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I confirm to have conceived and written this thesis in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors and any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are all clearly marked within the text or in the footnotes and acknowledged in the bibliographical references.

Vienna, June 2015

Lisa Spendlhofer

"It always seems impossible until it's done".

Nelson Mandela

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1. Introduction

Throughout the last decades, the South African novel has gained enormous popularity, thereby mostly focussing on the stories of the past of individuals and often implicating the suffering of the whole nation. Historical novels, dealing with South Africa's past of colonialism and apartheid, constitute the country's main literary output. In contrast to this, dystopian novels, which are set in a non-existent 'bad' place, have only played a minor role in South African literature in the past, but have become increasingly popular after the fall of apartheid. Given the fictitious setting, it might seem that dystopian novels do not have any implications for South Africa. However, the aim of this thesis is to refute this claim and find out to what extent the authors are dealing with South Africa within their allegedly fictional novels and how much truth and critique lies within these depictions. Furthermore, the analysis will focus on whether the authors prognosticate fear and hopelessness for South Africa's future, or if there might still be a spark of hope.

This thesis provides an in-depth analysis of three selected contemporary South African dystopian novels, namely Ceridwen Dovey's *Blood Kin*, Mandla Langa's *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* and Alastair Bruce's *Wall of Days*, and elaborates on their relevance for and relationship to South Africa. The first part of this thesis will introduce the three main theoretical concepts of utopia, dystopia and heterotopia, which are significant for the understanding of the genre. Moreover, to provide context, chapter three entails a short overview of the history of South Africa and its transition from colonialism to democracy. This thesis also includes a discussion of the terms colonial, post-colonial and post-transitional and their relevance for South African literature, as well as a brief summary of dystopian novels in South Africa.

The main part of this thesis consists of the detailed analysis of the three selected novels by Dovey, Langa and Bruce. All of these novels are unique and set in completely different fictitious places, but still they all circle around similar topics, such as politics, the abuse of power, complicity and guilt. By analysing the novels, these topics are being singled out and further elaborated, while investigating references and parallels to South Africa. Furthermore, this thesis

does not just present these references, which are concealed by the novels' dystopian form, but also unveils how much truth and critique they hold for the rainbow nation. Lastly, the analysis of these novels reveals the authors' outlook and concern of the country's future.

2. Definitions: Utopia, Dystopia, Heterotopia

This section intends to give an overview of the various definitions and usages of the terms *utopia*, *dystopia* and *heterotopia*. The most important word for the understanding of this paper is of course *dystopia*; nonetheless it is crucial to get a sense of *utopia* and *heterotopia* as well in order to understand how *dystopia* works. Therefore, all of these terms play a significant role throughout this thesis and especially for the analysis of the chosen novels.

2.1 Dystopia: The Opposite of Utopia?

The term *utopia* was coined by Thomas More (1478-1535) and was derived from Greek, meaning 'no place'. With his use of the word *utopia* More punned on *eutopia*, meaning 'no place, good place', whereas *dystopia* refers to a 'no place, bad place' (Claeys and Sargent 1). A more detailed definition of literary *utopia* is given by J. Max Patrick (qtd. in Sargent 5) who bases his definition on More, claiming that

[a] *utopia* should describe in a variety of aspects and with some consistency an imaginary state or society which is regarded as better, in some respects at least, than the one in which the author lives. He does not ordinarily claim that the fictitious society and its people are perfect in all respects and that he is propounding a total ideal or model to strive toward or imitate; most *utopias* are presented not as models of unrealistic perfection but as alternatives to the familiar, as norms by which to judge existing societies, as exercises in extrapolation to discover the social and other implications of realizing certain theories, principles and projects.

With his definition of *utopia*, Patrick focuses the attention on the aspect of *utopia* that is being described within the text, namely the imaginary society or state. This society is in a way superior to the author's society, which does not necessarily mean that a *utopia* suggests striving towards a perfect society or state, but rather presents alternatives to the status quo and initiates the reader to critically think about the existing society he/she lives in.

Coming back to the general definition of *utopia* as being an imaginary good place and *dystopia* being a fictitious bad place, one could now claim, "that all fiction is *utopian* in the basic sense of presenting a no-place" (Sargent 12).

However, this claim does not hold true, even though the main characteristic of a utopia and/or dystopia is its nonexistence, which is a commonality with fiction as such, utopia/dystopia differentiates itself from general fiction as it needs to represent a place in time and space which gives it authenticity and, furthermore, the location also needs to be recognisable as either good or bad by the intended reader (Claeys and Sargent 1). These simple definitions of utopia and dystopia by Claeys and Sargent may lead to the conclusion that dystopia and utopia are simply opposites, which is being denied by Gordin et al.:

Despite the name, dystopia is not simply the opposite of utopia. A true opposite of utopia would be a society that is either completely unplanned or is planned to be deliberately terrifying and awful. Dystopia, typically invoked, is neither of these things; rather, it is a utopia that has gone wrong, or a utopia that functions only for a particular segment of society. (1)

This indicates that the common assumption of utopia and dystopia being opposites is not correct and that the two are more closely related than one might think. Dystopia is, as Gordon claims, utopia gone wrong, as it is a utopia for privileged groups of society. Instead of fulfilling the general utopian aim of creating an ideal society for the whole population it creates a dark and sinister perspective for the majority of it. Mohr (27) presents a similar view on dystopia, as she claims that it is an antonym of utopia and describes it as utopia's devilish twentieth-century sibling. In her view,

dystopia reverses, mistrusts, and parodies the ideal of a perfectly regulated utopian state, often unintentionally inclined towards totalitarianism. Where utopia uplifts the reader, dystopia holds up a hellish mirror and describes the worst of all possible futures. (Mohr 27)

This definition clearly emphasises the dark atmosphere of dystopian literature, where unrealistically perfect and seemingly ideal states are being mocked and challenged. Furthermore, dystopia describes a state often leaning towards totalitarianism, which depicts a future that the reader would only imagine in his/her worst nightmares. In order to further differentiate the two literary concepts, Mohr (27-28) states that whereas both utopia and dystopia show possible futures, which should make readers think about the present, and want to initiate societal change, they do not cause the same effects. An example for

this is that utopian literature raises the readers' longing for utopia, while dystopian visions terrify them. Moreover, they are using opposed strategies to achieve one common goal. Utopia uses the strategy of creating difference between the utopian future scenario and the present social order, whereas dystopia aims at creating a sense of similarity between the present state and the imaginary future state. Nevertheless, they still have the same intention of initiating "socio-political change by means of the aesthetic representation of a paradigm change." (Mohr 28)

Another interpretation of dystopia is represented by Langer, who claims that dystopia can be seen as a corollary of utopia and

is the strategy that differs. Rather than imagining a world in which the criticized aspects of the author's society have disappeared, it instead imagines a world in which those same aspects are overgrown and run amok, displacing them into an alternate universe where life is defined by them. (171)

Langer refers to dystopia not as an illustration of an ideal society, but a depiction of a society where criticised and unwanted aspects are being left out on purpose. Moreover, dystopia is being conceived as an imaginative world in which these societal problems and dilemmas get out of control and define the life of the people. Mohr (13) also addresses this issue by stating that literary dystopia and utopia focus "on socio-political themes and changes, opting for solutions in the socio-political or economic realm". Moreover, she claims that politics are a key topic in utopian and dystopian fiction. Since, the actual politics and the disapproval of them inspire the author, fictional politics can often be seen as a satire and a desire to change the status quo. Therefore, utopian and dystopian politics should not be considered to have emanated from reality, rather they are a construct of imagination (Mohr 14).

Apart from defining dystopia itself, it is also interesting to take a closer look at how and why this genre emerged at a certain point in history. According to Mohr (31) the main impulses for the development of dystopia in the twentieth century were the historical polarisation into communism and capitalism, accompanied by the different attitudes of people towards the state and technological progress. Moreover, people's world views, as well as writers' imaginations have

been changed immensely through the violation of ethical norms and the atrocities committed in the First and Second World War. The rise of totalitarian systems, such as Fascism in Italy, Stalinism in Russia and of course Hitler's Nazi Germany also played a key role. George Orwell (312) declared that

making people *conscious* of what is happening outside their own small circle is one of the major problems of our time, and a new literary technique will have to be evolved to meet it.

This "new technique" he was talking about was put into practice only shortly after this comment by publishing his influential dystopian novel *1984* in 1949 (Mohr 31-32). Speaking of the historical context in which dystopian literature emerged, it is clear that the political systems and social problems of that time influence the key topics of this literary genre, which are

nationalism, militarism, slavery, exploitation, class antagonism, racism, barbarism, enforced and controlled gender relations, rape, overpopulation, drug dependence, sexual perversion, pogroms, degeneration, nuclear devastation, [...] ecological pollution, and authoritarian/totalitarian regimes that oppress the masses. (Mohr 33)

Most of these topics, such as slavery, racism, class antagonism, rape and overpopulation, are central topics in the South African dystopian novels analysed further on in this thesis. Langer (172), amongst other things, focuses on dystopia and its postcolonial implications. She claims that postcolonial literature often functions as more than a warning to the reader. It does not only refer to what may happen in the future, but often indicates what might have happened if history had gone differently. Additionally it alludes to still prevailing topics, such as racism, which the reader might think his/her society might have already left behind.

2.2 Heterotopia

When dealing with the concepts of utopia and dystopia, especially in connection to contemporary postcolonial South Africa, there is another important concept to consider: Foucault's heterotopia.

Foucault (3) argues that there are two main types of spaces, namely utopias and heterotopias. In his view, utopias "are sites that have a general relation of

direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society” (Foucault 3). This means that societies are either turned upside down, or perfected, but in any case they can be seen as “sites with no real place” (Foucault 3), which again refers to their imaginary character. On the other hand, he identifies another type of space, which he claims to exist in supposedly every culture and civilisation that does not have this imaginary character of utopias and; therefore, these spaces are real places that are formed and exist in every society (Foucault 3). Moreover, Foucault (3-4) states that these places

are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias.

This definition of heterotopias clearly shows its complex character. In contrast to utopia being a “no place, good place” and dystopia a “no place, bad place” (Claeys and Sargent 1), heterotopia can be considered as a real, but different place, which at the same time exists within the same place and all at once presents, challenges and reverses this real place. This might seem very complicated at first, but in a simplified way it is a place that belongs to society, but is somehow displaced outside of society and culture and, therefore; belongs to it, but is different at the same time.

An interesting example of a place that simultaneously represents a utopia, as well as a heterotopia, is the mirror. On the one hand, the mirror is a utopia, as it is a place without a real place where a person can see himself/herself in an unreal space, where s/he is actually not. On the other hand, it is also a heterotopia, as the mirror itself is a place that exists in reality where it counteracts the position occupied by the person looking into it (Foucault 4).

Hetherington also concentrates his work on heterotopias in the sense of Foucault and; furthermore, he focuses on the concept of heterotopia and its function for social ordering. He

define[s] heterotopia as spaces of alternate ordering. Heterotopia organize a bit of the social world in a way different to that which

surrounds them. That alternate ordering marks them out as Other and allows them to be seen as an example of an alternative way of doing things. (Hetherington viii)

This shows the function of heterotopias in relation to social ordering, as Hetherington stresses the otherness of heterotopias to its surroundings and; therefore, offers them the possibility to represent an alternate way of how things can be done. In another interesting definition of heterotopia, Hetherington (ix) claims that they

do exist, but they only exist in this space-between, in this relationship between spaces, in particular between eu-topia and ou-topia. Heterotopia are not quite spaces of transition – the chasm they represent can never be closed up – but they are space of deferral, spaces where ideas and practices that represent the good life can come into being, from nowhere, even if they never actually achieve what they set out to achieve – social order, or control and freedom. Heterotopia, therefore, reveal the process of social ordering to be just that, a process rather than a thing.

Here he further elaborates on his idea of heterotopias being tools for social ordering, by presenting some sort of good life, even though this good life never actually needs to be fully achieved, such as control, social order or freedom. Moreover, heterotopias should in his view rather be seen as a process than a thing. Hetherington (52) also considers Foucault's idea of transferring the "concept of heterotopia to places like prisons, hospitals, factories and museums" and by doing so showing "how sites of Otherness are constituted by the powerful within society and represented as such to everyone else".

In order to further classify this complex term of heterotopia, Foucault identifies six principles of heterotopia, which will now be described briefly. The first principle is that every culture produces its heterotopias, which can in general be categorised into two main groups, namely crisis heterotopias and heterotopias of deviation. Crisis heterotopias do exist in primitive societies and are places that are privileged, holy or forbidden. These places are reserved for people that are, in comparison to the rest of society, in a state of crisis, such as pregnant and menstruating women, adolescents or elderly people. In contrast, heterotopias of deviation are far more common nowadays. These are places in which people, who behave deviant from a common norm within society, are

placed, as for example prisons, psychiatric hospitals and rest homes. The second principle of heterotopias is that the same heterotopia can have different functions in different societies. As an example Foucault mentions the cemetery, which is an unusual cultural space as in former times it was located in the heart of the city, but in the 18th century was moved towards the suburbs, where it now constitutes some sort of a city on its own, in which every family has its own resting place. With the third principle, Foucault claims that heterotopia manages to combine several spaces and sites that are incommensurate with each other, within one real space, examples for this would be cinemas or theatres. The fourth principle of heterotopias deals with these places being linked to certain slices in time. These can be divided into two contrasting groups, namely heterotopias of accumulating time, such as museums and libraries, and heterotopias of the festival that are completely temporal, like fairgrounds. With his penultimate principle of heterotopias Foucault implies that they are a system of opening and closing, as heterotopias are at the same time penetrable and isolated. Generally, it can be said that heterotopias are not freely accessible and sometimes one needs a permission to enter. On the contrary, there are also heterotopias that seem to be simple openings, which anyone can enter, but in fact this is just an illusion as not everyone belongs there and can grasp the full potential of the heterotopia (Foucault 4-8). Finally, the sixth principle of

heterotopias is that they have a function in relation to all the space that remains. This function unfolds between two extreme poles. Either their role is to create a space of illusion that exposes every real space [...] [o]r else, on the contrary, their role is to create a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled. (Foucault 8)

This shows that Foucault is differentiating between another two types of heterotopias. On the one hand, there are heterotopias of illusion that do create a certain illusion of a place and by doing so they unmask real spaces. On the other hand, there are heterotopias of compensation, which do not create an illusion, but rather create real space as close to another real place as possible. Especially these heterotopias of compensation seem to be of importance for this thesis, as Foucault (8) suggests that colonies might have functioned in the same way, as they sometimes played the role of heterotopias, for example in

the general organisation of land. When considering the texts discussed in this thesis, townships, such as in Mandla Langa's *The Lost Colours of The Chameleon*, are a good example of a heterotopia within colonies, as they are part of society, even though they are different and represent a sense of otherness because only the black population inhabits them.

Moreover, there is also another concept that needs to be mentioned in this context, namely Julia Kristeva's use of abjection. The abject can be described as something neither subject, nor object and Kristeva (1) claims that it "has only one quality of the object – that of being opposed to I". This already shows that the abject is a very complex concept and hard to describe, as it is a thing or place that is neither an object, nor a subject, but something in between and still somehow is part of them both. In order to illustrate this, the placenta is a good example, as it is neither the mother, nor the baby. It is a part of the female body, but also does not really belong to it and is being rejected by the female body after birth. The concept of the abject is especially interesting in the context of this thesis, as it is a highly philosophical term being interpreted in a historical, cultural and sociological way. One could argue that the people living or born within townships for example, are abjects, as they neither fully belong to the colony, nor to the coloniser. The black inhabitants of these townships are allowed to enter the city in order to work for the white rich population, after their work is done they are being rejected again and have to go back to the townships. Even though, they are excluded due to social and racial factors, they are still part of the whole and in a way belong to it.

