic that the future networked city allows cyberpunks to escape into the virtual cyber worlds where they can interact with other avatars and live free from surveillance. Tendeka's experiences here are instructive (Beukes 2008, 310):

Skyward*¹ is waiting for me in Monomotapa, which is what I call my house in Avalon. With 59.3 million registered users, it's one of my world's favourite virtual escapes, which makes it easier to blend unnoticed.

What is significant here is that the same infrastructure that is used for surveillance and corporate domination acts as a medium for resistant escape and community making, which resonates with Vambe's (2012, 80) discussion on the paradox of fantastic subversion where an oppressed Azaro manages to fight and liberate himself from the blind old man who dominates the spirit world in Okri's *Songs of Enchantment*. In addition, the virtual home, Monomotapa, is homely, unlike the repressive and fragmented textual Cape Town. Nonetheless, the avatars here are double-edged, which shows what Vambe (2012, 82) terms the fantastic depiction of the contradictions evident in the postcolony; in Beukes's novel these are the contradictions that exist in the futurist and cyber Cape Town. Later in the novel various young urbanites reeling under corporate repression enter into another subversive and escapist virtual space, the gaming world of FallenCity Apocalypse. This is however infiltrated by high-tech company agents in order to eliminate the various cyberpunks who always find spaces and other worlds to escape to or in which to perform resistant activities.

Other urban youths enter the trendy out-of-the world and surreal spaces of modern tech-based pop cultures marked by the corporate and high-tech domination. These networks and other virtual spaces are ironically tainted by the dystopian cyber city condition characterising this future city and depicted as still supporting different forms of urban youth resistance. The company Prima-Sabine Food Solutions colludes with other companies, including Vukani and Inatec Biologica, to control the female residents of Beukes's Cape Town. The control is established through the production and advertisement of "top shelf biotech ... anti-ageing moisturisers" and corporate sponsorship for "[y]oung, dynamic, creative, on the top" Cape Town youth. Kendra the photographer, in her bid for the constitution of brand ambassadorship, is injected "robotic microbes" (Beukes 2008, 5) into her veins, thus turning her into a corporate cyborg. Ironically, the ambassadorship is a ticket to enter the spaces of Cape Town youth culture in which she uses her photography skills that are steeped in anti-high technology practices to capture the punks' resistance. This future city is also defined by a possible dystopian trans-humanisation of the city's youths into ghosts and zombies of global capitalism and beings plagued by various displacements. Tendeka unknowingly acts in complicity with the manipulative Communique company agent Skyward*, leading to the deaths and infections with company-unleashed biological viruses of various youths. Yet, Tendeka's ultimate act of resistance before the end of the novel is shown when Toby live-streams the dying Tendeka defiantly criticising the city fathers and companies for gross human violations.

¹ The character uses an avatar with this name that has an asterisk in cyber and virtual worlds for anonymity in this heavily surveilled world.

Some characters indeed grapple with the daily dystopian urban experiences and at the same time exhibit resistant activities and searches for other possible worlds. Toby's relationship with his mother is dysfunctional yet his status as an online-connected but cynical urbanite and futurist flâneur allows him to constantly live-stream the corporate economic and cultural domination and social injustices encountered in the different future Cape Town's spaces. This condition, typical of what Jameson (2005, 286) terms a "defamiliar[isation] and restructur[ing] [of] our own *present*," as the urban experience is futurist and marked by high-technology and cyber networked spaces, is in dialogue with the urban presentness of Cape Town and South Africa. The cyberpunk representation here portrays possibilities, within the present of South African cities, of a transition into another hegemonic and repressive temporality. Hence, as aptly noted by Stobie (2011, 367–68), the urban residents and nation in general should guard against possibilities of new global cultural and local repressive agendas. Nonetheless, this possibility evident in the intersection between the present and future, Cape Town citiness and its geographic networks, termed the literary geographic textual space by Thacker (2017, 34), enables us to witness the city as we know it and recognise it through reference to real spaces and names such as Kayelitsha, Long Street and Adderley Rail Station and its underway. This depiction of real city spaces and nodes is typical of Ameen's (2017, 234–35) referential element typical of city novels where the real and actual city is made present in the textual city and how it is lived in the imagined urban social-spatial activities and constituted agencies. I also argue that this possible connection between spatial forms and the way the city is imagined and lived in real life enables Beukes to create these links between textual Cape Town and Johannesburg and Chicago, whose sense of the city and temporality are discussed below.

