Representations of Xenophobia and Animalisation in *Zebra Crossing, Zoo City* and *Wolf, Wolf*

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Summary

This article explores the depiction of xenophobia and animalisation in three recent South African novels to determine whether these narratives offer ways of re-imagining relations with others. It is specifically interested in the depiction of encounters with those dehumanised by xenophobic discourse as well as the ways in which animals figure in these texts. The texts under discussion are: Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing* (2013), Lauren Beukes's *Zoo City* (2010) and Eben Venter's *Wolf, Wolf* (2013). All three novels, in unusual ways, engage with xenophobia and employ animals, animal metaphors and animalised humans in their narratives. All trouble the boundaries between self and other and centre bodies as the place from which relations with others are conducted. This article will focus on the descriptions of African migrants in these texts, and the manner in which they are animalised. It will also question the extent to which writing embodied others – be they animal or foreigner – remains a way of writing about the embodied self. Finally, this article will consider whether the use of animal metaphors disrupts humanist exhortations against xenophobia.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikelt ondersoek die uitbeelding van xenofobie en verdierliking in drie onlangse Suid-Afrikaanse romans, om te bepaal of hierdie vertellings maniere bied om nuut oor verhoudings met ander te dink. Daar word spesifiek gekyk na die uitbeelding van ontmoetings met diegene wat deur xenofobiese diskoers ontmenslik word, sowel as die maniere waarop diere 'n rol speel in hierdie tekste. Die tekste onder bespreking is Meg Vandermerwe se *Zebra Crossing* (2013), Lauren Beukes se *Zoo City* (2010) en Eben Venter se *Wolf, Wolf* (2013). In al drie hierdie romans word daar op ongewone maniere met xenofobie omgegaan en word diere, diermetafore, en verdierlikte mense in die verhale ingespan. Al drie vervaag die grense tussen die self en die ander en sentreer liggame as die plek van waar verhoudings met ander gehandhaaf word. Hierdie artikel fokus op die beskrywings van Afrika-migrante in hierdie tekste, en die manier waarop hulle verdierlik word. Dit bevraagteken ook die mate waarin skryfwerk wat ander – hetsy dier of vreemdeling – beliggaam, steeds 'n manier is om oor die beliggaamde self te skryf. Laastens word in hierdie artikel oorweeg of die gebruik van diermetafore humanistiese vermanings teen xenofobie versteur.

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Introduction

There is a long history of animalisation in racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic discourse and genocidal actions, which exists side-by-side with the tendency to anthropomorphise certain animals. Thus certain humans are reduced to, or made akin to, animals in order to dehumanise and more easily objectify them, while certain animals are humanised, often as part of a call to protect them or accord them more (human) rights. In the space of this article, I focus on three recent novels which relate fictionalised accounts of xenophobia in South Africa and consider the ways in which animals figure in these texts or mediate encounters between humans.

From May to June of 2008, South Africa experienced a brutal outbreak of xenophobic attacks. There had previously been isolated xenophobic attacks. Yet, the violence of 2008 was noticeable for its wide reach and horrifying figures: 62 deaths, 670 wounded and tens of thousands displaced (Toll from Xenophobic Attacks Rises 2008)[1] In 2015 again, xenophobic violence resulted in large numbers of mainly African refugees and migrants who returned to their countries of birth and uncertain futures. For the most part, these xenophobic attacks are carried out by people who live in the same communities as their victims. Beyond the violence itself, Dodson insists that this xenophobia is "systemic" (2010: 5). Against the backdrop of this xenophobic violence and sentiment, I attempt to illuminate ways in which the three novels might respond to the argument that "the 'everyday' intimacy of attacking those [living] close to you needs fuller analysis" (Flockermann, Ngara, Roberts & Castle 2010: 245, 248).[2]

Questions of Animals and Foreigners

The terms and pejoratives used to refer to foreign others are starkly dehumanising and frequently occur in the South African public and media sphere. Even the word "foreigner" has acquired a distinctly loaded and demeaning bent in certain discourses. Most notoriously perhaps, the *Daily Sun*, was taken to the press ombudsman and the SA Human Rights Commission where it was criticised for inflammatory, stereotypical articles published at the time of the 2008 violence, particularly its reference to

1. The *Mail and Guardian* stated that the figure is between 30 000 (according to government sources) and 100 000 (according to NGOs) (Toll from Xenophobic Attacks Rises 2008).