3. South Africa and its Literature

Looking back, South African writers have constantly produced momentous and unique pieces of literature to add to the corpus of the world's literary works. In its recent past, this exceptional country has been transitioning from apartheid to democracy and thereby underwent substantial changes in terms of its politics. These changes triggered the production of some incredible works of literature, which have also been recognised internationally by scholars and students.

South Africa's unique history of violence, oppression and political struggle seems to be one of the main influences of the nation's literature and, therefore, this chapter will give a short overview of its main historical events from colonialism up to the present. Furthermore, this chapter will also give an overview on how different phases of history influenced South African literature and on the genre of dystopias in South Africa.

3.1 Historical Context: South Africa's Transition from Colonialism to Democracy

The policy of apartheid, which in Dutch and Afrikaans means 'separateness' or 'apartness', was officially put into practice in South Africa after the National Party became head of government in 1948 and ended in 1994. The main aim of this policy was to secure white supremacy in South Africa and regulate the separation of people by race, regarding their places of residence, school, work and even death (Clark and Worger 3).

However, South Africa's racial discrimination did not have its origin in 1948, but can be dated back much further. Magona (95) claims that "[i]n South Africa, perhaps the single most violent event in the nation's history was the coming of the white tribe into the continent". In fact, the country's history of traumatising and racial discrimination had its start in the 17th century, when the Dutchman Jan van Riebeeck, together with some of his fellow countrymen, arrived at today's Cape of Good Hope in 1652. Their aim was to set up a colony building an outpost for the Dutch East India Company, in order to easily resupply their ships sailing to Asia. In the process of doing so they intruded into the land of the

Khoisan, the earliest known indigenous people in South Africa. As one can imagine, the Khoisan were not particularly happy about that and put up resistance against the intruders. The Dutchmen reacted harshly and either enslaved or killed these people. From 1680 on, the colony expanded rapidly through the immigration of free European citizens, as well as mostly African slaves. As a result, a social order within the colony was created, thereby fulfilling a fundamental prerequisite for a functioning society (Ross 21-23). As a consequence to white men outnumbering white women by far, many mixed race children were born, which often were not accepted within the European colonial society. Therefore, a parallel 'mixed' society with their own social order and a new Creole language, which was the basis for Afrikaans, developed rapidly (Clark and Worger 12).

However, everything changed when the British entered the country in 1795. By taking the Cape they wanted to gain control over the sea route to Asia. Additionally, they tried to counteract Dutch settlers expanding their land on African's farmers ground by building small British farms in between. This plan failed, since these British farmers were not able to live from the profits of their farms and needed to withdraw their native neighbours from their land in order to survive. The abolition of slave trade in 1807, as well as the prohibition of slavery throughout the British Empire in the thirties, were devastating for the majority of European settlers in South Africa, since the profitability of their farms was based on slave labour. As a result, about 20 per cent of Dutch farmers, called 'Boers', left the British territory in the 1830s, which became known as the 'Great Trek'. They mostly moved to the North and East, as they could continue practicing slavery there, and quickly established three independent states, called Transorangia, Transvaal and Natalia Republic (Clark and Worger 12-13).

The discovery of diamonds in 1867, as well as gold in 1886, had an enormous influence on South Africa's politics and economics. For the first time, the country attracted foreign investors, modern capitalism began to arise and the demand for labour was immensely increased. The constant conflict of the Dutch and British about these resources resulted in the Anglo-Boer war from 1899-1902 (Butler 12). After three years of fighting, in which around ten per cent of the population lost their lives (Ross 72), the British eventually managed to win

the war. However, the Boers denied to sign a peace treaty until the British awarded them a compensation for the 30.000 Boer farms that had been burned down, as well as a certain degree of self-government (Clark and Worger 15-16).

From 1910 onwards, strict segregation laws were introduced in order to protect white supremacy, as well as the economic and political interests of the white oppressors. These laws enabled the whites to retain control of the majority of South Africa's economic resources by keeping the coloured people under strict control and exploiting their work, even though, they only amounted to 20 per cent of the population. One of these discriminating laws was the Mines and Works Act from 1911 that restricted coloured people to unskilled and menial jobs. As a consequence, many people protested against these acts, which then led to the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1924 that even prohibited these people from the right to form unions and protest against their working conditions (Clark and Worger 21). Resulting from these strict legislations, educated African men began to group up and form the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) in 1912, later named the African National Congress in 1923. Their main aim was to obtain equal rights and treatment for all people in South Africa, irrespective of their skin colour. Negotiating with the British should help them achieve this objective, but Britain did not want to intervene in the domestic affairs of South Africa. In cooperation with the Industrial and Commercial Worker's Union (ICU), the SANNC organised various protests and strikes. Even though the government suppressed these actions, they at least unsettled South Africa's white population (Clark and Worger 23-25).

At the same time, Afrikanerdom increased its popularity, which showed in the elections of 1915, where the National Party won the majority of Afrikaner votes, as well as the foundation of the Broederbond in 1918, an organisation dedicated to promoting Afrikaner culture (Clark and Worger 27). Simultaneously, segregation laws got even stricter and many Afrikaners started to sympathise with Hitler and Nazi Germany. They even founded youth organisations, which were inspired by the German "Hitlerjugend" (Clark and Worger 29). In the mid 1930s Afrikaners wanted to express their cultural otherness from the English speaking Europeans and, therefore; they coined the term 'apartheid' (Clark and Worger 4). However, the term changed its meaning

and it was not until the 26th May 1948 (Ross 114), when the National Party won the majority of votes and the term became “the watchword of the government and a world-wide term of abuse among its opponents” (Ross 115). One of apartheid's main goals was to retain the purity of the races, culture as well as politics (Ross 116), which meant that “[e]very aspect of political, economic, cultural, sporting and social life was segregated” (Krog, Mpolweni and Ratele 41). Moreover, Magona (qtd. in Mengel, Borzaga and Orantes 32) claims that the coloured and black population of South Africa was denied their right of citizenship and the government's protection. By this he implies that they were denied the possibility to choose their workplace, place to live or education and lastly their suffrage. By passing various acts, such as the Population Registration Act, the Mixed Marriages Act, or the Immorality Act (Ross 116), the government aimed at maintaining the separation of the races, which in reality resulted in whole families being torn apart and is just one example of how apartheid traumatised South Africa for years to come.

In the international community first severe criticism of apartheid was raised by African and Asian states throughout the 1950s, as they stressed the “dangerous and explosive situation” (Clark and Worger 5), as well as apartheid being a “threat to international peace and a flagrant violation of the basic principles and fundamental freedoms” (Clark and Worger 5) promoted by the United Nations. Nonetheless, it was not until 1966 that the United Nations officially denounced “the policies of apartheid practiced by the government of South Africa as a crime against humanity” (Clark and Worger 5). Nevertheless, apartheid only managed to gain international attention in the 1980s, when the conditions in South Africa already resembled a civil war in which black citizens constantly tried to fight the system and make the country ungovernable, as well as international boycotts to end apartheid. Due to this civil war and the international pressure exerted it was possible that the National Party ended apartheid in 1990 and promised that all South African citizens, no matter what their skin colour was, would be guaranteed the right to vote (Clark and Worger 5-6). These elections were held four years later, in April 1994, when the ANC won the majority of the votes (62.6 per cent) and Nelson Mandela, who was being held as a political prisoner from 1963 to 1990, was anonymously elected

as the first president of the new South Africa by the National Assembly on 9 May 1994 (Clark and Worger 6, 110).

Even though, many people died during the long and hard fights before 1994, the peaceful transition from apartheid and the rule of a white minority government, to democracy and majority rule can still be considered as one of the most significant features of South African contemporary history. The most remarkable achievement of the new South African Government of National Unity was the declaration of a new constitution in December 1996. In contrast to the ones of 1910 and 1983, the new constitution was not based on the ideas of inequality and racial segregation, but sought to “heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights” (Clark and Worger 113). Especially for the coloured and black population, the most important change in this constitution was a bill of rights stressing that before the law everybody was equal, as well as enjoining the state from discrimination “including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth” (Clark and Worger 113). Besides the democratisation process, the accomplishments of the governments of Mandela and Mbeki have also been outstanding in the economical and social areas. For example, since the end of apartheid over 7 million people have been provided with an access to clean running water. Additionally, three and a half million households have since been connected to electricity. In order to get poor people out of the ghettos and shacks of apartheid, one and a quarter million new houses have been built, as well. Furthermore, the fact that segregation no longer existed also showed in the educational system, as the numbers of African students going to university doubled in the 1990s (Clark and Worger 115).

Nevertheless, the legacy of apartheid was tough and still persists, but the ones who have felt the effects of its absence the most were probably the whites because they have mainly been protected from its impact before (Ross 199). For more than a century, South Africa's economy was based on the exploitation of black under-educated people working for extremely low wages. Obviously, such a system cannot be transformed over night, but in the first seven years of

their reign, the ANC has mainly focused on continuing the privatisation of state corporations as well as generally following a pro-business approach in terms of economic policy. Many critics claimed that the steps taken by the government to minimise the impact of apartheid have been too little. Unemployment is still a big issue, especially among the black population. Only 50 per cent of the 18 million Africans between 15-65 years have been recorded as economically active during their lifetime, however merely half of these nine million people are unemployed. Moreover, these enormous levels of poverty and unemployment result in the high crime rates which can be observed throughout South Africa and find their peaks within the cities (Clark and Worger 116). Nevertheless, Ross (199) claims that the crime rate itself did not rise, but merely the effects of it changed. Before the fall of apartheid the poor majority was restricted to townships and; therefore, not all South Africans and foreign visitors were exposed to the high levels of crime from which the majority of the population had already suffered before. Cape Town and Johannesburg continue to be some of the most dangerous and crime-ridden cities in the world. Besides South Africa's problems with unemployment and crime, the country also has to deal with the ever rising numbers of HIV and AIDS, which are threatening the country's economic and social well-being. In 1992 there were only 1,352 people infected with the disease, whereas by 2001 there were 5,000,000 cases of the disease and around 360,000 fatalities per year. The impact this illness has on the economy as well as family structures cannot be underestimated. As a result, the government is forced to provide a well-functioning support system for people that are affected. However, it seems to be unlikely that any government will be able to deal with these massive problems and only the future will tell how South Africa will be able to cope (Clark and Worger 117).

3.2 The Colonial, Postcolonial and Post-transitional in South African Literature

When dealing with South African history and literature, colonialism and post-colonialism are key terms. It might be surprising that colonialism does still have influence in recent days, however, more than three quarters of the world's population today are in some way being influenced by the experience of

colonialism. There are certain spheres of life in which this might be more evident, such as economy and politics, whereas colonialisms influence on the lives of contemporary people is less obvious. One of the most important ways in which these postcolonial perceptions are expressed is via literature, as people's writing is one of the most powerful ways to show the profound influence of colonialism on peoples day-to-day realities (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1989: 1). Loomba (2) states that

[c]olonialism was not an identical process in different parts of the world but everywhere it locked the original inhabitants and newcomers into the most complex and traumatic relationships in human history.

On the one hand, this quote refers to the individuality of colonialism in the different countries affected by it. As we have already seen in the previous chapter, in South Africa's case, the history of apartheid has its roots in the time of colonialism, when a new culture and way of living was imposed upon the country's indigenous and native inhabitants. British and Dutch people invading South Africa and founding new settlements can be seen as the starting point for separation within the South African population. However, "racial stereotyping is not the product of modern colonialism alone, but goes back to the Greek and Roman periods." (Loomba 105) As colonialism had an enormous impact on the development of South Africa it can also be held responsible for the following development of apartheid. On the other hand, the quote shows the complexity of colonialism and how traumatic and difficult this situation was for people in the colonised countries. Furthermore, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin comment on this ambivalent and complex relationship by claiming that "the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer" (2007: 10), which refers back to the idea of the abject, as mentioned earlier in section 2.3.

Postcolonial literature focuses on literature written by those cultures formerly colonised by European countries, such as Britain, Spain or France. Semantically, the term postcolonial might suggest a focus only on the national culture of a country after the colonising power has left, but Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin claim that for them it is more useful to refer to post-colonial literature as literature from the beginning of colonisation to the present (1-2). Loomba (7-8), too, refers to the difficulties of usage of the term postcolonial itself, too.

Firstly, she claims that the prefix 'post' may be misleading in two ways, temporal as well as ideological. In a temporal sense, the term postcolonial is problematic, as it can be understood in many different ways. Decolonisation is a process that began in the 18th and 19th century and lasted until the middle of the 20th century. Therefore, Shohat (103) asks: "When exactly, then, does the "postcolonial" begin?". This is not a rhetorical question, but Loomba and Shohat stress the fact that colonialism was different in various parts of the world. Therefore, the expression postcolonialism insufficiently defines contemporary realities in former colonised countries and lacks clarification of the addressed time frame, but it may also disguise "the internal social and racial differences of many societies" (Loomba 8). In an ideological way, Loomba (7) sees the term postcolonial as problematic because it indicates expulsion. This means that as long as the injustice of colonialism has not been eliminated, it is too early to speak of its end. Therefore, it is possible that a country is postcolonial, meaning formally independent, as well as neo-colonial, that is, culturally and/or economically dependent, at the same time. Furthermore, Loomba (17) also addresses another issue of the term postcolonial, namely the problem with the expression colonial. Postcolonial studies always focus on the history of formerly colonised societies as if colonialism indicates the starting point of their history. This is simply not true, as there have always been cultural practices, ideologies and hierarchies of these countries' indigenous inhabitants before colonial rule, which is why colonialism cannot be the cause of everything that makes up these postcolonial societies. Due to these difficulties, the term postcolonial might not always be the best option, which is why we should take other expressions into account, namely post-apartheid and post-transitional.

Even though the novels analysed in this thesis are postcolonial, there are categories that describe them in more depths. An obvious choice would be to specify the era after the fall of apartheid in 1994 as post-apartheid. Again this term might be conflicting in the same way as postcolonial, as it also carries the prefix 'post'. However, for this thesis and the novels addressed it still seems to be a good choice, as the novels were written after the fall of apartheid. Nevertheless, they sometimes deal with apartheid directly or at least address and raise issues that emerged at that time.

Medalie (4) refers to the difficulty of categorising post-apartheid literature, as “[i]t is both diverse and encumbered with sameness, profound and glib, predictable and unpredictable, linguistically ambitious and linguistically drab,” which makes it hard to make generalisations about it. He further states that history plays an important role in post-apartheid novels and claims that it “is not relegated to the past, but, paradoxically, is imbued with an active and authoritative presence.” (Medalie 3) Therefore, history has an enormous impact on contemporary everyday life and culture, which is depicted in literature. Moreover, he stresses that a central aspect of post-apartheid South African literature is its “preoccupation with the relationship between the apartheid past and the post-apartheid present” (Medalie 4), as it seems to be impossible to address the present without conjuring up the past. South African writers seem to make use of dystopian elements in order to represent their post-apartheid country, but according to Medalie (3) by doing so they depict the past to be darkening, rather than illuminating, the present. Whether this claim also holds true for the novels interpreted in this thesis, will be revealed in the following analyses.

Apart from the term post-apartheid there is also another expression often used to refer to this era after the end of apartheid in South Africa, namely post-transitional. In their article, Frenkel and MacKenzie (1) refer to André Brink, who claimed that after the fall of apartheid and in the beginning of the transitioning phase, South African literature had become directionless. Apartheid had been the arch-enemy, as well as the trigger for inspiration in South African literature for a long time and this enemy was now lost. Therefore, Brink (1) claimed that South African literature had lost its way and had become spiritless:

Those were the days, terrible as they may have been [...] when the relationship between reader and writer was electrified with expectation and mutual reward. Now, suddenly, we seem to be facing the prospect of a freedom in which anything goes – with the result that nothing goes any more. A widespread gloom is settling over many central European, South African and South American writers, in the curious conviction that ‘there is nothing to write about anymore’.