Beukes's construction of the final vision of horror of her future literary city is also significant in mapping these science fiction and fantasy-based temporal and geographic images that set the link between the three textual cities. I consider here the possibilities of linkages by drawing from Jameson's (2005) and Eric D. Smith's (2012) articulation that one of the key characteristics of science fiction is its ability to create possibilities and linkages between different textual experiences, landscapes and the readers' world experiences in ways we would not have imagined. This articulation is extended to how one image, this time of horror and dystopia, present in textual Cape Town, connects with that of an Afro-futurist fantasy, whose image of horror is specifically emblematised by a defamiliarised Afro-fantasy Johannesburg that is dark, derelict, and defined by crime and magic in *Zoo City*, and the dark and murderous multidirectional temporality of Chicago that is defined by crime, poverty and time travel in *The Shining Girls*. The horror in *Moxyland* is nevertheless depicted through the cyberpunk trope of gaming, high-tech-aided brutal policing and the resultant implosion that befalls Beukes's Cape Town. Tendeka, Toby, Zuko and other Cape Town youth get invitations to participate in a game called FallenCity Apocalypse. However, the fantasy game turns out to be a real battle as live bullets are fired and the Aitos cyber dogs and the flesh-eating M7N1 Marburg Strain Virus are set on ordinary residents and the gamers-cum-terrorists. The

dystopian image, resonating with what Bethlehem (2014, 522–34) terms post-apartheid dystopia, reflects a cyber city tottering towards chaos and implosion owing to the violent and repressive local government techno-bio-power.

Thus, the novel depicts a city marked by corporate companies' and city fathers' domination. These economic and human forces use their power to unleash horror on the city's youths and ordinary residents, as noted in the unexpected gun fire and virus-induced deaths of the gamers and commuters at Cape Town's Adderley station. The city implodes along with many cyberpunks, except Toby, who is transmuted into a superhuman after having sex with Kendra and thus receiving the disease-fighting Ghost nano particles that heal him. A contradiction is also imprinted here: Toby lives for another day of resistance having been saved by corporate company nanotech. Nonetheless, Cape Town is turned into a post-apocalyptic space at the end of the novel, thus suggesting that the future trajectories are filled with grime and death, new divisions and dominations, which ironically still offer moments of possibilities. Finally, this trope of a future dominated by an evil economic and cultural geography creates the basis for making comparisons with the landscape, temporality and urban conditions of fictional Johannesburg and Chicago, as I discuss in the next sections of this article.

The Fantasy and Futurist Cityscapes of *Zoo City*

How then does the novel *Zoo City* create textual and imaginative human and geographical connections with the Cape Town of *Moxyland*? The answer is within the Afro-fantasy and magically defined cityscapes and the associated everyday experiences evident in Beukes's Johannesburg. It is also located in the discontinuous linkages and connections reflected in the textual landscapes and spaces as well as the relationship between space and time in this and the other selected texts by Beukes. The novel conflates time and space through its use of science fiction and African magical fantasy to transport readers into a Johannesburg of another temporality. Whereas in *Moxyland* the author uses the cyberpunk aesthetics to transport readers into a Cape Town of the near future marked by dominant high-tech corporate companies acting in collaboration with a brutal police force and local government, the Johannesburg in *Zoo City* is depicted as Afro-futurist and fantastical. Thus, Beukes uses the science and cyberpunk fiction aesthetics and their futurism as well as the transportation of readers into Afro-fantasy worlds and times to make those time and textual geographic-based linkages between her textual Cape Town and Johannesburg, respectively.