2. It is worth pointing out that unlike Nkala's play discussed by Flockermann et al, these novels are all written by white South Africans (Venter has emigrated from South Africa to Australia) and are fictionalised rather than autobiographical works.

immigrants and non-South Africans as "aliens", printing "alien logos" and a headline referring to (but also potentially proclaiming) a "war on aliens" (Daily Sun 2008) Black Africans who are not South African are also often offensively referred to as *Makwerekwere*, a term which originated as a derogatory reference to their speech which, in this logic, is dismissed as supposedly mimicking an animal sound (Centre for Human Rights 2015; Nyamnjoh quoted in Desai 2010: 100).

Furthermore, there are interesting parallels in the invocation of animalisation and xenophobia. Geoffrey York's 2009 was entitled "They treat us like animals", referring to the outrage voiced by African migrants.[3] On the other hand, when rumours of resurgent xenophobic violence after the Soccer World Cup were gathering force, Malusi Gigaba, then deputy Minister of Home Affairs, denounced xenophobia as "a heinous crime we must all, in the name of humanity, condemn unreservedly" (Gigaba 2010). He objected to the manner in which South Africans were being represented and claimed the rumour mongers had ulterior motives: "We have been praised for being a humane and hospitable people. This we are now to be denied by rumours aimed at tainting us as savage and ferocious animals" (Gigaba 2010). Interestingly, both the victims and those condemning the xenophobia invoke the figure of animals. In both accounts, a human-animal binary is starkly presented, for different purposes, to assert the humanity (seen here in moral terms) of people in opposition to the non-humanity of animals. The animal is then used as a means to define, or narrow, the category of human. As Ruth Lipschitz, suggests: "The silenced question of 'the animal' thus haunts the emancipatory humanist narrative of post-apartheid South Africa as a problem of the foreigner" (2014: 105).

Regarding the foreigner, Jacques Derrida questions, in *Of Hospitality*, *"Isn't the question of the foreigner [l'étranger] a foreigner's question? Coming from the foreigner, from abroad [l'étranger]?*" He continues that the foreigner is "*also the one who, putting the first question puts me in question" (*2000: 3). This encounter with the foreigner is key for any consideration of an ethics of hospitality. Flockermann et al, referring to Derrida, argues that the "stranger is a destabilising presence, and helps us know ourselves" (2010: 246). Yet I am wary of this phrasing and the centring of the self in this relationship, or the certainty that the self can be known, rather than merely "put … in question". Katarina Jungar and Elina Oinas, in writing about their work with HIV-positive women, argue that "it is through the figure of the "stranger" ... that we can find ethical postcolonial ways of writing about others' embodied experiences" (quoted in Lewis

3. An 18-year-old Mozambican, Sir-Jose Tomaz stated: "They [South Africans] treat us like we are not human. We are doing the donkey's work for them – the construction work, the cleaning – and they don't appreciate it". Johannes Sibanda told York: "They just hate us. They hate the foreigners. They treat us like animals" (York 2009).

2011: 198), and are able to write about "encounters with others" without resorting to what Sara Ahmed calls "stranger fetishism" (225). Instead, Ahmed argues, one should "consider how the stranger is an effect of processes of inclusion and exclusion, or incorporation and expulsion, that constitute the boundaries of bodies and communities" (Ahmed 2000: 6). Furthermore, Magrit Shildrick maintains the importance of risking vulnerability: "a radical undoing of the very notion of embodied being as something secure and distinct" is necessary in order to contemplate ethical encounters with others (2000: 226). Thus there is an equal need for an awareness of borders and boundaries demarcated by power relations – both of the body and polis and potentially human/non-human boundaries – but also the need to re-consider these as potentially porous or soluble. It is worth considering whether encounters with the bodies of marginalised humans and/or nonhuman animals might be thought through in parallel.