However, Frenkel and MacKenzie (1-2) refute this claim as the last two decades, especially since the millennium, have brought out extremely diverse and surprising literary works. They have chosen to use the term post-

transitional in order to address South African writings produced after 1994. By using this expression they argue to make a statement about the character of this new literature, which they claim not to be restricted by the past, even though they might also reconsider it in innovative ways or might sometimes even ignore it. Typical literary features of this period are “politically incorrect humour and incisive satire, and the mixing of genres with zest and freedom.” (Frenkel and MacKenzie 2). However, also the term post-transitional is not without its difficulties. It, like the other terms, is a temporal marker, but this time it does not only refer to the past, but suggests that the process of transition and change is not over yet. Furthermore, apart from this temporal aspect, the term post-transitional brings up a broad scope of styles and concerns that reach both backwards and forwards (Frenkel 27, 42). Finally, it does not matter so much whether post-colonial, post-apartheid or post-transitional are sufficient terms to describe the era after the fall of apartheid. What is important here is that the cultural and literary landscape of South Africa are changing. Post-transitional literature seems to be newly enlivened and more willing to take risks, as it has changed its relationship to the past and lost its fear of tradition, political correctness and morals (Frenkel and MacKenzie 4).

3.3 Dystopias in Contemporary South African Novels

South African authors make use of various fictional and non-fictional forms and genres. The term ‘genre’ refers to “any category of writing that has developed its own conventions over time and that is distinguished by its own form, content, and structure” (Mengel 146).

The novel, which has a multifaceted and heterogeneous character, is one of them. Dystopia is one of its subgenres, which compared to other subgenres like the historical novel, takes only a marginal space in the variety of South African novels. As a result of the fall of apartheid, dystopia began to rise in popularity among South African writers. Of course there have also been writers like J.M. Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer, who already published dystopian novels, such as *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) or *July’s People* (1981), before the fall of apartheid. These novels mainly depict the rising fear and pressure of the white population in South Africa at that time. After the fall of apartheid, black writers

start writing dystopias as well, and both black and white authors share a common anxiety of South Africa developing into the wrong direction, which is expressed in their novels. Their worst fear seems to be the occurrence of a bloody and armed conflict between the different ethnicities. Furthermore, crime, poverty and AIDS function as direful prophecies that allude to a grim future for South Africa. Considering the fact that Africa as such is characterised by dictatorships, pogroms and constant rebellions, these ideas and literary directions are not that surprising (Mengel 146, 169). According to Mengel (169), instead of giving hope and opening up horizons to the future, dystopias are direct representations of the “fear, anxiety, and hopelessness that are symptoms of trauma” and; therefore, they do not have a ‘healing’ effect on the South African population, but rather aggravate the situation.

In the following chapters, this thesis will analyse three contemporary South African dystopian novels, namely Ceridwen Dovey’s *Blood Kin*, Mandla Langa’s *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon*, and Alastair Bruce’s *Wall of Days*, in detail and determine whether or not it is true that they do only propagate fear and hopelessness, or if there might still be a spark of hope.

4. Ceridwen Dovey's *Blood Kin* (2007)

4.1 Ceridwen Dovey

Ceridwen Dovey was born in South Africa in the beginning of the 1980s and; therefore, witnessed the apartheid regime as well as the period of transition. Her father, who was a lecturer at a university education department and a known opponent of apartheid, began to receive threats for his criticism, forcing the family to move back and forth between South Africa and Australia (Anonymous 2007). Later on, Ceridwen Dovey moved to the United States of America to study anthropology as an undergraduate at Harvard. As a part of her studies she made a documentary, called *Aftertaste*, which depicts the life of workers at South African wine farms. Afterwards, she moved back to Cape Town, where she wrote her debut novel *Blood Kin*, which was nominated for various literature prizes, such as the renowned Dylan Thomas Prize. She even won South Africa's Sunday Times Fiction Prize in 2008, whose earlier winners were no less well-known authors such as André Brink and Zakes Mda. Once she finished the novel, she returned to the U.S. in order to study social anthropology at New York University. Today, she lives in Sydney, together with her husband and son (Dovey 2015).

4.2 Plot Summary

Dovey's dystopian, fable-like *Blood Kin* finds its beginning with a coup d'état in which a Commander overthrows the President of a nameless country. Amongst a series of mass arrests also three of the President's servants, namely his barber, chef and portraitist, are being kidnapped and taken hostage in a solitary palace in the mountains. Dovey divides the book into three sections, which are narrated in the first person voice. The voices telling the story alternate between the three men and later on in the book their wives, lovers and daughters also serve as focalisers.

The first section concentrates solely on the stories of the three male protagonists. Before the coup, these men served the president in seemingly minor and harmless tasks, such as grooming, painting or feeding him. Along

with the fall of the regime the veil that hides the men's, and their women's secrets disappears too. The way Dovey describes these characters and their lives gives the reader the impression of getting to know the characters closely. In addition, she explores their relationship to the president in detail. These men do not seem to know why they are being held captive in the palace, since they have the feeling that they themselves are of little importance and have not done anything wrong.

In the second section of the novel the perspective changes when three women, who are closely related to the earlier addressed men, get to tell their stories. These women are the portraitist's wife, the chef's daughter and the barber's brother's fiancée. As their stories unfold, we receive an even more detailed look at the men in these women's lives. Simultaneously, it becomes clear that all these characters tell their parts and versions of the story, so the reader will never know whom to trust; and hence will never find out the truth.

The final section of the book provides the reader with various plot twists, like, for example, when the barber and the commander's wife are starting an affair, as well as the chef feeling offended by it and trying to use his knowledge to his advantage. In the end, Dovey's final lesson seems to be that no one is immune to the temptations of power and that the mad king lives within us all.

4.3 The Corruption of Power

While reading *Blood Kin* it becomes obvious that the overarching theme is Dovey's criticism on the abuse of power and her exploration of its various mechanisms. When we think of the corruption of power, what typically comes to our minds are the monsters of history: the dictators, the tyrants, and the life-long presidents. Though it is true that they cause the most evident damage, it is also true that these people would not be able to stay in power without people supporting them.

Dovey's harshest criticism is not directed towards the men shaping history, more precisely in the case of *Blood Kin*, the President or the Commander, but she tries to reveal how far the blood line of political corruption extends. This is done by telling the story through the voices of indirect beneficiaries of this

corrupt political system, who at first sight do not seem to have done any harm at all. In an interview, Dovey (in Dovey and Freymann-Weyr) claimed that she was much more interested in the lives of people who worked for political leaders, but performing non-political functions, than in the leaders themselves. For her these seemingly unimportant people provide the perfect opportunity to explore the structures and contamination of power in a more abstract way. Similarly, Samuelson (2008: 132) states that

Blood Kin offers a pertinent and profound engagement with the contaminating nature of power, and is equally attuned to its capillary nature as it intrudes into and animates the most intimate spheres of everyday life.

This shows in what an extreme way power works and how deeply it affects all of us, as it is not just something influencing political and social sphere, but is even spreading into everyday and family life. Furthermore, she argues that in Dovey's representation, power does not simply taint the individual, but "is shown to course through, animate and tie together all the characters and their multivalent desires" (Samuelson 2007). This synergy of power and desire is also directly addressed in the book by the character of the chef (Dovey 2009: 63):

Having been failed by my own flesh, and those of my flesh, what else can an old man turn to except power to shore himself up, or at least proximity to power? We all know power and desire couple effortlessly.

Itzkoff, too, refers to the representation of power in *Blood Kin* and states that "the slightest taste of power so easily stimulates our limitless appetite for sadism." Moreover, he claims that Dovey's text has the power to give the reader an impression of life under these tyrannical leaders through simply telling the story of these minor characters and the implicated sublimated aggression (Itzkoff). This means that the aggression of the characters living under tyranny is being turned into socially acceptable actions or behaviour. An example for such sublimated aggression is the chef's obsession with killing abalones: "[They] had to calm down before I could kill them [...]. If they sensed me coming they contracted like a heart muscle and were wasted" (Dovey 2009: 6). Also the barber's pleasure in shaving the president lets the reader grasp this reversed aggression, when he claims that

[f]or me, the satisfaction was in delathering. I would sharpen my knife in front of the President, and he would wince from the sound, but he never opened his eyes to look, [...] with a brisk twist of my hands, I could have snapped his neck, slit his throat with a knife flick, but I did neither. (Dovey 2009: 7-8)

However, via focusing on the lives of these minor figures in terms of political importance, Dovey does not merely want to indicate how far the corruption of power can extend. Rather, she wants to highlight that everybody is in a way complicit in maintaining these power structures, whether it is through upholding a corrupt regime or narrow-minded social norms (Frenkel 39). Therefore, Dovey seems to advocate an emancipatory discourse insisting on “collective responsibility as a transnational imaginary within South African cultural life” (Frenkel 39). As Dovey (Anonymous 2007) grew up in South Africa during the end of the apartheid era, hence being a bystander herself, this experience left her with some hindsight of the different levels of complicity, which provoke a struggle with one's integrity and conscience. When dealing with this concept of complicity, Dovey claims that the ideas of Mahmood Mamdani were helpful to her, as he differentiates between perpetrators, victims and beneficiaries. She argues that

[t]hinking about being a beneficiary is another way of asking yourself: which are worse – the sins of omission or commission? How do we draw the line between things for which we are directly and indirectly responsible? (Dovey qtd. in Anonymous 2007)

These ideas and thoughts become apparent when reading *Blood Kin*, as the book seems to have a psychological fallout and moral, which can be seen in the “hiding and eavesdropping, lying and chicanery of characters striving to stay afloat in a despotic regime” (Anonymous 2007). All these immoralities, however, might be another indicator for Dovey drawing from real life in South Africa and the country's anxieties about the abuses of power. There “corruption and cronyism at all levels of officialdom appear to be beyond legal control, and betrayal and dishonesty appear to be rife among the powerful” (Hunter 91). As she has experienced being a bystander herself Dovey harshly criticises the ignorance and staying afloat of people in such a tyrannical regime because “political disinterest has the potential to support dictatorships transnationally through the circulation of silence” (Frenkel 41). This ignorance to politics can be

seen at various stages in the novel, such as the chef explaining that “[p]eople are confused. Many had chosen not to know about the President’s crimes” (Dovey 2009: 39). This emphasises that people deliberately choose not to know and ignore what is happening because it is more convenient to them. Another example can be found at the beginning of *Blood Kin* where the portraitist claims not to be interested in politics, as he thinks that it is all relative and the information provided by the media are probably not true anyway.

I have avoided thinking about why I am here. I have never paid attention to politics; if I am exempt from one thing as an artist, surely it is knowing what my government is doing. Much more interesting to me than the puny stirrings of student revolutionaries was how to transform a thought into an image, how to paint the sky without using blue, how to get perspective wrong on purpose. My wife and I made it a rule never to listen to the news. “It’s all relative anyway,” she would say, imagining that politicians do to their actions what fast-food advertisers do to their burgers. It seemed purer to know nothing than to glean bits of information thrown to us like chums to sharks. We didn’t even own a television set. (Dovey 2009: 14-15)

Besides this passage being an excellent example of the ignorance of the characters in terms of politics, it also highlights another important issue relating to power, namely an almost perverse self-interest. Frenkel (40) claims that Dovey exceptionally links this extreme self-interest to the surplus of political power and the lack of emancipatory discourse. There are various passages within the book that emphasise this extreme focus on the self, such as the following:

all three of us have been in siege mode, thinking only of our own survival, unwilling to form a bond that might implicate us further. My mind has been full of my wife, my own pain. (Dovey 2009: 53)

This extract expresses a sense of everybody looking after himself first instead of being interested in and having empathy for others. They do not realise or possibly even ignore the fact that they would be better off if they formed a bond, rather they are keeping all their secrets and anxieties to themselves. Instead of reaching out to their fellow detainees they are only interested in their own survival, pain and life. But not only the men in the book are self-centred, also the female characters are, which is shown in the following passage by the portraitist’s wife:

There is a calm that comes from thinking only about oneself; I would venture so far as to say it is the only true freedom. I discovered that early on, encouraged by my mother's good example. Self-devotion – and by that I mean devotion to oneself – takes time to perfect, like all skills worth developing, and requires extreme discipline. (Dovey 2009: 105-106)

This almost reads like a eulogy to self-devotion and self-interest, as it even declares it to be the only true freedom in life. It is described to be a skill one needs to perfect; however, it is another example of how the characters are only interested in their own lives, and thereby forget about the common good. This does not even make a halt at the fate of their own families, which they are not interested in at all, emphasising their cruel and self-absorbed nature: "I am not in the least bit concerned about my father or mother and their fate after the coup; they're either lying murdered in their country house or they've flown their private jet out of the country" (Dovey 2009: 106). However, probably one of the best examples to demonstrate how power, self-interest and ignorance mix together within *Blood Kin* is a passage of the chef's daughter being reminiscent of her father and claiming that

[...] there is a delicate line between knowing too little (ignorance) and knowing too much (perversity) [...]. My father probably knew it was going on – he was close enough to the President in a non-political capacity for the President to confide in him the way one confides in one's plants while watering them on a sunny balcony. He's not the grovelling type, though, my father, that's why men in power like him – they recognize themselves in him, utterly committed to one man alone: himself. (Dovey 2009: 100)

Here Dovey makes an excellent point about the way power works by pointing out that people who are in power, especially in despotic regimes such as in *Blood Kin*, are not interested in the prosperity of the general public, but only care about themselves. This is a very interesting argument, which links directly to the final point I want to make about the mechanisms of power within Dovey's novel, namely the fact that even though a regime change is propagated within the book nothing has really changed and history seems to repeat itself:

Human beings dispose of each other, set themselves up in the place of the deposed, and then go about their daily tasks: you shave at the ex-President's basin, examine yourself in his mirror, pack your old socks in his underwear drawer. That in turn made me think about contamination, and whether a bad person leaves behind bad things in his place,

excretes badness like foul air: can you catch it like a cold? (Dovey 2009: 91)

People adapting to and imitating the habits and behaviours of their predecessors is a very interesting argument and definitely proves to be true for the people in charge in *Blood Kin*. It is a rhetorical question that every one of us can ask him/herself: Does it turn you into a bad person if you surround yourself with bad people? Dovey shows how the Commander, who wants to end the tyranny within the country, is overthrowing the old President. However, without even realising it himself, he seems to imitate the President's behaviour and becomes his spitting image.

I had not seen the President's face up close until he was captured and put in a room in the Summer Residence, and when I saw him for the first time I saw my husband as he will be when he is an old man: haggard, greedy, lustful. At first his zealousness was attractive, but now, months after the coup, I have learned to pay attention to what he is a zealot about, and sadly, it seems it is as unoriginal as power. (Dovey 2009: 147)

Here Dovey depicts how one leader appears to morph into the other seamlessly, to an extent where even their outward appearance becomes alike. Furthermore, the Commander's eagerness, which once was triggered by the will to free the people of the country, has turned into a simple lust for power. Lastly, it seems that not only the Commander has settled into his new role effortlessly, but also the rest of the characters have easily taken their places in the new regime. The barber, the portraitist, as well as the chef are first being taken captive, as they possibly could have known too much. Once they are released, they just resume their old posts working for the Commander instead of the President as if nothing ever happened. Dovey's criticism of a new leader taking over where the old left off, which includes using the exact same staff and confidantes, is expressed very well in the following passage:

"Every person I see looks vaguely familiar," I say to the portraitist softly. "Should that worry me?"