Beukes crafts an image of a Johannesburg that is both familiar and fantastical. The author uses a style evident in realist Johannesburg novels, such as Mpe's *Welcome to Our Hillbrow* (2002), to depict the greying, derelict, crime-ridden and multi-peopled conditions typical of the post-apartheid and early post-2000 Hillbrow, and conflates this with the fantastical. This is portrayed through the textual experiences around the rundown Elysium Heights flat where the main protagonist Zinzi October stays with her sloth just as "other people ...[who] had animals of their own" (Beukes 2010, 51). The

fantasy is evident in the depiction of both the ordinary and “animalled” or “aposymbiot” residents and their transformation of this textual urban space into a “zoo city” (2010, 157). The tenor of this part of *Zoo City* is also marked by both night and day experiences characterised by “[g]unfire [which] has been part of the nocturnal soundscape of Zoo City, like cicadas in the countryside. But it’s only recently that it’s become part of the daytime routine” (49). Furthermore, there is a heavy presence of legal and illegal African immigrants and asylum seekers such as Benoit—Zinzi’s live-in boyfriend from the Congo. Thus, the familiar image of Johannesburg is destabilised and made unfamiliar through the inflection of the futurist and fantasy streak that maps the Johannesburg of *Zoo City* from a different geo-spatial temporality, just as Cape Town is defined through a futurist high-tech temporality as a cyber city.

Zinzi has magical powers that are constituted from a Zimbabwean and Shona mythology about the power of “*mashave* ... spirits of foreigners, or of wanderers who died far from their families and clans and did not receive a proper burial” (2010, 177). The legend has it that the wanderer’s spirit searches for a host and should one be found the host will suffer from a strange illness that can only be controlled through a diviner’s intervention. The diviner either makes the host accept the *mashave* or transfer it onto an animal that is thrown into the wilderness, and should someone take that animal, they become the host of that spirit. Ironically (2010, 178),

if a person accepts his *mashave*, the sickness leaves him immediately. A special ceremony is held during which he is initiated into a cult made up of groups whose members all possess similar *mashaves*. Some practice midwifery, others are skilled in divining or herbal lore. Some *mashave*-possessed individuals are even believed to confer skill in such improbable things as football, horse-racing or attaining good examination marks!

This trope of the African magic/spirit myth is significant in that, firstly, characters are able to enter and inhabit a spirit temporality marked by odd juxtapositions of evil and good and other agencies such as Zinzi being burdened with a sloth and yet, as a result, possessing an ability to find lost things. This *mashave*-based temporality is similar to Azaro and the old man’s spirit world, which is portrayed as marked by a complex interlink between the chaotic and oppressive and possibilities of new worlds and agencies in such a world, as discussed by Vambe (2012, 82). Secondly, the author links *mashave* with the urbanites’ lived experiences and their “zoo” temporality, as depicted through Zinzi and her sloth, Benoit’s movement with his mongoose and Huron’s attachment to an albino crocodile. The trope transports readers into this Afro-futurist Johannesburg where different statuses of urban being, traumas, and pasts and presents impact on the characters’ everyday lives and their interaction with the city’s spatial forms. This confirms the craft with which Beukes conflates how space (social space) is lived in the futurist and fantasy temporality, in a way that resonates with Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of the chronotope. In addition, the depicted geographical textuality of Johannesburg, like the Cape Town of *Moxylant*, is characterised by multilayered

activities and existences to the extent that we witness the chief protagonist Zinzi's experiences map the textual space within the city text/fantasy/magical/Afro-futurist/investigative story.

The trope of the magical indeed facilitates this intersection between the residents' travels, lived spaces and daily activities and the mapping of the landscape of this fictional city. Zinzi's ability to find lost things through *mashave* and her investigative job in search of a missing youth musician takes the reader through the inner spaces of the Elysium Heights flats, the underworld of disused mine shafts, spaces of malls such as Sandton City and the gated suburban areas where Huron stays. This built and lived space is linked with the magical and criminal to define the complexity of this city space. Huron is depicted as the music producer and media mogul who is murdering the city's residents and musicians from his stable in order to feed his animal—the crocodile. Zinzi's Francophone African immigrant boyfriend, Benoit, lives a burdensome life in that he carries a mongoose as an indicator of the trauma and displacement suffered from the civil war in his home country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo. These interlinked lived and traversed spaces and the residents' experiences and statuses create this complex urban textual space where a magical and fantasy-based temporality impact on the urbanites' social experiences and thus define the bleakness and hence dystopic sense of the city. In addition, the same complex link between travel, space and its bleakness is evident in the fictional geography of Chicago depicted in *The Shining Girls*, as discussed later in this article.