There is a sense in which we might productively consider the "question of the foreigner" in dialogue, or even overlapping, with the "question of the animal". As Matthew Calarco writes, in his reading of Derrida: "animals have the capacity to interrupt one's existence and inaugurate ethical and political encounters" (2008**:** 106).

In "The Animal that Therefore I am", Derrida addresses directly the "question of the living animal" (34), through an encounter with his cat. This moment of being seen, naked, by "the *wholly other they call 'animal', for example 'cat'*" (2008: 11) is where "thinking perhaps begins" (29). It leads to a series of questions, not least of which concern the formation of his subjectivity and relations with others (5-6). There follow provocations and hypotheses about human-animal relations, violence, compassion and anthropocentrism which inform the work of many subsequent theorists in animal studies and posthumanism.

Derrida's second hypothesis concerns "limitrophes" (29), although he is careful to say that there is "no homogenous continuity between what calls *itself* man and what *he* calls the animal" (29). He is thus not interested in erasing the limit between man and animal, "but in multiplying its figures, in complicating, thickening, delinearizing, folding, and dividing the line precisely by making it increase and multiply" (29, 48). For Derrida it is an "*asinanity*" to refer to "The Animal, or animal in general" (31), suggesting instead "*l'animot*" (47). The continued reference to nomenclature, however, seems to also throw into doubt and deconstruct what has been understood as "the human". Calarco's discussion of Derrida's "Force of Law", and the manner in which "the meaning of subjectivity is constituted through a network of exclusionary relations" is helpful here (2008: 131). Both animals and some humans are thus similarly excluded or "marginalized" (Calarco 2008: 131). Calarco concludes, "this shared position suggests that thinking through the processes of human and animal marginalization together can be

useful for uncovering the functioning and consequences of the metaphysics of subjectivity" (131-132).

Nonetheless, Calarco criticises Derrida's continued attachment to these limits between human and animal; his concluding provocation in *Zoographies* is "Might not the challenge for philosophical thought today to be to proceed altogether without the quadrails of the human-animal distinction and to invent new concepts and new practices along different paths?" (2008: 149).[4] These new concepts, along with the potential dismissal of the "human-animal" distinction at work in some posthumanism, might be productively read in line with Shildrick's call for a "radical undoing of the very notion of embodied being as something secure and distinct" (2000: 226).

With reference to the role of the animal figure (Derrida 2008:35), and indeed figuration, Cary Wolfe draws attention to the importance of the distinction between "the *discourse* of animality – the use of that constellation of signifiers to structure how we address others of *whatever* sort (not just nonhuman animals) – and the living and breathing creatures who fall outside the taxonomy of Homo sapiens" (2003: xx). As he explains, the "discourse of animality has historically served as a crucial strategy in the oppressions of *humans* by other humans – a strategy whose legitimacy and force depend, however, on the prior taking for granted of the traditional ontological distinction, and consequent ethical divide, between human and nonhuman animals" (2003: xx). Referring to the work of Étienne Balibar, who insists that this "question" of the divide is present in the "systematic "bestialization" of individuals and racialized human groups" (quoted in Wolfe 2010: xx).

Underpinning my research, then, are several questions. While many South African media outlets were criticised for their biased reporting on these violent xenophobic incidents, or their reluctance to term them xenophobic, what has been the response of fiction? And especially, how do fictional representations relate to the findings of the Centre for Human Rights report which notes that language which conflates immigrants with animals, non-human or less than human ultimately "makes violence against them easier and even 'justified'" (Centre for Human Rights 2015). It is unclear whether this recourse to humanistic language is always convincing or whether it simply elides the issue of human-animal relations altogether and on the level of discourse, takes seriously enough the function of animalisation in relations between humans. Might it be useful theoretically, if not necessarily

4. One innovative, even radical, response exists in a new temporary "Museum of Nonhumanity", scheduled to open in Helsinki later this year. Their website states: "The problem is the idea of 'the animal' – the problem is the practice of boundary-making in itself. Museum of Nonhumanity consigns dehumanization to history where it belongs, and seeks a more inclusive form of coexistence for the future" (Museum of Nonhumanity 2016).