"In a strange place, your brain does things like that," he says. "Seeks out familiarity. A survival tactic." (Dovey 2009: 43)

4.4 Characters

In terms of narrative devices, Dovey's *Blood Kin* departs substantially from the other texts analysed in this thesis, as she successfully uses first person narration and weaves together the voices and stories of several characters. None of the characters in the novel are named, but are simply defined by their relationship to the President or the Commander. Furthermore, Frenkel (38) claims that "[t]he split between the male and female voices in the narrative is also a division between vertical (as in top-down) and lateral personal relationships."

One of the outstanding qualities of the novel is its disposition to deal with fundamental questions about how human beings react when they are confronted with evil. Especially the male characters can be ascribed to be representing possible responses to tyranny, as the portraitist pretends to be superior to politics, the barber reacts with cowardice and the chef is an aggressive collaborator. By not naming the characters, Dovey wants to achieve the effect of them representing 'Everyman', which makes them serve as a mirror for the readers, who are prompted to think about how they would react to tyranny themselves.

However, in terms of the novel's coherence, all these voices are important, as the text only becomes clear through the combination of them all. Whereas looking at them separately depicts the narrators as false textual guides whom you cannot fully trust (Frenkel 38). Moreover, Dovey's talent in describing the smallest details of her characters and, thereby, creating realistic human beings, needs to be highlighted. An example for this extremely descriptive style of writing can be seen in the following passage about the painter mixing his colours:

I always mixed my palette before he arrived. I knew the shade of his skin, the hue of his hair, the pinkness of the half-moons in his nails. After he'd arrived, and was seated, I'd adjust the colors slightly, according to his mood: if it had been a bad week, his skin tone needed more yellow; if he was feeling benevolent, I added a daub of blue to the white for his eyes. (Dovey 2009: 3)

The following two sections will go into more detail on the male and female characters in Dovey's *Blood Kin*. Furthermore, their most prominent character traits will be analysed by using significant passages from the novel. Besides a description and analysis of the characters, I will also address how women are represented in the book.

4.4.1 Male Characters

As already mentioned, the male characters of *Blood Kin*, which are the barber, the portraitist and the chef, give the reader a detailed insight into their lives and relationships to the President and the Commander by telling their stories through first person narration.

The portraitist is the character the book starts off with and is depicted as a very sensitive and sensual person. He is alert to the smallest details, which is something his work as a portraitist has trained him to be and notices even minor changes in the president's skin. Therefore, he seems to be surprised that he successfully ignored the fact that something must be wrong when the president's skin colour changed:

I should have known, at the last sitting, that something was wrong. The President had changed color – every fiber of him was a tone I hadn't mixed on my palette before [...]. (Dovey 2009: 11)

He does not represent himself in a very masculine way and does not take responsibility for anything he has done in his life. He claims that "[c]hoosing to be an artist never seemed like a risky thing to do; in fact, it seemed to be a guarantee against risk." (Dovey 2009: 50) Furthermore, he believes that "if I am exempt from one thing as an artist, surely it is knowing what my government is doing" (Dovey 2009: 14), which he uses as an excuse for his ignorance and cowardice towards the regime. The portraitist's lifestyle of not making decisions himself can also be seen in his father in law providing him the job as a portraitist for the President. Another obvious feature of this character is his extreme love and desire for his wife, which almost seems to be an obsession:

But after I'd met my wife my world seemed to shrink wonderfully, so that I needed nothing more than to see her immersed in a bathtub, her body refracted by the water, or to watch her lift a screaming kettle from the

stove in one graceful arc, to be deliriously happy. She is the kind of woman you can never get tired of, for she is secretive and has a vivid internal life that is opaque to me. (Dovey 2009: 15)

Even though in this passage it might still seem romantic and sweet of him to talk in such a way of his wife, there are other instances where his affection for her reminds the reader more of a perverse obsession rather than love:

Later, after I'd fallen in love, everything about her – clipped nails she'd left in a jagged pile on the floor, her morning breath, her week-old underwear in the laundry basket – became a clue to her chemistry, and I began to believe that I could possess it, could possess her, if I were vigilant enough to collect all the clues. (Dovey 2009: 10)

The second male character introduced in the novel is the President's chef. He is the complete opposite of the sensitive portraitist, as the chef can be described as a "manipulative, misogynistic and wily" character, who is "interested only in his own fortunes" (Urquhart). Moreover, Urquhart argues that the chef's claim of "[w]e all know power and desire couple effortlessly" is a concise description of this character. Through the character of the chef, Dovey shows the seductive nature of power, which can be seen in a reflection of this character on himself (Itzkoff): "I used to wonder why they called it blind ambition because I know my eyes were wide open while I clawed my way up." (Dovey 2009: 81) This ambition accounts for his advancement in terms of his job as the head of the President's kitchen, as well as his desire for beautiful young women. Contrary to the portraitist, the chef abuses women, mentally as well as sexually (Itzkoff). He does not seem to be able to fall in love and dedicate himself to another person, but always thinks about himself first. He craves the recognition and approval of women in an extreme almost perverse way and especially now that he is getting older he cannot handle the rejection of women:

One of them glances up at me and smiles, making me feel alive. I would like to add her to my album. [...] I have a photograph of every woman I have pursued. It's the old kind, with plastic sheets over adhesive backs that have lost their glue over the years, and the photos have started to escape the plastic film holding them down, to creep off the pages. This is what old age does to a man: even past conquests want to escape you. (Dovey 2009: 33)

Finally, the third male character giving us insights on his life is the President's barber. He lived with his mother and older brother in the countryside, but when his brother, who was an underground revolutionary, got killed, the barber moved to the city in order to take vengeance for his brother's death:

I came to the city to kill the President. I looked for a way to put my hands on him – to touch him every day as part of my job, to lull him with my fingertips like a snake charmer hypnotizes with a flute, to pierce his inner circle of security through the deftness of my skill, perform for him an unalarming service, at its essence manual and thus reassuring. And I found that way, and put my hands on him, and every day I held the slim blade of the shaving razor to his throat and could not find the will to slit it (or perhaps will lets me off too easily, it was the courage I could not find). I feared the consequences too much to be able to take my revenge, to avenge your death, brother. [...] I am a coward, and I wanted to live more than I desired vengeance. (Dovey 2009: 170-171)

This shows the cowardice of this character, as he was able to see and touch the man who was responsible for the death of his brother every day, without ever avenging him only because he was afraid of the consequences. However, this cowardice caused the barber to experience enormous feelings of guilt, which left him with an extreme longing for purity. He tried to purge himself of the guilt and; therefore, started to collect the hair of his customers in jars, kept his belts and socks in rigid order and slept with the window open, but none of these things helped to overcome his remorse. When he started to have an affair with the Commander's wife and his dead brother's former fiancée he realised that she was the only person who released him from his guilt:

I didn't want you to see this," he says quietly, behind me, standing in the doorway. "The way I live. I thought it might scare you, put you off."

I swallow and close the drawer. "You must have your reasons," I respond. "I'm only afraid I might not be clean enough for you. Not well ordered."

He buries his face against my neck. "You purify me," he whispers into my hair. "You are my salve." (Dovey 2009: 143)

4.4.2 Female Characters and the Representation of Women

In the second section of the novel, Dovey introduces three female characters that are in some ways related to the male protagonists. By means of telling their own stories they give the reader a new perspective on the male characters and

thereby become the counterparts to the men in the story. When asked about the female characters, Dovey stated that she

didn't want the female characters to seem like helpless victims. They are just as implicated as their men in the sorts of power struggles going on, and they also bring home the disintegration of values that is the fallout from that kind of brutal regime. They weren't perpetrators or victims, but were certainly beneficiaries. (Dovey qtd. in Anonymous 2007)

This indicates that even though the female characters appear to be less involved than their male counterparts this was not Dovey's intention; she sees them as beneficiaries of the corrupt structures of power, too. Just like the men they in some way benefitted from their position within this corrupt totalitarian regime. Generally, women do not come off well in the novel as their worth is mostly being measured by their social status and beauty. Frenkel (39) even claims that "wives are chosen for their wealth and social standing, a stammer is unforgiveable, and a woman's ugliness is seen as buffer against infidelity." An example for this is the portraitist's wife's reflection on her parents' marriage and the fact that they only married each other in order to benefit from it, but not because they loved each other:

She has an unfortunate stutter [...] so despite her excellent breeding the only man who would marry her was my father, who was compensating for his disfigured face [...] by pursuing power as if it promised him deliverance, and perhaps it has, if they've murdered him. (Dovey 2009: 106)

Another instance of women being reduced to their beauty and social standing can be seen when the portraitist's wife talks about the President's wife:

She doesn't know that it's an open secret in my family that the only reason the President married her was that she was wealthy enough not to embarrass him and ugly enough never to humiliate him with another man. (Dovey 2009: 129)

This even shows that it was not just the money and social standing that made the President choose his wife and surprisingly not her beauty, but on the contrary rather her ugliness, as this feature seemed to be a guarantee for her not betraying him. Furthermore, both examples highlight the idea that within this world, women are chosen to be wives and do not have a say in these decisions

and, therefore, they are being objectified. Lastly, by all these instances of reducing women to their social standing and especially by focussing on vanity and beauty one can see the harsh social criticism Dovey implants within her dystopian novel. This criticism seems to be extremely relevant for everyday life and draws a dark picture of how women are not just represented and measured by society, but even measure themselves not by what they have achieved, their intelligence or their happiness, but simply by their outward appearance:

I look at women and they look at me and we rank ourselves constantly according to what we see. In fact, it's a wonder to me that men ever manage to get our attention when we're all so busy looking at one another. In a dancers' changing room you even give up disguising your glances or looks or stares and girls stand next to one another in the full-length mirror and systematically calculate which of them has the better body. The one who loses usually has a prettier face, but that is no consolation. (Dovey 2009: 132-133)

Interestingly, the women in *Blood Kin* are introduced in reversed order to their male counterparts and, therefore, the barber's brother's fiancée is the first female voice the reader encounters. Her name alone indicates how hard it must have been to smoothly integrate these women into the novel and Urquhart argues that this character's "fractured loyalties hold the key to Dovey's compressed plot, which eviscerates the corruption of the political body". In fact, this character seems to be torn between the various men in her life, however, she is not loyal to one of them, except to her dead fiancée. The barber's brother's fiancée is now the Commander's wife, but after the coup starts an affair with the barber. The chef ascertains their relationship and forces her to have sex with him as well. However, after sleeping with her the chef still tells the Commander about her affair, which again points towards the corrupt structures of power within this world. After finding out about her affair with the barber, the Commander punishes her with wounds similar to the ones she received during the President's regime. This also refers back to a previously made argument, namely history repeating itself and the two leaders becoming more and more similar. Moreover, Frenkel (39) claims that these old and new wounds and scars "link both the space and hegemonic hold of these regimes." This character can be described as a connecting link between various characters in the novel, as she has a close relationship to the barber, the Commander and the chef. She

vindicates her need to be surrounded by men with the early loss of her parents, which resulted in a focus on herself and her needs alone:

I expected that losing them would make me stronger, that I would grow hard and self-reliant with time, the way wood eventually becomes stonelike with age, but instead it created a need in me for a man, just one, who would make me his first priority; friends weren't good enough – they had obligations to too many people. A lover alone could ward off the loneliness enough to let me function, to venture out into the world. (Dovey 2009: 115)

Dovey raises issues of family life and highlights the importance of parents and domesticity for a child's development. If one lacks the love of a family one becomes disloyal and looks for validation somewhere else. This can also be seen in the second female character, the chef's daughter. She, too, struggles with her family ties, as her mother went crazy after finding out her husband was cheating on her and abusing women in an extreme way. The chef's daughter, who was aware of her father's sexual liaisons from an early age on, has adopted this abusive behaviour as well, as she uses men for sex and keeps the stories about them in a journal:

I asked her if she had lost her self-respect and she knew immediately what I'd done. She asked me if I enjoyed it, if I'd enjoyed the part about her trying to have sex in a swimming pool. [...] It only strikes me now that my daughter could easily have asked if I'd lost my self-respect. (Dovey 2009: 32-34)

This is a passage in which the chef reflects on his own behaviour, as well as his daughter's imitation of it. The chef considers his sexual adventures to be almost heroic, nevertheless, when his daughter imitates him he asks her whether she lost her self-respect. Only then he realises that he is just blaming her for her behaviour because she is a woman and apprehends how his daughter could have easily asked him the same question. The chef's daughter now has a secret relationship with the President's son, who "ruined her relationships with others by inextricably linking pleasure with pain for her" (Frenkel 39):

I tried to be silent, proud of my resilience, proud that he wanted to hurt me. It felt good. It still feels good; he is still my lover. I feel guilty because now I know that pain and pleasure are not meant to be paired, but it is too late to unlearn it, it has been burned into my brain, gouged into my body. (Dovey 2009: 152)

The last female character letting the reader have a share of her most intimate thoughts is the portraitist's wife. She was raised in a wealthy and powerful family with relations to the President, but then met the portraitist and decided to marry him, which was not to the liking of her parents. Just like the portraitist she too has a strong sense for aestheticism and works as a food stylist. At the time of the coup she was eight months pregnant and Itzkoff argues that her character is the only one with a lasting impact on the reader as she feels that her fertility and pregnancy provide her with an extra power and emphasises her right to enjoy the freedom of only thinking about herself and nobody else. At the end of the book we find out that she betrayed her husband with the President and that the baby was in fact his, but then the story gets a horrible twist as she discovers that he was not just the father of her baby, but also her biological father:

I should have known. He was a sick old man. Sick old men don't just like young women – that wasn't it after all. They like a little something extra, a bit of a twist, a cherry on top of their perversion. (Dovey 2009: 165)

Furthermore, besides incest, this also raises another interesting issue about betrayal. The portraitist's wife betrayed her husband, which for her is justifiable; however, she harshly criticises and blames her own mother for betraying her father with the President, which again shows the double-edged morals of this world:

Oh mother, you win. I underestimated you. You have a taste for deception, a taste I have inherited. [...] Did you stutter when you whispered to him your desires, instructions, preferences? It was not love – I know that he is incapable of it. [...] Oh, the great art of it, the sliding up to Father afterward, reeking of another man. Did you lock your jaw stoically when you had to let Father touch you to take the credit, the responsibility, ownership of me? (Dovey 2009: 163)

4.5 Eroticism and Sexuality

Besides the corruption of power and the complex characters, the novel has a third topic of relevance, namely sexuality. Freeman argues that *Blood Kin* “is the most erotic novel you might ever read about political gamesmanship and power” and; furthermore, asks the rhetorical question of “[w]hat is more important, who is in office or who is in your bed?”. This question can be easily answered for this

novel, as it is definitely more important whom you slept with, than who is in charge.

The novel ascertains different forms of sex, as well as addresses topics such as incest and rape. However, also simple sexual problems, such as trying to get pregnant during marriage, but failing and losing the spontaneity and excitement about sex, are being focused on by Dovey (2009: 56-57):

We had already been trying for a child for over a year at that stage. Sex had become a trial for me, only a few years into our marriage.[...] We stopped making love at any time other than when she was ovulating, and then it felt clinical, like a doctor doing something to a patient.