The fantasy world transports the reader, in a way similar to the repressive cybernetics and manipulated gaming world of the Cape Town of *Moxyland*, into the dystopian Johannesburg spaces plagued by African myth and magic-related ritual murders (*muti* murders) of homeless and prostitute residents and celebrities. The economically and culturally dominant, such as Huron, are portrayed as perpetrators and masters of the city's underworld and other networks of evil. Interestingly, Huron can be compared with the manipulative and deceitful Stefan in *Moxyland* who spied on Lerato and infiltrated the cyberpunk's virtual and real world as an avatar to lead them to the FallenCity game so that they would all be eliminated. Thus, the use of the magical and Afro-futurism is central in creating an image of a familiar but unfamiliar and magical-fantasy networked Johannesburg that is dystopian and bears resemblance to the equally dystopian future Cape Town of *Moxyland*.

The Bleak and Violent Time-Travel-Defined Chicago in *The Shining Girls*

Science fiction aesthetics and the sense of a city's landscapes and lived experiences over time are significant in mapping Chicago and creating tenets of comparison between this and the depicted South African cities as discussed above. The image of an eerie and violent urban space is central to the mapping of the imaginative American urban textuality. This image also assists in establishing parallels and connections between this

and the depicted South African urbanism. A science fiction aesthetic, time travel, plays a significant role in enabling the main character in the novel *The Shining Girls*, Harper Curtis' multidirectional murderous travels through Chicago's city spatial nodes at different moments in time and history. The mapping of the violent urbanism starts with Harper's accidental murder of a friend, Jimmy Gebe, which leads to an entrance into a derelict house in the city of Chicago in 1931. This house allows, like the time machine in hard science fiction, multi-directional travels between the imagined old and new American city, historical and lived moments. Harper travels back and forth across a city reeling under the ravages of the Great Depression, a future city marked by the spatial-temporality of the 1940s and its war-industry-based transformative industrialisation and opening up of spaces for all races, and the post-second world war city of the 1950s up to the 1980s and 1990s. The constructed, imagined Chicago landscapes and the social and economic experiences they support are instructive. Spain (2017, 273–74) describes it as a fictional literary geographic entity reeling under global economic failure that marginalises the poor and fails to provide a decent life and better future and ultimately breeds a sense of alienation, and a racist and murderous dispensation, as reflected in Harper's condition and experiences. Nevertheless, this mapping of Chicago draws on the science fiction trope of time travel to describe Harper's experiences as a serial murderer. Time travel also enables the reader to get a sense of the landscapes, the city and urban experiences of this bleak city over time, in a way that resonates with what Brady Smith (2016, 345) terms "speculative urbanism."

The house that facilitates the time travel is located on the city's West Side and portrayed as derelict. It has broken windows and peeling paint as well as a notice stating that it is "[c]ondemned by the City of Chicago" (Beukes 2010, 25); yet it is described by Beukes as paralysing Harper with possibilities. Unlike hard science fiction that uses a time machine, the narrative presents a derelict house whose upstairs room consists of mounted artefacts, drawings and constellations that enable both entrance into another temporality and time travel. It also has a list of girls' names that are shown shining and have to be killed by Harper in the future in accordance with a sequence that stretches from the near future of the Depression years to the 1990s (2010, 34):

There are names scrawled beside them. Jinsuk. Zora. Willy. Kirby. Margo. Julia. Catherine. Alice. Misha. Strange names of women he doesn't know. [...] It's enough. The realization. Like a door opening up inside. The fever peaks and something howls through him, full of contempt and wrath and fire. He sees the faces of the shining girls and knows they must die. The screaming inside his head: *Kill her. Stop her.*

As a result, time travel and the associated futurist trope enable us to trace Harper's transformation and murderous journeys.

Harper indeed undergoes a time-travel and futurist metamorphosis into a devilish and monstrous character. He murders women who include Nurse Etta Kappel, a one-time accomplice in his murders, in the Chicago of 1931–1932, for greedily asking for more.