practically or legally at this point in South Africa's history, to think along more post-humanist lines, where ethical relations are not based on or founded in, anthropocentrism (Wolfe [2003: xiii]; Calarco [2008: 10])? At stake for Wolfe, in this "question of the animal" is the "disarticulat[ion of] the problem of a properly postmodern pluralism from the concept of the human with which progressive political and ethical agendas have traditionally been associated – and to do so, moreover, *precisely by taking seriously* plural-ism's call for attention to embodiment, to the specific materiality and multi-plicity of the subject" (2003: xiii). In this regard, how are relations between fictional characters in these novels mediated by and through bodies: specifically, nonhuman animal and animalised human bodies? These are some of the questions which have inspired this paper which considers three novels, all referring to animals in their title: *Zebra Crossing*, *Zoo City* and *Wolf Wolf.* In order of discussion, the focus will be on representations of xenophobia and discourses of animality, fantastical animals and ultimately animals in a realist mode.

Zebra Crossing

Meg Vandermerwe's *Zebra Crossing* is a fictionalised rendering of historical events, set in Cape Town during the 2010 Soccer World Cup amidst rumours of renewed xenophobic violence.[5] George Nyamubaya is warned: "just you wait. When the World cup is finished, we will drive all you foreigners out! If you stay, you will burn" (Vandermerwe 2013: 81).

The narrator of the novel is Chipo Nyamubaya, a 17-year-old Zimbabwean girl with albinism, who has been smuggled across the border into South Africa with her brother George. The novel relates the precariousness, daily struggles and humiliations of being a foreigner in one of the most beautiful cities in the world. In language echoing terms recently used by King Goodwill Zwelethini and those used during the Rwandan genocide Chipo comments: "Refugee sounds like flea. That is how, we are warned, many at [the department of] Home Affairs view us. Like fleas that need to have their heads squeezed off" (36).

The title is an obvious reference to a pedestrian street crossing, a site of safe passage. In the context of the novel, it is also a cruel reference to the contrasting colours of Chipo's pale scalp and her new black hair braids: "You look like a Zebra!" (76). It also plays with the idea that those with albinism disrupt conventional understanding of race. Chipo herself is most often associated with, or considered akin to, slow and docile animals – a tortoise (76) rather than a zebra – by her brother. While these associations may appear innocuous enough, they hint at the brutal "discourse of

5. For more details of the plot of the novel, see Buxbaum (2013).

animality" (Wolfe 2003: xx) people with albinism are subjected to. As a young woman who is also a foreigner, with albinism, Chipo is thus othered on multiple levels.

There are many myths and derogatory terms for those living with albinism (Baker, Lund, Nyathi & Taylor 2010). Chipo lists some the ways in which they are animalised and dehumanised: "many in Zimbabwe call me ... 'monkey' and 'sope' .... In Malawi they ... whisper that we are linked to witchcraft. In Tanzania, we are 'animal' or 'ghost' or 'white medicine'. Their witch doctors pay handsomely for our limbs. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, they call us 'ndundu' – living dead …" (10). These terms are sadly not the stuff of fiction. Under the Same Sun released a study in March 2015 "which gathered data from 25 countries in Africa, found reports of 145 albino [sic] killings and 226 cases of violations that include mutilations and kidnappings" (Wesangula 2015). Furthermore, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies reports that "a complete set of albino body parts ... can fetch up to $75000" (Wesangula 2015). As Gbadamosi states: "Western medicine treats albinism as if it is a fundamental flaw in the make-up of the person, while non-Western medicine simply regards the whole body as dispensable, dividable and dispersible" (2013).

Chipo is besotted with David and in an attempt to attract him consults Dr Ongani, whose pamphlet promises to "stop suffering" and "win loved one" (104). However, when she cannot afford to pay the nefarious doctor, the myths which Chipo has heard whispered about "albinos" all her life suddenly acquire a terrible reality and she is turned into the doctor's hostage. Chipo is thus equated with an exotic animal, literally a caged creature, with no will of her own, but magic to disperse, in the form of hair clippings (122). Ongani claims she, like "the psychic octopus in Germany" (139), can predict the results of the soccer matches. She is rarely fed and as a result, her sense of her own body changes. Her skin becomes translucent and she thinks she sees "the blood swimming through my veins, beneath this pink skin of mine …. I can see the blood vessels too … my food too" (148); her very self is reduced to its anatomical functions.