Here sex is being used as a way to conceive a child, however, another interesting passage by the chef's daughter reflects on the various other reasons to have sex:

But she never told me that sex could be for fun, or for pleasure, or that it can be a tool for manipulation, or that it can be a way to mark important moments in your life that have nothing to do with the other person. I had to find all that out for myself. (Dovey 2009: 119)

This quote reveals the relationship between sex and power, as it is not just seen as something you do for pleasure, but more importantly sex allows you to manipulate others, which forces power upon them, and it can even be used out of pure self-interest to mark special dates important to oneself alone. Furthermore, this shows that the chef's daughter does not even consider practicing sex out of love, which can be seen in the following passage:

I don't think my mother was just trying to make me do the right thing by insisting that sex is only about love, I think she genuinely believed it; she lived by that conviction. (Dovey 2009: 120)

One can clearly feel that she does not believe in sex being simply about love and, therefore, in a way judges her mother's behaviour. This also relates to the possible reason why the chef's daughter's mother is being represented as crazy and insane, as she had the will to sacrifice herself for the one she loved. However, this will to do anything for another person cannot be appreciated and understood within a world in which everybody is only looking after his/her own good.

Nevertheless, Dovey's *Blood Kin* does not just directly focus on sex as such, but also highlights the underlying eroticism of everyday routines and actions. Freeman claims that "a dictator's monomania enforces a voluptuous sensuality upon those around him". This can be seen in the way the chef is proud to nourish his president and in the barber's intense liking of the process of grooming him. However, one would expect the characters to reflect upon their cowardice after the coup, but instead they again practice their perverse self-interest and care more about themselves and their sex and love life.

4.6 References to South Africa

As already mentioned in the previous chapters Dovey intentionally does not assign any names to her characters, as well as the country and city the story takes place in. On the one hand, this is an interesting and important move because it intensifies the effect of making the reader aware of the fact that this could happen anywhere, at any time, to anyone of us and we might as well be the seemingly minor bystanders. On the other hand, by closely reading the text and considering Dovey's personal background, one can still identify some hints that might suggest the story is actually taking place in and dealing with South Africa.

Although Dovey claims that she wanted to deliberately avoid writing a work about her growing up in South Africa or that could in any sense be seen as autobiographical. Furthermore, she argues that she did not intend to set *Blood Kin* in South Africa as she intentionally chose to set her story about political power and intrigue in an unnamed country that could be an example for any country (Dovey and Freymann-Weyr). As far as the depicted city and countryside go, Dovey stated that her story was topographically more influenced by Beirut than any other city (Anonymous 2007). Nevertheless, various critics claim that within the text there are some passages that might refer specifically to South Africa. Firstly, Itzkoff claims that the novel seems to be set quite contemporarily, since Dovey occasionally slips in modern phrases such as *regime change*, which should remind the reader that the lesson to be learned in this novel might be exactly directed to them. Furthermore, the term regime change can also be allocated to South Africa and the apartheid regime

changing towards democracy, but it could also refer to the change of presidency from Nelson Mandela to Thabo Mbeki in 1999. Even though Dovey denies Mbeki being a model for the regimes in her novel this idea does not seem to be too far-fetched, as he seemed to be of great interest to her. She first planned to do a documentary on him via capturing people being close to him, which turned out to be unrealistic, and later on started writing *Blood Kin* (Armitage and Anonymous 2007).

Another interesting feature of the novel, especially when considering South Africa's history of apartheid and racial segregation, is that Dovey omits to use any kind of racial descriptions. She is a master of description, but managed to describe the outward appearance of her characters in detail without giving clues about their skin colour, which is an indicator for her criticism of racial discrimination and again makes her characters become 'Everyman', as any reader can identify with them.

Lastly, Frenkel (39-40) claims that another indicator of the novel actually taking place in South Africa are the various references in the text to jacaranda petals, which are abundant in South Africa as well as India, where they originally come from. Moreover, within the novel Dovey allegorises the place as the Global South, which represents a transnational neo-colonial ground for the story. Also the vineyards described within the novel, might be an indicator for South Africa being the true setting of the novel because the country is well known for its viniculture.

4.7 Summary – relation to South Africa

Even though Dovey claims that she did not intend to write a story about her past and growing up in South Africa, the analysis of her debut novel *Blood Kin* has shown significant references to her birth country. Firstly, her detailed account of the corruption and structures of power, as well as the focus on political dictatorships, are strong indicators for and link to the novel dealing with South Africa's history and present. Dovey harshly criticises this corruption of power, but the interesting point made in *Blood Kin* is that she not only blames the dictators and terrifying leaders for what has happened. Rather she disapproves

of the bystanders of these despot regimes, as each and every person living within these systems is in a way responsible for its dictator's power. Therefore, she focuses on the lives of people close to the president and gives them the chance to tell their version of the story. At first this results in the reader sympathising with the characters; however, this feeling does not last long as the plot unfolds and the characters reveal to be just as corrupt and power lusting as the system and their leader. Secondly, disregarding the fact that Dovey has chosen a dystopian setting, meaning a non-existent bad place, for her novel, there are still references within the novel that give away details on a possible location of the novel. Therefore, not just the system the novel is dealing with, but also the plants and landscape described might be references to South Africa. However, the most depressing feature of this novel is not the story of corruption and power itself, but the fact that Dovey draws a bleak and horrible outlook for the future, since history, not just within this novel, is repeating itself over and over again and nobody seems to learn from their mistakes.

5. Mandla Langa's *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* (2008)

5.1 Mandla Langa

Mandla Langa was born in Stanger/KwaDuzukain, South Africa, in 1950 and grew up in KwaMashu, which is a township on the outskirts of Durban. Langa's father was a preacher and he is one of nine children (Anonymous May 2015). His interest in art and storytelling became apparent at a very early age, when Langa drew cartoons in order to tell stories (Drew 148). Langa went to Gardner Memorial School and afterwards Sibonelo High School in Durban, before enrolling at Fort Hare University. During his studies he was an active member of the South African Students' Organisation. Subsequent to finishing his studies in English and philosophy in 1972, Langa started teaching at a school in his former township KwaMashu (Anonymous May 2015).

In 1976, Langa was accused of trying to leave the country without permission, and as a consequence got imprisoned for 101 days. Following his release he went directly into exile to Botswana until the early 1980s. During this period, Langa never ceased his literary production as he continued writing poetry whilst pursuing his political responsibilities from afar (Anonymous May 2015). Moreover, while being exiled he travelled various countries. In 1977 he went to Nigeria in order to participate in the Festival of Arts and Culture. Two years later, in 1979, he visited the United States. However, upon his return he sensed a transformation taking place in Botswana as crime rates soared and incursions occurred daily. Therefore, he decided to leave for Lesotho, which he describes as a terrifying experience, as some of his friends had already been captured on their way there. During his time in Lesotho, Langa won the *Drum* magazine's short story contest for *The Dead Men Who Lost Their Bones*, motivating him to continue writing prose and not only poetry. Soon after, Langa joined the ANC's armed wing and participated in training camps in Angola and Zambia. In Zambia, Langa also worked in the ANC's Department of Information and Publicity, which was led by Thabo Mbeki at that time. Thereafter, he went to Hungary and started studying journalism in Budapest. Langa claims that the

experience of living in Europe gave him the needed distance from the so-called Third World that allowed him to bring life into his characters (Langa in Drew 149, 153). Furthermore, his reason for studying journalism was to reveal everything that South African media was incapable to expose owing to state censorship (Anonymous May 2015).

Throughout his lifetime Langa wrote numerous literary works, some of which include short stories like *The Dead Men Who Lost Their Bones*, and his first novel *Tenderness of Blood*, which was published in 1987. Langa's second novel, called *A Rainbow on the Paper Sky*, was published in 1989, followed by *The Naked Song and Other Stories*, which is a collection of short stories, in 1996. His last three novels *The Memory of Stones* (2000), *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* (2008) and *The Texture of Shadows* (2014) are among his most successful writings. For his exceptional literary work, Langa received various awards, including a bursary for creative writing, which he received as the first South African writer from Great Britain's Arts Council in 1991. Furthermore, in 2007 the South African government rewarded Langa with the National Order of Ikhamanga in silver for his outstanding achievements in the fields of literature, journalism and culture. Lastly, his novel *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* won the Commonwealth Price for Best Book in the African Region in 2009 (Anonymous May 2015).

Through the diverse positions held by Langa over the years, he has not just become an award-winning novelist and short story writer, but also advocates creativity in the media. At the moment, Langa is the head of the Contemporary African Music and Arts organisation, as well as a board member of various institutions, such as the Institute for the Advancement of Journalism, South African History Online and the Foundation for Global Dialogue (Anonymous May 2015).

5.2 Plot Summary

Langa's novel *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* transports the reader to the fictitious island of Bangula, which is situated in the Indian Ocean. A minority of whites, as well as Creoles, who are the descendants of ancient Portuguese

colonisers and the indigenous African community, account for the one million inhabitants of Bangula. The latter two groups are involved in a constant struggle for power and leadership aggravated by the increasingly fast spreading of an epidemic called “blood plague”. Specifically, the novel tells the story of Colonel Gondo, the patriarch of the newly reformed democratic nation of Bangula, and his three sons. Even though Bangula has become a modern democracy, blood still seems to be of greater importance. Therefore, subsequent to their father’s death the three men become entangled in a harsh struggle over his succession.

The novel opens with a scene set in the present showing Abioseh Gondo, the Colonel’s only legitimate son and successor, which signposts his isolation from power and indicates his demise. Afterwards, the reader is taken back in time to the beginning of the Colonel’s supremacy and the three men’s early childhood, that could not be more dissimilar. Abioseh grows up in Mariposa, the presidential palace, as the son of the Colonel and his wife MaZembe, however, being mostly neglected by his parents. Although he is known as the Colonel’s only legitimate son, in the course of the novel doubts occur concerning his father’s paternity. His half-brother Zebulon is the offspring of the Colonel’s great love, Madu, who was the daughter of Vezi, the leader of a murderous sect known as ‘The Blood of the Ancestors’. Zebulon’s life is dominated by poverty and his greatest wish is to avenge his mother’s death. He works as a comforter of the bereaved, which is a thriving business as the blood plague spreads quickly. Due to his profession he is very popular among the people in contrast to his reigning half-brother Abioseh and, consequently, many believe that Zebulon should become the leader of Bangula. Apart from the power struggle between Abioseh and Zebulon, a third prospector for the throne presents himself, being Abioseh’s childhood friend and head of security, Hiero or Hieronymus Jerome. In the course of the book, it is implied that he too might be one of the Colonel’s illegitimate children. Although Hiero has ambitions for power, they are more directed towards controlling rulers rather than being one of them. Therefore, he joins a revolutionary movement in order to overthrow Abioseh and install Zebulon as the president of Bangula. These power struggles between the Colonel’s three sons are fuelled by their varying personal motivations and expose the central divisions that are about to tear this fragile

nation apart. The main concerns the government of the island state has to face are poverty, unemployment, and criminality as well as the spreading of the blood plague. However, all of these problems are being ignored and partly even denied by the rulers, leaving the poor majority of Bangula highly unsatisfied. After Abioseh gets overthrown during an attack on Mariposa and Zebulon dies at a shooting in the street, the novel finds its end with Zebulon's spectacular resurrection from the dead and his subsequent accession to power. However, it remains questionable whether the ascending cyclone or Zebulon's leadership will arouse and possibly destroy Bangula first.

5.3 Politics and power struggles

When reading Langa's *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon*, it becomes apparent that the major theme running through the novel is power. The story is full of various power struggles, which are fought mostly by the Colonel's three sons, as well as several other characters within the novel. This quarrelling between the brothers reminds the reader of the biblical tales such as Cain and Abel, even though the struggle within Langa's novel seems to be far more complicated (Gagiano 109-110). Apart from these struggles for power, the novel also deals with the concept of power itself, as "Abioseh realises the futility of power, the fact that it actually doesn't exist except as an ideal on people's minds. *What is it? What is power?*" (Langa 316; original emphasis). Especially the character of Abioseh wonders constantly about the notion of power. He realises that even though having a position that represents power, he himself has only little of it, since in his decision-making he is dependent on his people's opinions. Furthermore, he criticises the way the government works, as they rather seem to work against each other and, thereby, inhibit improvements of living standards and harm the common good:

For here are men and women, elected representatives, who clasp each other fondly in public gestures of shared affirmation, but now employ legal artifice to cut one another to pieces. At which point of their relationship was the seed of this enmity, at once polished and primeval, planted? (Langa 316)

This shows Langa's critique of the way democratic governments function, as they should be representations of the people's needs. Instead of the

representatives fulfilling this task they often just pursue their own goals and achieve power by being corrupt and climbing up the greasy pole. Another instance of Langa criticising corrupt governments is shown by the fact that even though Bangula has become a democratic republic after the Colonel's Reform, succession is an issue still handled the old way. Apparently, blood is to this day thicker than the people's right to vote. Nevertheless, Abioseh seems to be the only person questioning this, as "he had no ambitions to the presidency. It was enough that his father was the head of state; this was not a dynasty, but a modern democracy" (Langa 119). Furthermore, he asks himself about the purpose of democracy if the ones who rule are always able to take personal advantage from it:

And democracy, in whose name everyone speaks: what is its value when it can be bent into shape and made malleable for the moneyed of the land? (Langa 319)

This question Abioseh asks himself is not only important within Langa's novel, but it can also be easily identified as a critique on South Africa and its politics. In an interview about his novel Langa claimed:

The book in some sense was an outburst from inside myself to comment on the post-colonial malaise where we finally achieve power, and the big question then, which is the big question of leadership all over – It is sometimes easy to get power, but it is insuperably difficult to deploy it. To handle it, and to not let it go to your head. In a sense I started to see glimpses in our own political make-up towards power becoming a burden. (Langa in Tolsi)

This perfectly represents Langa's struggle with the way power works. As a consequence, the story of *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* can be seen as a critique of these abuses and shifts of power in general, and not just in South Africa. Furthermore, he refers to the fact that power can be achieved easily, but not letting it cloud your vision is a task that only few people are capable of achieving. This sense of power being a burden is also addressed in Abioseh's reoccurring dreams after the attack on Mariposa: "See how heavy the crown is," he recited. You sit there watching power. The oppressed becoming oppressors in the name of the common good" (Langa 267).

Abioseh is one of the protagonists in Langa's dystopian novel whose character Thurman (2010: 98) claims to be strongly inspired by a former South African president, namely Thabo Mbeki. He argues that similar to Mbeki, Abioseh is completely removed from the people living in his country, as he grew up among the upper class and has never had the common touch. Furthermore, Thurman suggests that Langa, who is a member of the ANC himself, made use of allegory in order to handle this topic and incorporate certain traits of Mbeki into his novel, without directly offending many members of the ANC.