Harper also kills other Chicago residents, such as a mother and dockyard worker Zora Ellis Jordan in 1943, the comic strip artist Willie-Rose in 1954, the “six foot strawberry blonde” (2010, 199) Margot in 1972 and Marl in 1991. Thus, it is interesting that the magical and fantastical is, on the one hand, central to the depiction of the crime and grime that define the futurist Johannesburg’s ritual murders perpetrated and the criminal underworld coordinated by Huron in *Zoo City*. On the other hand, a science fiction aesthetic, time travel, assists in the portrayal of a similar characteristic urban blight in the form of Harper’s criminal travels and serial murders in the Chicago of *The Shining Girls*. Therefore, the imaginaries of human experiences over time of this city of Chicago, with its blending of historical spatial and true depictions of a particular time, enable the possibility of reading the connections between Beukes’s American city of Chicago and South Africa’s Johannesburg.

The novel *The Shining Girls* signals continuities with the above discussed novels in that it is set in a metropolitan city, Chicago, and its reading proffers possible resonances between the geo-spatiality of Chicago and South Africa’s Johannesburg and Cape Town. It is interesting that critics such as Brady Smith (2016) and Spain (2017) focus on the textual linkages between *Moxyland* and *Zoo City*, and *Broken Monsters*, *The Shining Girls* and *Zoo City* as well as *Moxyland*, respectively, drawing on the notion of physical and human infrastructure and how it relates with nature in defining urban lives. Both critics further locate the textual oeuvre within planetary discourses on the environment and the Anthropocene, as well as the impact of global capitalism in displacing and rendering the urban male figure into the state of postcolonial unconscious. I am, however, interested in Eric D. Smith’s (2012) postulation that science fiction seeks to show the possibilities of different human encounters, perceptions and relations with other worlds and beings. These postulations assist in the examination of how we can tap into Beukes’s use of space and time to envision the South African city and a Western metropolis together. I also consider, in this regard, Brosseau’s (2017) ideas about noticing connections arising from geographic linkages facilitated by travels and experiences within landscapes and spaces. In fact, Harper’s travels into the future from 1931 to 1993, in a chapter titled under his name, but whose temporality is “Any Time” (Beukes 2013, 72–75), suggest that there is a link between past and present and all cities. Harper indeed realises that, although the city changes all the time, it always has signs of disease and dilapidation that continue into the future, as he sees in 1993 during one of his travels from 1931 (Beukes 2013, 72):

He tries out other days, careful that no one sees him coming or going after the encounter with the homeless boy with budging eyes. The city changes every time. Whole neighborhoods rise and fall, put on pretty faces, peel them away to reveal disease. The city manifests symptoms of dilapidation: ugly markings on the walls, broken windows, garbage that congeals. Sometimes he can trace the trajectory, sometimes the landscape becomes wholly unrecognizable and he has to reorient himself by the lake and landmarks he has memorized. The black spire, the rippled twin towers, the loops and bends of the river.

Therefore, it is in the envisioned dystopian qualities that possible linkages between the three cities are created.

There are indeed parallels between the depicted dystopias of Chicago, Cape Town and Johannesburg. The Chicago of the Great Depression is portrayed as decaying and derelict with the poor suffering from poverty and exclusion, as well as living on the margins. The same misery and sense of helplessness is replicated in the decades from the 1950s to the 1990s, to the extent that Harper thinks it is a revelation of “the collapse of the world into fire and brimstone” (2013, 73). Spain (2017, 266–67) argues further that the white American male, as typified by Harper, suffered most during the Great Depression, with the misery continuing and appearing in the 1990s in the form of anxieties and conditions of displacement owing to the failed realisation of the American Dream. At the same time, and as already discussed, the futurist Cape Town is transformed into the unrecognisable owing to the corporate companies’ and local government’s technology-aided brutal surveillance and redefinition of some of the city spaces. Cape Town, as discussed earlier, even implodes, thus creating similarities with Harper’s vision of the future apocalypse befalling Chicago and all cities as noted in the above-cited quotation.