Ultimately, Tanzanian criminals murder and mutilate Chipo for *muti*, which is traditional or non-Western medicine. Yet, by narrating from Chipo's perspective, Vandermerwe reverses the medicalising discourse applied to people with albinism, who "assum[e] that the body can be understood from the outside in" (Gbadamosi 2015). Familiarity with her human anatomical functions thus stage an intimate encounter which troubles the discourse of animality and the dehumanisation it facilitates. Chipo's death and transformation into a ghost-narrator also transcend the limits of the human, as well as the human-animal binary, and can be productively read in concert with Derrida's suggestion: "Beyond the edge of the *so-called* human" exists "a multiplicity of organizations of relations between living

and dead" which are "difficult to dissociate by means of the figures of the organic and inorganic, of life and/or death" (2008: 31).

Chipo's transformation also re-inscribes some myths: "in the end, it is purported that those with albinism do not die – they simply dematerialise" (Gbadamosi 2015; Baker et al 2010). Indeed, throughout the novel there is a suggestion that this was Chipo's destiny (her name means both gift and ghost [143]). Yet in narrating her life, Chipo attempts to suture her wounds and insist on her presence, rather than her complete "dematerialisation", thus claiming a degree of (fictional) power. Chipo's final monologue is harrowing, yet liberatory: *"I start each day by putting myself back together. Dead hand, dead heart, dead leg, dead head. From head to foot I make the puzzle of me fit, and that which in life I found ugly I now find beautiful"* (157).

Zebra Crossing might be read as a contemporary form of protest fiction – against xenophobia and prejudice. Yet, apart from occasional encounters, *Zebra Crossing's* characters are all foreigners. While this emphasises the degree of separation between groups in South Africa and innovatively de-centralises South Africans from so-called South African fiction, it further reinforces false beliefs about violent foreigners. The real villains, then, are not the South Africans threatening xenophobic attacks, although we do see the impact of xenophobic threats on the characters, but the foreigners themselves.

"The fear of a death 'out of place'" has currency in contemporary South Africa, and many migrants and their families fear for their fate after death in a foreign land: "To die away from 'home', ungrieved and without proper burial, is for many to risk metaphysical itinerancy" (Lorena Núñez & Wilhelm-Solomon 2013; Wilhelm-Solomon 2015). The ghost of a "man who died while waiting for Home Affairs", is moored to the bureaucratic office (2013: 38). In this sense Chipo is not the only one to endure as a spectral figure, and this might go some way to suggesting that that fate is not reserved for those with albinism, but those foreigners, migrants and refugees who have been brutally treated in their failed search for refuge.

Chipo's mutilated spectral presence thus troubles the binary of human-animal relations as well as the boundaries of embodiment. The encounter with her ghost potentially calls for compassion and an ethical response from the reader.

Zoo City

Zoo City by Lauren Beukes, has been critically lauded and generated a great deal of scholarship. In an interview Beukes acknowledges the xenophobic attacks of 2008 as part inspiration for the novel, especially the character of Benoît (Lotz 2010). The protagonist, Zinzi December, a young black

woman, lives in Zoo City, a fictionalised version of the inner-city suburb of Hillbrow, the subject of the late Phaswane Mpe's haunting 2001 novel, *Welcome to our Hillbrow*. As Mpe writes, Hillbrow is home to many migrants – both from rural South Africa and from the rest of Africa "all sojourners, here in search of green pastures" (2001: 18). Mpe writes, it has a reputation "as a menacing monster" which consumed many unsuspecting and hopeful new arrivals and according to myths, which he debunks, "was the sanctuary in which *Makwerekwere* basked" and the reason for its "moral decay" (18). These myths and the significance of Hillbrow in the national imaginary form the backdrop to the novel.