At one point of the novel, Langa describes a fight between Abioseh and Baluba Jambo, another of Abioseh's childhood friends who later organised the rebellion against him, when they were still schoolboys. Even though this fight might in the first place not seem to be of great importance for the analysis of power and politics within Langa's novel, it is an excellent allegory of Abioseh's rule over Bangula. He

shows a complete inability to take responsibility for events in his life. [...] He is neither particularly good nor bad at anything. This basic flaw becomes a defining feature of his rule in Bangula, deferring all decision-making to his mother, to his ministers and relies on second-hand information of advisors. (Gule)

In general, Abioseh is depicted as a leader who tries to be good to his people. He sees their suffering and feels pity for them, but ultimately does not make use of his power to ease their pain. However, he critically reflects on the democratic system of his country and his father's reign:

The buildings of the city that had once been the pride of the pioneers, which were now encrusted with stubborn layers of dust, stood silhouetted against the dirty sky. *Does the Colonel ever see the state of the city? Of the country? Of the people?*

He couldn't, Abioseh concluded; *it is difficult to see anything if you have lent your eyes to others.* (Langa 107; original emphasis)

Although Abioseh does not approve of his father's style of leadership, he seems to make the same mistakes as the Colonel once did. He does not realise that his government and advisers are keeping secrets from him and censor important information, giving him, just like his father before, a blurred vision of the status quo. This is represented by the following passage on Hiero, his head

of security, withholding information from Abioseh in order to continue his corrupt intrigues:

This death and many injuries in the name of preserving law and order were no longer reported to Abioseh Gondo. Hiero explained that the president has a role to play to ensure that there was a government in place. [...] Hiero had overseen that the president received only an acceptable ration of news. More than ever, Abioseh had been kept busy with ceremonial tasks: opening a multi-purpose community centre here, a bridge there, commissioning a housing project on its way to being a slum long before the cutting of the ribbon. (Langa 239)

Langa's critique on the government not seeing or wanting to see the problems of society becomes even more apparent when Abioseh argues about the importance of listening to the voices of the people, however not doing so himself:

[A] government that works is a government that listens to the people. All the people. (Langa 202)

'With respect,' Zebulon started, 'my feeling is that this government has treated people with astonishing callousness. It has lurched from one disaster to another, as it can't listen. It's not a case of overpromising and underdelivering as the president says, but an unwillingness to deliver on even the small things that you have the power to deliver on. (Langa 204)

Here, Zebulon can be regarded as a representation of the common people, who feel to be forsaken by the government, as those in power deny making even the smallest changes. Curiously, it seems not to be the case that Abioseh is unwilling to change things but rather that he is scared of exerting his powers, possibly because he knows how little influence he has in the country of Bangula. This becomes even more apparent in a passage of the novel showing that at first he does not want to take his place as the Colonel's heir and paints a bleak picture of his reign:

'I've heard it said,' Abioseh put in, 'that mothers are the real kingmakers. But you don't have to bother because I've no desire for the high seat, Ma[...]. He adopted the formal tone of someone making a presentation to a panel: 'I led this republic into ruin for four years; in year so-and-so my tenure resulted in so many deaths from the blood plague and the deflowering of one thousand virgins...' (Langa 133)

As Abioseh is the Colonel's only legitimate son, he is, defying the rules of democracy, chosen to become president after the downfall of his father's

successor and eventually accepts his fate. Yet, because of his various rivals for the throne, of whom his half-brother Zebulon represents his strongest threat, his succession is met with resistance. Zebulon is one of the Colonel's illegitimate children, who was conceived during a previous relationship with the Colonel's great love, Madu. As Zebulon grew up with his mother, he had no contact with his father and only very little with Abioseh. Throughout the novel he dislikes the existing blood tie between him and the ruling elite. In general, Abioseh and Zebulon, even though they are biological half-brothers are being depicted as two very contrasting individuals. However, what makes these two characters extremely interesting is that Langa avoids clichés. Abioseh, who grows up in pure luxury within Mariposa and attends the best private school in Bangula, does against all odds not turn out a spoiled and snobbish rich boy. Rather, he grows to be a principled and perceptive man, who questions the society he lives in and sometimes even dares to challenge his father's reckless leadership. Contrary to Abioseh, Zebulon grew up in poverty, but instead of becoming a modest person, he developed a fascination for luxury cars and a striving for power (Gagiano 111). Zebulon is extremely hateful and jealous of Abioseh as

[e]verything that has happened to him has given him no option but to seize any opening to fight what his half-brother – and the government he heads – stands for. [...] [E]ven if Abioseh Gondo were to spend his entire tenure giving alms to the poor, Zebulon would have found some missile to hurl at him. (Langa 19)

Since Zebulon is a member of the lower class himself, he easily attracts the masses, who feel that he is the rightful president of the country because he has the Colonel's and Vezi's blood running through his veins. In contrast to Abioseh, Zebulon is lusting for power and thinks that he is the only one who can save Bangula, which is illustrated very well in the following passage:

'I'd thought,' she said sadly, averting a face now moistened by steam and tears, 'that you were different, a democrat. But I can see that you're just another despot.'

'Perhaps,' Zebulon countered, 'that's exactly what this country needs. A strong hand that will put to rights some of the ancestral wrongs.'

'And you believe that *you* have that strong hand?'

'Indubitably.' (Langa 198; original emphasis)

This clearly shows that even though Zebulon claims that he wants to change people's lives for the better, he would just become another tyrant, who is mostly interested in power and would stop at nothing to maintain it. His girlfriend Zoya seems to be one of the only people surrounding him that recognises Zebulon's power lust verging insanity:

'I think,' Zoya said levelly, 'you men are all the same. You don't know what the other guy's got but you suspect it's much better than yours – and then on the strength of that, you construct an enemy.'

'You're so smart,' Zebulon said, 'you'll end up outwitting yourself.'

'At least the victim of my delusion will be just one person,' Zoya said, stepping on the accelerator as the traffic congestion eased. 'Your paranoia is as widespread as the blood plague, and it will claim as many victims.' (Langa 216)

Zoya's comment about Zebulon's paranoia clearly shows how obsessed he is, as she suspects his power lust to be as lethal for people of Bangula as the blood plague. At the end of the novel, Zebulon's thirst for power reaches a climax when he stages a fake resurrection which makes it possible for him to take over power from Abioseh. However, this move does not bode well for his future rule over Bangula and a change to a principled and transparent use of power (Gagiano 112).

As if the rivalry between Abioseh and Zebulon was not enough, Langa also focuses on a third main character, which in the course of the novel turns out to be a possible third son of the Colonel. Hiero is Abioseh's childhood friend and later on becomes his head of security. Nevertheless, he also has a relationship to Zebulon, as he was one of the mourners after Hiero's father's death and they both attended a group for teenagers suffering from alcohol abuse. Hiero finds that he does not resemble his father at all, but looks much more like the Colonel:

'I wish to find out,' Hiero said, 'if the Colonel was in any way related to me.'

'You mean,' Baluba Jambo asked, 'if he was your real dada?'

'Yes.' Hiero started to squirm. 'I feel like an idiot.'

'You *are* an idiot,' Baluba said simply. 'Everyone knows the Colonel's *your* dada.' (Langa 185; original emphasis)

This shows that everybody except Hiero himself seems to know that he is another biological child of the Colonel. Similar to Zebulon, he also seems to crave power, however, he does not want to claim power himself, as he joins the revolution and help Zebulon to overthrow Abioseh. In contrast to his two half-brothers, Hiero seems not just to long for power, but also abuses it in a very violent way. This can be seen in the following scene where Hiero and Father Mitchum discuss how to maintain peace and Hiero confesses his pleasure in people being tortured:

‘And that means some people must bleed,’ Hiero said. After a brief silence, he went on. ‘I oversaw the torture of a man I knew was innocent the other day. When he screamed, I felt an excitement that was like a sexual charge. I knew even as he admitted to various plots against the state that he was lying, and something in his eyes told me that he knew that I knew.’ (Langa 238)

All of these examples have shown how power and politics work within the country of Bangula and especially how the Colonel’s three sons struggle to gain and maintain power. Langa managed to interweave these power struggles into the story of *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* seamlessly and by doing so not only painting a picture of Bangula, but also constructing an allegory for his home country South Africa.

5.4 References to South Africa

At first glance, Langa’s *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* appears to depict a typical dystopian society. One can see that the environment where the plot takes place is a fictional and non-existent place that is a utopia for few people, whereas being a living hell for the bigger part of the population. However, in contrast to the other two novels analysed within this thesis, Langa’s story does not take place in an entirely fictitious world or remote future, but rather on an invented island that is embedded within a real life context. This fact allows the author to feature more direct references to the world we live in.

As already mentioned, the setting of the novel is the Democratic Republic of Bangula with Jambora as its capital, which is located on an island somewhere in the Indian Ocean. In spite of this fictional setting of the novel, the island

Bangula is surrounded by a real world setting. On the one hand this can be seen by references to other existing countries, such as the United States of America, which seem to be Abioseh's state ideal, and on the other hand via referring to the past and historical events such as colonialism and the Second World War. By mentioning these past events, Langa, similar to the other authors mentioned in this thesis, makes a statement about the importance of the past and the need to remember what has happened and to learn from it:

However hideous the past was, [...] it contains a kernel of goodness, or a benefit – or we wouldn't even be talking about that past. The Second World War was a hideous period, but it threw up heroism and an understanding of patriotism. The evil of oppression broadens our knowledge of the resilience of the human spirit. (Langa 231)

In an interview Langa gave to Tolsi, he reasons that no fictional world can ever be created without using the real world as a role model in several aspects. Since more than sheer imagination is needed to create an exceptional work of fiction:

The struggle was in the research; even though you have a mythical and fictitious place, it has to have the characteristics of a real place. [...] To translate your own real circumstances into another reality – that takes a lot of doing. (Langa in Tolsi)

In relation to the topic of this thesis, the second part of the above given quote is of major importance as it indicates that Langa used the experiences he made, as well as the cultural experience of his country and incorporated them into the fictional reality of *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon*. Thurman (2010 98) claims that Jambora can be easily identified as Langa's hometown Durban, however, this kind of city can also be found outside of South Africa. A possible indication for Bangula and Jambora actually being representations of South Africa and Durban can be seen in Langa's description of the country's river landscape and climate:

The space that the country occupies is described in lingering detail not so much for what it supports or represents as for what it lacks. Bangula lacks important arterial rivers or lakes [...] thus necessitating extensive water-conservation and -control measures. The experts will always include pollution of the few rivers that exist and blame agricultural run-off and urban discharge. [...] It is hot, humid and it rains daily; in the interior it has a temperate climate; it is mostly mountainous with narrow,

discontinuous coastal plains and is subject to wild winds that sometimes get upgraded to hurricanes. (Langa 318)

Langa's description of the country focusing on what it lacks rather than what it offers can be identified as a criticism on the Western world and how we relate to Africa in general. The categorisation applied by the Western world, of classifying countries as Third World countries forces a negative picture upon nations, highlighting structural weaknesses and environmental problems while any merits the countries offer are being neglected. Furthermore, the references to few lakes and rivers and a lack in water supplies and multitude of pollution paints an adequate picture of South Africa. Also the climate of Bangula described corresponds to the weather in South Africa. As Durban is situated on South Africa's eastern coast next to the Indian Ocean, it is affected by much rain and high humidity, whereas South Africa's interior offers a drier climate. Moreover, the coastal plains as well as the mountains described in Langa's novel can be seen as representations of South Africa's east coast and the Drakensberg escarpment.

Apart from the climate and landscape of Bangula, also the way its capital is depicted reminds the reader of the unfair distribution of wealth and how this becomes apparent as soon as you leave the city centre and move towards the suburbs in Durban:

Guiltily elated, Hiero got on the bus with the other students. As he had a window seat, he watched Jambora, the outskirts dominated by brown fields readied for development, past despairing shanties and the higgledy-piggledy brick and mortar structures, shops and homes of the middle strata that fought a desperate war with unappeasable poverty. The scenery changed drastically as the bus rolled further away from the city and its tall buildings to the flattening countryside, the rolling sugarcane plantations a swathe of green that merged with the blue of the ocean. (Langa 66)

Here, Langa describes the different parts of the town that strongly resemble South African cities. The outskirts of Jambora seem to be inhabited by the lower class, who dwell in shanties, whereas the middle class occupies small brick houses fighting poverty. Moreover, the city centres are characterised by their tall and modern buildings. In the countryside sugarcane plantations dominate the landscape. These can be seen as another indication for Jambora

representing Durban, as Durban is located in the Kwa-Zulu Natal, which is South Africa's main production area for sugarcane.

Within Langa's novel, these references to Africa, and especially to South Africa, are irrefutable. However, they are not just limited to the setting of the novel but also include the country's history, politics, social standards and economy. Knapp (9), too, argues that these topics are common within South African literature, as it

[...] is used to address the shortcomings of the political, economic and social transformation that has reshaped the South African social landscape since the end of apartheid.

According to Thurman, the political history of Bangula does not merely represent the South African experience, but seems to be a more adequate representation of the more general African political development. This is a result from Langa living in Mozambique, Angola and Zambia and incorporating these experiences in his novel. What Thurman means by the 'African' experience is the fact that the government has been overthrown by a military coup of an inspiring freedom fighter. In the novel, the Colonel represents this freedom fighter, but during his time as the leader of the newly founded republic becomes kind of a tyrant and wishes for his son Abioseh to take over after his death. This part of the plot dealing with a coup d'état and tyranny is strongly reminiscent of Dovey's *Blood Kin*. Even though the general plot reminds one rather of Africa than South Africa, the political figure of Abioseh Gondo has a strong resemblance to the former South African president Thabo Mbeki, as already mentioned in section 5.3 (Thurman 2010 98).

Additionally, the hardship of people living in the Republic of Bangula reminds the reader of the conditions in South Africa. Especially social injustices such as poverty, crime, unemployment and racism are directly referring to the situation people have to face all over Africa and South Africa. Furthermore, the incurable disease called the blood plague featured in the plot can be interpreted as a representation of the HIV and AIDS epidemic in Africa, as well as criticism towards the government's and international community's approach to tackling it.

Lastly, also the economy described in Langa's *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* strongly suggests that Durban and South Africa have been the source of inspiration for this fictitious world. Zebulon's working at a dock, can be seen as just one of the abundant references to Durban, which has the largest shipping harbour of the whole continent. Furthermore, when describing the revolutionary group called The Blood of the Ancestors, Langa mentions mines, another fact pointing towards South Africa as being the disguised setting of the plot since the nation's economy has profited highly from mining.

5.5 Social Injustices

Apart from the power struggles mainly expressed through the quarrelling half-brothers, social injustices, such as poverty, racism and illnesses, are the most prominent themes running through the novel and will be discussed in the following.

5.5.1 Poverty

Right at the beginning of the novel Langa draws a striking image of the distribution of wealth in his fictitious country of Bangula:

There were no borders on this island. [...] The only boundaries were man-made and they differentiated people into the haves and the have-nots. There were others in the middle who from time to time experienced great hunger. When starving, they cursed the gods and the rulers who had condemned them to that condition. But every now and then they ate their fill, and thanked the government for the bounty.

The land itself was indifferent to the drama being played out by the have-nots who wanted to escape their condition and by the haves who didn't wish to be dislodged from their lofty perch. Those caught halfway between the two conditions kept their heads down and their guards up, eyes peeled for the slightest rustle of the foliage. (Langa 4)

This passage clearly indicates the different strata of Bangula's population and the extreme differences between the classes. The majority of people belong to the lower class living in suburban shanty towns. Their lives are characterised by poverty and unemployment and the constant wish to escape their living hell. These shanty towns can be seen as heterotopias within society and the people who live in them can, according to Kristeva, be categorised as abjects. On the

extreme other end of the spectrum a small part of the population lives in sheer luxury, however, always afraid to lose this advantageous lifestyle. In between these two classes, a certain amount of the population does not fit into either of these categories; their lives being unpredictable, suffering days of hunger and days of abundance. The three main characters of the novel can also be ascribed to these three categories, as Abioseh clearly belongs to the rich upper class, Hiero having grown up in between the two belonging to a middle class, whereas Zebulon grew up in poverty. By building the story around these three characters, Langa manages to give a good insight into the various social classes and their way of living, which show considerable similarities to South African society. Throughout the novel there are various passages in which Langa clearly raises issues of social injustice and criticises the social standards of Bangula, as well as South Africa:

Unemployment was rising with thousands of people joining the ranks of the jobless every month. He asked himself: *What is our role?* [...] He felt that the people of Bangula had the power to change the situation. *Why are there so many kids begging on street corners?* he thought. *Why has there been a frightening increase in the number of women with wide-eyed babies strapped to their backs, with begging bowls, some breaking into song-and-dance routines for the amusement of the bored and moneyed motorist? Why is the fruit of liberation so bitter and so unreachable for the majority of the people?* (Langa 153)

Langa raises questions about society, which can be clearly identified as references to South Africa and not just being fictitious ideas. All of the shortcomings addressed within the novel are also parts of South African society and the majority of people's everyday lives in a country transitioning from an oppressive regime to democracy. Especially the last sentence of the quote can be identified as a direct reference to the current situation in South Africa, where people were full of hope after the end of apartheid, but their dreams have been destroyed by the brutality of reality. This issue is also addressed by Thurman (2010: 99), who argues that

[p]ost-apartheid experiences of government corruption and the abuse of power, along with widespread poverty and a growing gap between the rich and the poor, suggest that most South Africans have not yet achieved 'freedom' – despite the universal franchise and bill of rights entrenched in the constitution.