In addition, the Johannesburg of *Zoo City* links with Cape Town and Chicago through the mapping of Hillbrow as an inhospitable and derelict zoo city peopled by the socially burdened aposymbiots with past criminality and disease. *Zoo City*’s fictional spaces are derelict, marked by darkness and plagued by violent murders and criminalities that include kidnappings and internet-based fraud. Similarly, fictional Chicago is derelict, crime-ridden and alienating at different stages from the 1930s to the early 1990s. Therefore, the description of experiences along the conflated urban space-time paradigm creates possibilities of seeing connections between Chicago, Johannesburg and Cape Town, as the landscapes, lived spaces and temporality are similar in their dystopian nature and trajectories towards the grime and apocalyptic.

The textual journeys in *The Shining Girls* also assist in mapping the possible imaginary linkages between the three fictional cities. Harper’s journeys, as already noted, result in the textual exposition of the grimy life of most citizens of Chicago as they live in hovels, suffer from hunger and diseases such as tuberculosis, and fail to get medical attention owing to the gross impact of the Great Depression. His travels into the future make him see the same bleak conditions and sense of disillusionment in citizens as they fail to live the better life enshrined in the American Dream. The novel portrays Rachel Muzarchi, Kirby’s mother, as a failed artist who even tried moving from one state to another in search of a better life but returns to Chicago having failed to make it out there. Dan Velasquez, the sports journalist for *The Chicago Sun-Times* is, in a manner resonating with Spain’s (2017) idea of forgotten displaced men, struggling to fit in with his profession’s tempo. He “grunts and slumps down deeper behind his computer, ignoring the little ducklings quack-quacking in excitement at being in a real live newsroom. He shouldn’t even be here” (Beukes 2013, 58). Dan is also anxious owing to the changes

in the journalism world where his focus on sports seems to have been relegated to insignificance, hence his desire to move into opinion piece writing (Beukes 2013, 59):

He's been nagging for Harrison [his editor] to let him write a column instead of gamers all the time. That's where great writing is: opinion pieces. [...] Dan searches himself for meaningful insight. Or at least an opinion. He finds himself lacking.

Thus, the depicted Chicago of the period between 1931 to the 1990s is defined by the prevalence of shifting urban blight and experiential anxieties just as experienced in the fictional cyber Cape Town and Afro-futurist and fantasy Johannesburg in *Moxyland* and *Zoo City*, respectively.

Finally, the futurist investigative streak that permeates the experiences in the Chicago of *The Shining Girls* compares well with that depicted in *Zoo City*. Kirby, a survivor of a brutal attack in her childhood but still burdened by the past trauma, joins *The Chicago Sun-Times* on 2 March 1992 as an intern under the supervision of the sports journalist Dan. Ironically, Dan rescued her in the earlier brutal attack by Harper. Kirby is interested in crime reporting and does research on serial murders, thus linking the past (Harper's unsolved gruesome murders) and the present (his continued murders in the 1980s and the 1990s in rabid pursuit of Kirby so that he can fulfill his dream to kill her). The novel ends with both Kirby and Dan entering the house in the derelict part of Chicago in 1993. Time travel takes both characters back to the 1930s temporality. Harper and Dan fight each other until Kirby eventually shoots and kills Harper, burns the house down and both return to the future and 1993 present. What is interesting here is the way the characters, especially Kirby, search and enter into the past and newspaper archive worlds to piece together the evidence in order to solve the grotesque and seemingly unsolvable serial murders. One gets the sense that the investigative task seems an impossible one for Kirby and Dan considering that the serial murderer, Harper, is slippery owing to his multi-directional movements through time travel. Hence, the more Kirby and Dan engage in their meticulous and passionate investigation of the past cases, encounter the realm of futurist mystery with each case, and learn more about the murdered victims and particular evidence left by the murderer Harper throughout time, the more these textual journeys and social-spatial experiences provide textualities and tropes that create possible imaginary linkages and continuities with Beukes's Johannesburg and Cape Town.