Zoo City's inhabitants are primarily, but importantly not only, "aposymbiots" or "zoos" (Beukes 2010: 44, 64-65) who have committed a crime of some sort and are thus burdened with animal familiars (8-9). With the animal familiar comes a special talent, or "shavi". As Samuelson notes, "We are somewhere between Donna Haraway's 'companion species' and Gilles Deleuze's 'becoming-animal', while being brought into encounters with 'vibrant matter'" (2012: 89).

Zoos are subject to extreme prejudice, fear and dehumanisation: "Zoos. Animalled. Aposymbiots. Whatever PC term is flavour of the week. As in not human. As in short for 'apocalypse'. ... [They're] … not even animals … just things" (64-65). As Shane Graham notes, "insofar as the 'normal' population of this fictional South Africa is uncomfortable with the Otherness embodied in the zoos, Beukes is clearly riffing and commenting on the xenophobic tendencies that have emerged so forcefully in the real South Africa in the twenty-first century" (2015: 74).

Zoos cannot abandon their animals, "the feedback loop of the separation anxiety is crippling" (Beukes 2010: 124). Woodward suggests the zoos represent a "feral embodiment" and she describes the "animal/human boundaries [as] porous" (2014: 224). However, the empathetic connection runs one way between the humans and their animals: Zinzi cannot feel if the sloth is in pain, although the sloth picks up on her emotions, and experiences Zinzi's pain as her own. Nonetheless, if Zinzi is killed, the sloth will live on, often not for very long. There is always a demand for these animals to be exploited for *muti*. But if the sloth is killed, then Zinzi will be swallowed by what is known as "Hell's Undertow" and the person who kills the sloth does not become animalled.

Woodward, referring to Wolch's work on the "Zoopolis which fosters 'an ethic, practice and politics of caring for animals'" observes that "*Zoo City*, with its 'zoos', lacks any such ethic of care" (1998: 124). However, it would appear that in fact the ethic of care is obligatory, a survival mechanism. There is an extreme and brutal ecological imperative at work, in which the death of one's animal literally results in one's own death. The animals have no intrinsic value, then, except on the *muti* market; prolonging one's animal's life and providing it with care and sustenance prolongs one's own

and also guarantees companionship. Granted, that the care is individualised – there is no communal caring, or no reason to care for animals other than your own.

Our first sight of Benoît, Zinzi's lover, a refugee from the Congo, is on the opening page of the novel: his "calloused feet sticking out from under [Zinzi's] duvet like knots of driftwood. Feet like that tell a story. They say he walked all the way from Kinshasa with his Mongoose strapped to his chest" (2010: 1). Two pages later, "the mapwork of scars over his shoulders, the plasticky burnt skin that runs down his throat and his chest" is revealed (3). The reader is thus initially left to guess Benoît's story from reading the trauma inscribed on his body. Importantly then, even before the identity of *Zoo City's* narrator is revealed, the first named character we meet is coded as foreign, represented as wounded, naked and vulnerable. This initial intimacy with Benoît's body, in the non-violent context of Zinzi's bed, proves the catalyst for the reader's empathetic feelings towards him. Benoît is never merely a body in pain or reduced to an object. In fact, in this description of his body, his humanity is stressed, rather than his status as "animalled".

Subsequently Zinzi recollects the first time she met Benoît, she calls him a "giant" attracted by his sheer physicality; he sarcastically refers to himself and the men in the elevator as "animals" (52). The distance between having an animal and being one, is collapsed as Benoît imagines himself through Zinzi's eyes. Furthermore, his position in this fictional South African society, which despite the fantastic superstructure of the novel, maintains its structural violence and xenophobia – although noticeably not necessarily its racism – dictates he is an animal.

In the final thirty pages, all the strings of the plot come together in gory detail. Those are less important for my purposes here – and arguably in the novel itself[6] – than the fate of Benoît, who is injured attempting to help Zinzi and remains in hospital in critical condition. Zinzi thus determines to leave South Africa undercover with a Zimbabwean passport, and sloth hidden under blankets, to try and find her lover's family in the DRC, in his stead, and bring them back to SA with asylum papers. She declares, in the novel's final lines "It's going to be the best thing I've done with my miserable life. And after that? Maybe I'll get lost for a while" (309). More ethically relevant than the original transformation into an aposymbiot is her attempted transformation into a human other, a Zimbabwean, in order find and provide shelter and asylum for refugees. This ending would seem to have clear ethical purchase in terms of who should be allowed a home, to belong in South Africa, and ultimately seems positive, even idealistic.