Even though the South African constitution has been amended on several occasions, only few things really have changed. The black population is still disadvantaged and the poor have remained poor, whereas the gap between them and the rich is ever increasing. In his novel, Langa suggests that this order can only be changed from within as the rich appreciate their privileged situation change must be demanded by the poor majority via exerting pressure:

You can see it in the way this country is shaped. The government will never lift a finger to support the poor. The poor have to apply the pressure – and the heat – or the rich will tighten their hold on the spoils. (Langa 50)

5.5.2 Ethnicity and Race

Racism is another issue addressed by Langa's *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon*, which is closely related to the previous topic of poverty. This relationship emerges from the fact that a person's skin colour is often used as an indicator for its social class:

'They want a chance to move away from poverty, which humiliates them. They look at the social stratifications of Bangula. The whites are still at the top, followed by a layer of Creoles, who are enjoying the benefits of whiteness without the burden of colour. Then you have the blacks at the base of the racial pyramid. (Langa 243)

Langa introduces a racial pyramid of whites, Creoles and blacks in his fictional country Bangula. In contrast to South Africa, the racial tensions are not most prominent between the whites and the blacks, but most struggles for power are happening between Creoles and blacks. The use of allegory within his dystopian novel gave Langa the chance to address racial tensions and at the same time move away from the common disputes between black and white, which are often a problem within South African literature. Additionally, allegory offered him the chance to present racism as a universal problem, rather than simply being a South African problem (Tolsi). Furthermore, Langa does not just criticise the racial pyramid as such, but also the fact that even though blacks are at the bottom of this racial pyramid, they also rule the country. However, by having power and ruling the country, blacks become increasingly similar to their former oppressors:

The blacks see all this, how everyone holds them in utter contempt, something that's made even more bizarre by the notion that they are in power, and all hell breaks loose. Those in power scramble and amass wealth to bring them closer to the former oppressor. Over and over, the old paradigm of power. (Langa 243)

Again, this old paradigm of power refers to the idea of history repeating itself and humankind not learning from its mistakes, which can also be seen in Abioseh's leadership as well as in Dovey's *Blood Kin*. Apart from criticising the fact that this racial pyramid does still exist, Langa's novel raises the issue of racism and people stirring up hatred against each other simply because of their different skin colours:

Many of you will wonder why it's so important to tell you that I'm Creole. The reason is simple. We have these names, these labels, so that we may identify each other and lock each other up in the prison of our fears. (Langa 110)

This clearly shows how race and ethnicity are influencing everyday lives of the people in the novel. Moreover, it becomes apparent that stereotypes and scapegoats are used to make enemies the people's wrath can focus on. This instrument is used to such an extent, that it becomes a mockery of these concepts. Furthermore, Langa also addresses the issue of black people lacking education as a result of their poverty and, therefore, the stories about their people are rarely written from their own perspective:

They're poor; they've never written anything of note that puts them on the map. Ezekiel Manolo is the only voice. But, [...] look at all the studies that have been done about the people of Bangula. Creoles are the ones writing bestsellers about our people. We're not a people but an anthropological study, guppies in a big fish tank, to be studied and interpreted for the world. (Langa 173)

This issue clearly arises from the South African experience, as Langa criticises the fact that it is challenging to describe and talk about South African Literature. The reason is that South African literature in an international context mostly refers to literature written by white South African writers giving their biased perspective on South Africa (Langa in Drew 149).

White writers, no matter how well meaning they may be, cannot fully understand the experience of black South Africans. [...] There has been

an ongoing tension over the question of whether white writers can really represent black characters, and there is a certain resentment by black South African writers of whites who assume they can. (Langa in Drew 149)

The idea of whites not being able to see the world from a black person's perspective, reminds strongly of W.E.B. Du Bois' idea of the veil, which he introduced in his novel *The Souls of Black Folk*. Even though Du Bois' concept deals with African Americans, it can still be applied to South Africa as well and refers to the notion of black people being born within a world dominated by white supremacy. Therefore, they are able to see the world from a white person's perspective, whereas at the same time being shielded by the veil, which makes it impossible for whites to fully comprehend a black persons view of the world. In general, by dealing with this issue in his novel, Langa probably wants to raise people's awareness of the importance of black South African writers as well as the importance of a diversity of perspectives.

5.5.3 Blood Plague

Lastly, besides incorporating issues of race and poverty into his novel, Langa also deals with an illness known as the blood plague. Langa never clearly describes what the illness is or how it spreads, but it seems to be a rapidly spreading and up to now incurable disease that leaves people suffering, vegetating and dying in masses. Considering all of these symptoms and the name of the illness itself, one can easily identify the blood plague as Bangula's representation of HIV and AIDS. Furthermore, Langa uses this topic to harshly criticise and satirise many African leaders' handling of AIDS and their wish for the disease to simply disappear. However, in his novel, Langa takes this wish even a step further, as the leadership of Bangula completely denies the fact the blood plague even exists, as well as not taking any actions against its spreading:

'You go to the market, near Cinnamon Hill,' Abioseh said, 'and look at the human waste there – the youth, some dying from diseases. The blood plague.'

'I need to chip in here,' the Colonel said, pulling rank. 'There's no plague in Bangula. You have a limited outbreak of communicable diseases. The

people dying have turned their back on the principles of sanitation that the rest of the world adheres to.['] (Langa 96)

This example clearly demonstrates Langa's use of satire as the Colonel traces the outbreak of the blood plague back to people's lack of hygiene and claims it to be only a simple communicable disease. He even takes it a step further by relating the blood plague to the idea of the survival of the fittest and attributing it to have a positive cleansing effect on Bangula's populace: "[W]e could also be throwing good money after bad, trying to stem the tide of infections when Nature has decided to curb the population explosion.' (Langa 96) Langa even claims that the way the government of Bangula, and also South Africa, treat the disease can be seen as a violation of human rights:

'What we have here,' he said one morning, 'is a violation of human rights. Health is a human rights' issue. Bangula is not alone in this. But what makes us unique are the unending efforts to justify what cannot be justified.['] (Langa 91)

5.6 Religion and Spirituality

Maybe not as dominant as the topics presented beforehand, but religion and spirituality are topics that are of paramount importance for the plot of the book. Throughout the novel, these two themes have been incorporated into Langa's overtly political story, showing the importance of belief for the people of Bangula throughout all social classes. At the beginning of the novel, we encounter a scene where Hiero becomes witness to a ceremony in which a goat was sacrificed next to a holy tree. This sacrifice should transfer spiritual power onto an earthbound person, namely the Colonel. This particularly strong passage right at the beginning of the novel already sets the scene for the significance accredited to spirituality and also the theme of blood. Going hand in hand with spirituality, also the belief in ancestors and their influence on the present is represented within the novel: "As was known by any African, no matter how brainwashed he or she might have been, ancestors were all round – and their restlessness could cause chaos lasting generations" (Langa 41). The ancestor's spirits are not only believed to be watching over people, but if you kill somebody this person's spirit will stay with you and haunt you until you die. Furthermore,

the novel also addresses the issue of resurrection when Zebulon gets shot during a fight:

Zebulon's body lay in a glass-topped coffin. On either side were another four coffined dead, making up nine, the magical number for Bangula believers in the resurrection of the dead. Reciting age-old praise songs from memory, the poet Ezekiel Manolo predicted the end of the regime. (Langa 266)

This indicates how strongly people believe in the power of the ancestors, as they imagine it to be possible for Zebulon to rise from the dead and become their leader, which he does at the end of the book. Another reoccurring theme throughout Langa's novel is the use of motifs, such as the chameleon or the lizard, which can already be seen in the title of Langa's novel. "The motif of the chameleon relates to human adaptability, whether for self-preservation in its finest sense, or for nefarious anonymity and hypocrisy." (Anonymous 2009) In the novel, this can be seen by the blood plague and other social injustices making it almost impossible for people to survive, as well as the fact that sooner or later the truth will be revealed. Langa often presents these motifs via poems or songs that are interwoven in the story of the novel. The following passage serves as an example for the use of poems or songs. It represents the wish of mankind to hide or adapt when we are confronted with danger:

*What happens when we all see the hidden lion
Don't we wish for the colours of the chameleon?*
(Langa 38; original emphasis)

Besides the motif of the chameleon, also the metaphor of the lizard is used at various points of the novel. The lizard, similar to the snake, can be seen as a representation of the powerful people ruling over the country and, therefore, the death of a lizard represents the Colonel's death:

Jutaita, hopping on one foot, let out a stream of obscenities, kicking the lizard straight into the live coals. The air was immediately filled with the smell of burning flesh. Jutaita, her hands supporting her head, started shouting and calling Jumaima and Josephine.
'Come and see,' she yelled 'Come and see.'
'What?' asked the two old women. Zoya added, 'Yes, *what?*'
'We've burnt a lizard,' Jutaita said. 'Someone big has died.'
(Langa 142; original emphasis)

Contrary to spirituality and the belief in the power of the ancestors, also traditional religion takes up an important place in *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon*. At various points of the novel, Langa cites the Holy Bible and the Old Testament, such as Abioseh swearing to God at his inauguration ceremony. Moreover, the church also occupies a significant position in people's everyday lives, as it tries to help the poor, the ill and the alcohol and drug addicts. These references to spirituality and religion throughout the novel can be clearly identified as references to Africa and South Africa because spirituality and the belief in ancestors, as well as the importance of religion and the various churches is still prevailing in these areas of the world.

5.7 Summary – relation to South Africa

Mandla Langa's *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* takes place on the fictitious, dystopian island of Bangula situated in the Indian Ocean. However, a detailed analysis of the novel has shown that in many ways it offers references to and critique of Langa's home country South Africa. Firstly, the novel deals with the abuse of power by the country's leaders and various other characters' struggles for power. This as such can be seen as a representation of South Africa's corrupt government, which even after the fall of apartheid has not been able to considerably change the lives of the majority of people for the better. Furthermore, the character of Abioseh Gondo shows substantial similarities to South Africa's former president Thabo Mbeki and it seems that Langa used the allegorical style of the novel to criticise him. Secondly, the setting of the novel in Bangula's capital Jambora can be easily identified as Langa's hometown Durban by the description of the town, its surroundings and climate. Moreover, the whole island is embedded within an African context and also Bangula's history and economy provide evidence of the novel actually dealing with South Africa. Thirdly, Langa raised various issues of social injustices that occur within Bangula's society, such as poverty, racism as well as an illness called blood plague. Even without being an expert on South Africa and its literature, one can easily recognise that these topics are not just prevalent in the novel, but allude to social wrongs within South African society. Lastly, the novel also addresses the importance of spirituality and religion for Bangula's population, which again

are also prominent in African and South African societies. Therefore, it can be claimed that Langa's novel represents an excellent critique and analysis of various parts of South African society by making use of allegory. However, the picture he paints is rather bleak, which reaches its peak at the end of the novel leaving open the question of whether Zebulon's tyranny or the cyclone will destroy Bangula first.

6. Alastair Bruce's *Wall of Days* (2011)

6.1 Alastair Bruce

Alastair Bruce was born in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, in 1972 where he spent most of his childhood. After his school years he started doing a science degree at the University of Cape Town, but he soon switched his field of studies to English Literature. At the turn of the century he emigrated to the United Kingdom, where he lives with his wife and daughter. Bruce is now working in the field of electronic publishing and currently writing his second novel. (Bruce 2015)

Wall of Days, Alastair Bruce's debut novel, was first published in South Africa in September 2010 and one year later also released in the United Kingdom and various other countries. Furthermore, the novel was shortlisted for the Newton First Book Award 2011 and the Amazon Rising Stars competition. (Bruce 2015)

6.2 Plot Summary

„It has been raining here for ten years.“ (Bruce 2011: 7) This is the first sentence of Alastair Bruce's novel *Wall of Days* and already gives the reader an insight into the depressing scenery depicted in this bleak dystopian novel. The story is told by Bran, who is the former leader of the colony of Bran, one of the two leftover settlements in the world that was named after him. As a punishment for a crime of which he believes he was made a scapegoat for, Bran was banned from his former settlement. Ever since then, ten years have passed which he has been living in exile on a nameless island. The island is drowning in rain and fog and is eroding inch by inch, day by day. In order to secure his survival Bran has learned to live a frugal life and is keeping a detailed record of the island and its resources. If his measurements are correct, the island will provide him with enough fuel and food for the next 20 years and then he will have to die with it. Bran's lonesome life on the island is clearly structured and dedicated to certain routines that guarantee his survival, until one day a man named Andalus, the former leader of the second known settlement Axum, washes up on the shore.

The appearance of this figure from Bran's past marks the turning point in the story and leads him to travel back to his previous home even though he is awaiting the death penalty there. Andalus' arrival on Bran's island is a violation of Bran's and Axum's peace treaty and needs to be reported, which Bran uses as a justification for his return to his former settlement. However, contrary to Bran's assumption of him being arrested upon arrival, nobody seems to recognise him. He can neither find any familiar faces, nor any evidence of his former regime. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that Bran is not to be trusted and the reader cannot be sure whether Bran's story is true or he is completely insane, which it turns out to be a bit of both. When finally finding Abel, Bran's successor, Bran is being offered a new life in the settlement, but at the cost of letting go of the past and his history. Since he does not want to accept this deal, his decision does not merely entail him being expelled from the settlement again, but also represents the death sentence for Tora, who was his former lover and the mother of his daughter Amhara.

At the end of the novel Bran returns to his island, where he wants to spend the rest of his days in solitude. However, he is being haunted by ghosts of the past and is unable to find his peace. His deep feelings of guilt for what he has done to his people become increasingly apparent and the novel ends with Bran accepting his fate and Bruce implying the question of whether it is acceptable to sacrifice the life of one for the good of many.

6.3 Political Amnesia, Collective Guilt and the TRC

"The complex and possibly irresolvable relationship between individual and collective guilt, and associated tensions between public memory and denial" (Barris 2012a: 46) are the most obvious themes explored in Bruce's *Wall of Days*. Barris (2012a: 47) argues that *collective guilt* can be considered a stratagem, as guilt is a feeling that can generally only be experienced individually. However, the construct of collective guilt applies if a group of individuals share certain features or values, such as for example 'whiteness'. Additionally, he claims it to be appropriate to speak of collective guilt

if a large number of such individuals within a class give public expression either to guilt or remorse, or if private expressions of the same tend to replicate each other to a significant degree. (Barris 2012a: 47)

This use of the term collective guilt can also be applied to collective denial, with reference to anger against the allegation of blame (Barris 2012a: 47). Another term, which is especially important in relation to the novel dealing with public denial of memory, is *political amnesia*. Rogin (105) explains that “[s]ince amnesia means motivated forgetting, it implies a cultural impulse both to have their experience and not to retain it in memory.” This suggests that political amnesia is a social and cultural impulse that makes people actively forget about the past. Political amnesia is not simply about forgetting and denying history, but it also deals with the return of restrained memories and emotions. Nobody wants to be blamed to know about something and deliberately forgetting and denying it because you feel guilty for it. Nevertheless, political amnesia does not disburden the ones who seem to be innocently ignorant and accuse the ones who actively deny; rather it includes all of these forms of denial and neglect (Rogin 105-106).