In fact, the continuities are constituted textually through the way the imaginaries of Chicago get connected with the South African city text and experiences, especially as depicted in *Zoo City*. Dan and Kirby investigate the mysterious murders around Chicago, while Zinzi's textual journeys take her into the dark and underground spaces of the spirits, the disused mine tunnels, and defamiliarised Hillbrow, Sandton and other suburbs as well as clubs and other spaces of consumptive popular cultures. Both investigative journeys make the Chicago of *The Shining Girls* probably synonymous with the Johannesburg of *Zoo City*. Zinzi, also a female protagonist and burdened by

the sins of a past manslaughter charge against her brother, collaborates with the female journalist Mandlakazi in an attempt to solve the mysterious and heinous murders and disappearances of celebrities and homeless people in the city. Zinzi's investigation, like Kirby's, also ends on a futurist fantasy level, with her at Huron's home's "underground lake" where Huron keeps an albino crocodile that he feeds his murder victims and kidnapped Johannesburg residents, as part of his ritual crimes. Ironically, just as Harper is finally shot dead by Kirby, Huron is devoured by his crocodile, as noted in Mandlakazi's media report (Beukes 2010, 305):

The Daily Truth

30 March 2011

POLICE FILE

Crime Watch with Mandlakazi Mabuso

The day the music died

They said the music industry had teeth—but who knew they meant literally! Legendary music producer Odysseus "Odious" Huron got himself chowed last night by his secret animal, a *moerse* white Crocodile after slaughtering twin teen pop sensation iJusi in a gruesome *muti* murder! Turns out the man behind some of the finest talent in this country was also a bigtime *tsotsi*, running drugs, killing homeless zoos for *muti*, feeding others to his Crocodile and cultivating talent only so he could slice them open! Some 20 bodies so far have been recovered from a secret underground lake, including a woman's skeleton that police refuse to comment on, but let's just say my sources on the inside say the investigation into Lily Nobomvu's fatal car-crash is being re-opened! *Yoh!*

Hence, the textual trope of investigation, the associated experiences and depicted cityscapes and other landscapes, as well as Harper's murderous and rouge time travel and Huron's *mashave* magic and murderous activities impact on the setting and tone of both novels. These also create those textual and possible geographic links that shape the larger connection between Beukes's American-South African grimy, crime-ridden, dark and mysterious city image.

Conclusion

This article has focused on the significance of paying attention to the landscapes and lived experiences depicted in Beukes's three texts. It argued that an analysis of the treatment of time and space and of the role played by the science fiction and fantasy genre assists readers to discern the imaginative connectedness of textual Cape Town, Johannesburg and Chicago in *Moxylant*, *Zoo City* and *The Shining Girls*, respectively. The article has shown that the cyberpunk Cape Town of 2018, a futurist fantasy/magical Johannesburg and a Chicago explored through time-travel between the 1930s to the 1990s are entwined in ways that we would not have imagined, as suggested by critics such as Eric D. Smith (2012). Further comparisons are noted in the three textual cities'

residents' experiences of unbearable living conditions, such as being subjected to urban decay, crime and different anxieties, typical of an urban dystopia. It must be underscored that the three novels treat the current state of globalisation and its associated Euro-American-based social, economic and political domination on the human and spatial and economic infrastructure of global South worlds, as ably shown in the cyber city of Cape Town. However, it is in the use of science fiction and its focus on the American and South African urban landscapes, as well as senses of life and the different temporalities (virtual, Afro-futurist and magical, and multi-directional time-travel) that we are able to note the possible and shared urban and human experiences in the different worlds. Therefore, imaginings about what it is to be human, to inhabit city spaces and to think of possibilities of creating new beginnings or better and meaningful lives, irrespective of location, are evidently enabled by the author's use of science fiction as a genre of imagination.

Nevertheless, the author, in a way that resonates with postcolonial science fiction's characteristic of specificities and plurality of stories (Langer 2011, 2–3), clearly shows that although the three cities connect via the evident dystopian urban futurist spatiality, the urban blight is specific to each literary city's historical trajectories, space-time context and the way the texts' landscapes and lived spaces are traversed. Ultimately, the use of the future and an apt representation of the associated futurist urban geography and human journeys and how they interact across the texts assist in reducing the gap between fictional Cape Town, Johannesburg and Chicago and link them. This, I argue, presents a moment for us to begin to view the imaginary connectedness between the three textual cities.

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