Sometimes the figuring of animals becomes stretched so far as to become

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6. See also Sofianos who suggests that "the motley spirit-animals['] … textual importance accordingly recedes as the narrative unfolds" (2013: 115).

potentially meaningless: there are literal animals, the animalled, the fictional animalled as stand in for real-life foreigners, animalised fictional foreigners who are not zoos, and similes in which "the war in the Congo is like an animal" (229). As Shane Graham suggests, this all gets rather complicated (2015: 74). Ultimately then, the notion of the zoos is an elaborate and entertaining way of proposing understanding for otherness and alterity – without erasing that alterity (difficult to hide a sloth, although Zinzi tries). Nonetheless, the Benoît-plot doesn't need animals to succeed as a plea for tolerance for migrants and refugees, and in that regard, the zoos might merely be a red herring or a macguffin, unless one argues the notion that a close relationship with an animal is the gateway towards intimacy with any human others. Zinzi must first learn to accept responsibility for sloth and keeping her animal alive, and embrace this enforced intimacy before she is capable of an intimate relationship with another human (or animalled person), before she feels ethically compelled to search for Benoît's family.

This is a novel primarily invested in the human and in restoring humanity to those who have been dehumanised. To clarify – it is about restoring humanity to zoos, in the world of the novel, and foreigners in the world from which the novel sprung. The animals are anthropomorphised, but primarily for dramatic effect and in order to arouse horror or dismay at their potential use as *muti*.

Wolf, Wolf

Wolf Wolf, by Eben Venter (translated into English by Michiel Heyns)[7] is in my reading the most troubling of the three texts, for its reinforcing of the myths that fuel xenophobia. Its mood is one of "default grimness" (Twidle 2015). A blurb for this novel might be, "Once were wolves and now the country is going to the dogs".

The plot in brief: A young Afrikaans man, Matt, who has been traveling Europe, supported by his father, returns to care for him as he dies of cancer (a recurrent post-apartheid trope). His nursing of his father exposes them both to greater intimacy than has previously existed between them, but it is also not selfless as Matt receives start-up money for his takeaway business and expects (erroneously it turns out) to inherit his childhood home upon his father's death. Furthermore, Matt only succeeds in his nursing because he is able to divorce himself from the reality of it: "What makes it easier is that he no longer experiences [his father's] foot as flesh. It's a transparent, white, porcelain object, cold from disuse. It's no longer a limb for walking, its function is lost, he thinks as he manoeuvres the clippers to cut the nail at an angle" (2013: 73).

7. This reading of the novel is based on the English translation.

Matt is also addicted to online pornography, which has a deleterious effect on his relationship with his boyfriend, Jack. His addiction is described as causing the "deformation of his brain" (130) and as Hedley Twidle suggests "compromising his ability to empathise with others or understand the shifting social topography around him" (Twidle 2015). His attempts to resist this posthuman virtual world are couched in a nostalgia for the human: "trying slit eyed to be just a human being, an ordinary human being with happiness and a future, that's all" (88). Yet, Matt enjoys porn precisely because it removes him from the social world and enables him to exist as a lone wolf: it is a "private domain, a cocoon, with him as the only occupant, success guaranteed. No restriction, his [online] friends never make demands, never get uptight ... never disappoint" (242).

Matt is oblivious of the real functioning of power and privilege and the ways in which these maintain boundaries between self and other (see Ahmed 2000: 6). His encounter with the security guard is illustrative in this regard (156, 234). Throughout the novel, bodies exist in the virtual sphere, are coldly objectified (as in his dying father's [197]), are transformed into meat, or associated with food, emphasising the extended hunting metaphor throughout the book. If nothing else, human and animal life share the same end. Bodies are resisted as media for intimacy.

While the majority of the novel concerns Matt's interactions with his father or his boyfriend Jack, it is his fleeting relationship – or lack thereof – with "Emile, the Congolese" (148) which is of interest for this article. *Wolf, Wolf* is provocative for its depictions of those who exist at the social margins and the modes of exclusion that maintain their position as well as the failed attempts at intimacy across these boundaries of privilege, nationality and race.

Matt hires Emile to work in his shop, but despite the close physical proximity in which they work, he is incapable of any cordiality or even interest in Emile's life and Emile is reduced to mere physicality (183-185, 223), in a way that Benoît in *Zoo City* never is. In his thoughts, Matt refers to Emile as "short arse" (149, 183) and decides to give him some takeaway lunch only "because he does after all have pity on the human being (the ribs)" (150). It is Emile's emaciated body, that provokes Matt to give him food, but this interaction is strictly on the level of biological need, rather than intimacy, understanding or ethical responsibility. Matt continues to "loo[k] away from this man" (224) or "stares at him" with "apathy" (225). Even the revelation of Emile's family history fails to move him – although it may affect the reader. Emile is constantly accompanied by his "monster dog" (148) who is tied up near the shop, and it seems as if Matt transposes the qualities of the hound onto Emile, until Emile eventually fulfils this vision and realises this animalisation.

When Jack inveigles his way into living in the house with Matt, he comes "disguised" in an absurd wolf-head mask. Later, when the house is sold to a

young black family, Matt and Jack take turns marching outside the house, playing the call-and-response game "Wolfie, Wolfie: what's the time?" (248) thus tormenting the new owners. "Dinner time" is the usual final answer. But it is the new patriarch, Mr Mkhonza, who enacts his revenge, who becomes the rapacious wolf, and shoots Jack.

As allegory about post-1994 South Africa, this is all a bit heavy-handed. Animals here figure merely to accord meaning to humans. There is also a potential invocation of the Latin "Homo homini lupus est" – man is wolf to man – at work. Except the wolf that is invoked here is a figure of human imagination and projection – wolves in nature are highly sociable creatures. As Frans de Waal suggests, this idiom is a "questionable statement about our own species based on false assumptions about another species" (4). Matt's imaginary idealisation of lupine masculinity remains just that.

In many ways *Wolf, Wolf* is an attempt at a queering of both white Afrikaner masculinity and the farm novel, and a depiction of a sense of white "homelessness" in post-apartheid South Africa. While foreigners are depicted, their own precarious sense of home is not engaged with, nor are they accorded any interiority; they remain opaque to Matt, and as a result, to the reader as well.

One of the predominant myths which fuels xenophobia is related to perceived economic violence and is the belief that foreigners are "stealing" South Africans' jobs. The fact that Emile and his dog highjack Matt's takeaway business is a concretisation of this myth, but unlike *Zoo City*, *Zebra Crossing* or even *Welcome to our Hillbrow, Wolf Wolf* does nothing to debunk or expose these dangerous myths, which feed directly into violence. Worth noting is that *Wolf Wolf* is the only novel where the "foreigner's" story has a happy outcome; both for him and his animal. Although it is at the cost of asserting his humanity. Emile remains wholly other, animal-like and unknowable.

Conclusion

All three novels in unusual ways engage with xenophobia and employ animals, animal metaphors and humans-as-animals in their narratives. All trouble the boundaries between self and other and centre the body as the place from which relations with others are conducted. Whether there is a space for animals to have value beyond humans' need for them, remains unclear in these texts, and whether the mythic stories ascribed to "foreigners", refugees and migrants can be disrupted further remains to be seen. They nonetheless indicate a new direction in South African fiction, where the intrusion of the figure of the foreigner and the animal together present new possibilities for the writing of embodied subjectivity, although these are neither always ethical nor always empathetic. When, the boundary

between self and other remains fixed and impermeable, as in *Wolf, Wolf*; writing the embodied other – be it animal or foreigner – remains a way of writing about the embodied self. When, on the other hand, vulnerability is risked, these borderlines can potentially dissolve and thus trouble the human-animal binary as in *Zoo City* and *Zebra Crossing*.

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