In his article Barris refers to Samantha Vice’s paper “How Do I Live in This Strange Place?” in which she introduces the concept of *whiteness* and the accompanied challenge of moral being in post-apartheid South Africa. Vice “discusses the concept of ‘whiteness’ as a property in which the epistemic centrality of being white is assumed without question, and in fact without insight” (Barris 2012a: 48). She argues that being white is an invisible global norm and can be seen as a standard that is working in the background. It is just the way things are and, therefore, constitutes an inherent advantage and rightness to people with white coloured skin, against which ‘non-whites’ are being measured. This advantage, however, is invisible to them and, consequently, not acknowledged as an advantage at all, as it is just how things are. It is a white person’s blind spot to understand its whiteness. The main question Vice asks is how and at what moral cost South Africans can bear their whiteness, since their identity is closely linked to the structural oppression of apartheid (Barris 2012a: 46-48 and Vice 324-325).

Barris connects Vice's idea of whiteness to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (hereafter TRC) because the latter was generally interpreted "as a partial solution to the difficulty of being white while occupying moral low ground, and to the disruption of whiteness that this implies" (Barris 2012a: 48). The TRC's aim was to create a spectacle and thereby purge individual guilt, which meant that individual guilt was transferred to collective guilt and exculpation. This was done by adopting the Christian methods of confession and absolution and using it for the legal device of amnesty (Barris 2012a: 48). Moreover, Young (148) claims that

[t]he choice of Archbishop Tutu as Chairperson (and therefore the addressee of every testimony) is in itself suggestive of a confessional, and the practice of beginning the hearings with prayer, and in particular, the first hearing with a eucharist, takes this further.

One of the main difficulties for white South Africans was certainly the disruption of whiteness and as a consequence thereof, the interruption of passive complicity and possibly even wilful blindness. However, the confession of these atrocities at the TRC hearings cannot be compared to redemption, "nor does the confession of individual guilt do justice (in both senses of the word) to the more complex problem of collective guilt" (Barris 2012a: 48). Furthermore,

[o]ne might also ask if the ritual of absolution enacted by the TRC had the unintended consequence of either justifying political amnesia by restricting the stain of transgression to a few isolated individuals, or by giving a platform to its advocates (Barris 2012a: 48).

In how far these tensions between individual and collective guilt, as well as public memory and denial are thematised in Alastair Bruce's *Wall of Days*, will be explored in the following sections.

6.3.1 Political Amnesia and Collective Guilt

The two terms political amnesia, a motivated forgetting, and collective guilt, a guiltiness shared by a group of people, are closely linked to each other, because political amnesia can be seen as a result of collective guilt. When reading *Wall of Days*, both these topics become apparent and have received significant attention by various reviewers.

However, before actually dealing with how collective guilt and political amnesia are represented within the novel, there is another topic, which both these concepts are closely related to and dependent on, namely memory. Without a memory of a certain event, story or history, there is no need for it to be forgotten or to feel guilty about. In *Wall of Days*, Bran can be described as an advocate for the importance of memory and history, whether it is his own or the history of his people, which are closely related, too. Especially in the beginning of the novel when the reader does not yet know about Bran's past he already seems to be obsessed with history and the desire to leave a legacy. However, he is also torn between whether or not this seemingly unimportant history will ever be of interest to future generations. This struggle is depicted in the beginning of the novel, when Bran tells the story of his arrival on the island and his initial urge to name the island, but dismisses the idea because he thinks that "[a] name for a place without a history would be pointless." (Bruce 2011: 21) Even though he thinks that the island does not have an important history, he still wants to record every little detail about the island and fill his life in exile with useful activities: "It may be a small thing on a small island in a forgotten part of the world, but I will leave a legacy, I will leave a history of this place." (Bruce 2011: 15) Furthermore, this desire to leave a legacy cannot just be seen during Bran's life in exile, but becomes even stronger when he returns to his former home. He wants the people of Bran to recognise him and either appreciate what he has done for them, or arrest and execute him:

This is not what I expected at all. Not recognised in the street, not recognised by the new Marshal, who registered no surprise or concern at the news of Andalus. No second glances. I have not been accosted or arrested. I have not planned for this. (Bruce 2011: 101)

Bran is devastated by the fact that people do not recognise him and, even worse, do not care about him and deny he has ever existed and played a role in their history. As he does not want to accept this, he begins to tell people, such as Elba, his story and asks them whether or not they know who he is.

‘Do you know who I am?’

She looks at me with what I think is a smile on her face. ‘I have never known you.’

It is a rather strange reply. I wonder briefly if she might be flirting. I try again, 'I don't look familiar to you?'

'I am sure I would not have forgotten you.' (Bruce 2011: 112)

Elba's answer of having never known Bran is in fact rather strange and a strong indicator of political amnesia. She denies Bran's existence, or at least the person he claims to be, not just in the present, but also in the past and the future. The fact that the people of Bran will never want to remember Bran is depicted in another conversation with Elba:

'You say we are the ones *deliberately forgetting you*, wiping you out but can you really be sure it is not you who is making all this up? Are you certain the story you tell is true? [...] [Y]ou cannot reasonably explain why a whole town would have conspired to cover up the existence of two men, a woman and an entire history.'

'I cannot explain yet why you have chosen this path. That is why I would like your help.'

'What answer do you want, Bran? What answer is there to give? *You can never know us again.*' She closes her eyes for a second, as if she has said something wrong.

'*You said again. You do know me.*' (Bruce 2011: 173-174; emphasis added)

On the one hand, this passage refers directly to political amnesia and the people of Bran intentionally forgetting their past. Furthermore, this also indicates that depending on your perspective there are always different versions of the past and there can never be something such as a general truth for everybody. On the other hand, it also shows the people's strong will to not just forget their past, but also to prohibit it from returning into their memory for ever. However, Bran does not want to give up and accept the amnesia of his former community. Therefore, he wants to force the 'truth', that is his version of it, out of the people of Bran: "I will get to the truth. I will force it out of these people one way or the other. I will force them to acknowledge me" (Bruce 2011: 164). Bran wants to achieve this by looking for evidence that verifies the story of him being the former leader of the settlement Bran. When he breaks into Abel's house, he finds a letter from his former lover Tora, which is addressed to him:

'Dear Bran, You should understand.' That line has been crossed out. It continues: 'There is a chasm between what we have been and what we want to be.' (Bruce 2011: 176)

Even though this note is an indicator that Bran is not insane, but actually tells the truth, it also reflects people's feelings of guilt and their wish to forget the past. The chasm Tora addresses is the time that lies between the past and the present, which is also represented in the title of the novel *Wall of Days*, namely an insurmountable barrier of time that keeps him and his people apart. Another piece of evidence Bran finds, is a portrait of himself that was painted when he was still Marshal of the town, which he thinks will force people to acknowledge him. The last piece of evidence Bran wanted to find was destroyed during his absence. It is a plaque with the names of the Marshals of Bran, but Bran's name has been changed to Madara, which again refers to the motivated forgetting. In this case, it goes even further as it is not just an instance of forgetting, but also about changing a people's history:

And if the decision was taken to expunge the name of a Marshal convicted of wrongdoing, why replace my name with a fictional one? No matter what they thought of me, they cannot forget my achievements. And besides, *they all know they are guilty too*. Yes I was banished but out of guilt, not hatred. (Bruce 2011: 141; emphasis added)

This passage shows how Bran struggles with his own guilt, as he does not want to take the blame completely on himself, but claims that all the people of Bran were guilty. They, too, are culprits killing numerous old and ill people in order to survive because they supported Bran and his decisions as a Marshal. Moreover, this example demonstrates how well Bruce depicts the tensions between individual and collective guilt, but he also shows how closely related collective guilt and complicity are. An in-depth analysis of the novel's concern with the latter will be given in section 5.3.2. However, as already mentioned, this passage is not just about guilt, but also shows the "fervent desire among those currently in power in the settlement to expunge the inconvenient past - to re-write history, in fact to de-historicise" (Thurman 2011). Here, Bruce raises the question of how a society should deal with its history if it puts a burden on the present:

'You think we should keep telling ourselves the stories that frighten us?' [...]

'Why should you be afraid of it? The past has as much power over you as you allow it. Punish if you like. Crucify if you must. Burn the guilty and throw their ashes to the wind, blacken their names and cast out their

families. Do not sweep under the carpet. Avenge guilt and move on. Even the guilty deserve to be remembered, deserve the status of being guilty.' (Bruce 2011: 151-152)

Throughout the book it is quite easy to discern what the author's suggested answer to that question might be. At various passages in the novel, Bruce refers to the importance of not being afraid, but rather acknowledging one's history no matter how bleak it might be, which can be seen in Bran arguing that even the guilty have a right to be remembered. Furthermore, the novel implies that political amnesia and forgetting can be seen as weakness:

They seem to be trying to forget. That would be a tragedy. It is only the weak who forget their past. [...] Only a weak people forgets its past, a nation that can be wiped out and restarted without anyone noticing. In place of a history, only a silence with no one to hear it. A pathetic people and if that is what they choose then they deserve what comes to them. (Bruce 2011: 155)

It does not only take guilt, but also a certain kind of weakness and fear to deliberately forget your past. Instead of accepting the mistakes made in the past and learning from them, people chose the easy way and simply erased their memories, which is an idea Bruce seems to condemn. This topic is highly relevant as it is not just fictional and occurs in *Wall of Days*, but also refers to everyday life. As Bruce grew up and studied in South Africa, the links to this country and its history of apartheid are apparent. However, the resonance of the novel is much broader than that. Every country and society has dark spots in their history, of which they are not proud and would like to forget. Austria, too, serves as a great example of collective guilt, as some people still feel guilty for their complicity during the Second World War and only at the end of the 20th century started to reappraise their role in history, which had a serious impact on the country's national identity. Lastly, it can be said that *Wall of Days* clearly refuses the idea of political amnesia and highlights the importance of recognising our history. The fact that national identities and values, influencing every individual, develop out of history only underlines the importance of *Wall of Day's* message: "Even if you hate the name and what it stands for, at least recognise it, stare it in the face." (Bruce 2011: 141)

6.3.2 Complicity

The theme of complicity can be encountered throughout *Wall of Days* as it is closely related to the topics of individual and collective guilt, as well as political amnesia. However, as it plays such a significant role in the novel it should also be addressed separately in order to conceive its full impact.

During his time as the leader of the settlement famine was a big issue hence, Bran had to devise a plan how to save his people from starvation. At that time he developed the so called Programme, which classified people into three groups based on whether or not they were capable to fulfil their function within society. The majority of the people were seen fit to contribute to the needs of the settlement and therefore were put in class A. People that were ruled to be temporarily incapable of providing value to the whole were classified as a B, while people who were no longer able to work belonged into class C and should soon be executed:

It never struck me as a particularly original idea. Erase the weak for the sake of the strong. Sometimes the best ideas are so simple they feel as if they've been tried before. But it was an idea required for the times. It was our duty to ourselves to adopt it. (Bruce 2011: 83)

In this passage of Bran's thoughts the barbaric and brutal idea of the Programme becomes evident. Bran's Programme seems to be similar to Darwin's *Survival of the Fittest*, however, taking it a step further and carefully choosing the weak links of society and eliminating them. Furthermore, Bran also refers to a certain kind of duty, which did not just apply to him, but all the people of Bran, in order to guarantee their survival. Bran uses this denoted duty to justify the atrocities he and his people committed and, further, also to purge him of his guilt. From his perspective, all of the people of Bran are complicit of these atrocities:

I wanted to ask my accusers how they could accuse me when *it was their support that enabled me to carry out my duty*. I wanted to point to them and say, 'You! You are in the dock too!' I wanted to shame them, to make them know their guilt, to tell them, taking their hands, 'See! You too have hands drenched in blood.' (Bruce 2011: 61; emphasis added)

Bran is well aware of what he did and how horrible his decisions were, but even though he feels guilty he still claims it was his duty, which he had to carry out for the greater good. Furthermore, he highlights that while he is guilty of these atrocities, the inhabitants of the settlement supported his decisions. Therefore, they are complicit of accepting and implementing the rules of the Programme, which makes them just as guilty of these deaths as Bran himself. Yet, this is only Bran's perspective on the past. Abel, the current leader of Bran, has a completely different view on the alleged history of Bran and its people's complicity:

We have allowed you to be part of the present and the future of this town but that too is not enough. Instead you must have forgiveness as well. For what? For the story of your past? A past that implicates this town? Forgive you? *Why would we forgive you if it makes us guilty?* (Bruce 2011: 199; emphasis added)

The people of Bran do not regard themselves responsible for what has happened in the past and, therefore, actively forget and deny their history. Moreover, they do not want to forgive Bran, as forgiving him would necessitate a confession of their own guilt.

Taking the topic of complicity even further, Barris (2012a: 53) claims that a differentiation can be made between being actively and passively complicit. *Wall of Days* introduces a system of murder in order to stop the starvation of people due to an ecological crisis and can therefore be regarded as an active participant in the wrongdoings of society. However, the novel examines the "interactions with people who do not necessarily share an active history as perpetrators, but can be seen either as beneficiaries, or as minor players in the oppressive system" (Barris 2012a: 53) Furthermore, he argues that the position of people being passively complicit becomes more complex when a state transitions from being abusive to humane (Barris 2012a: 53). This does not just refer to the settlement of Bran in the novel, but also to reality in the case of South Africa.

Throughout the novel, Bran claims that his actions as a leader of Bran are not to be evaluated in moral terms as they arose from his position as an authority. Yet,

[a]s the narrative progresses, that denial becomes hollow; it becomes evident that he is complicit in the suffering not only of his supposed political enemies or his bewildered flock of survivors, but also of the woman he claims to have loved. (Thurman 2011)

Thurman's argument introduces a new perspective on Bran's complicity, as he is not just complicit of hurting and extinguishing his people, but also of his former lover's suffering. As the novel is told in the first person voice, the reader hardly gets an insight into the complicity of single characters apart from Bran himself. However, there is one character in the novel that Bran describes in detail and also engages in her role as a bystander and supporter of his Programme, namely his former lover Tora. As the inventor of the Programme, Bran was responsible for the murder of Tora's mother, who woke up paralysed from a stroke one day. In fact, it was Tora who betrayed her mother and Bran who took care of her execution personally. Nonetheless, Tora stayed by his side until he was banned from the settlement and refused to talk to him about her loss. When Bran returns to the settlement he wonders if Tora will recognise him:

She cannot have forgotten. No one forgets a man who shared your bed for near half a lifetime. No one forgets a man who provided for you. No one forgets a man who ordered your sole surviving relative to be hanged. She forgave me for that. She had to. It was written in statutes. Besides, it was she who came to tell me of her mother's incapacity, she who stood aside for the hangman. I forgave her for that. I had to. It was me who forced her to abandon her mother, forced her to betray the one she loves. I did not think about why she had done it. It was what everyone did. (Bruce 2011: 116)

This passage indicates how Tora and also the people of Bran just blindly followed the Programme and the accompanying rules. They just did what they had to do, no matter if that meant sacrificing their own mother for the alleged good of the community. Nevertheless, Bruce (Barris 2012b: 121) claims that even though Tora is a character of complicity it is a bit more complicated with her as it is almost impossible to separate her figure from Bran's narration of it, as well as Bran uses her as a stage on which he can act out his quest for salvation. Albeit Bran being the inventor of the Programme, he admits that the idea behind it was dreadful, but still claims it was essential for their survival: "No one really could approve, besides madmen, but we all knew it was necessary" (Bruce 2011: 48). By using the theme of complicity, Bruce tries to galvanise

people to critically reflect on what is happening in the world and to not just tolerate everything because you might be afraid of the consequences. The main rhetorical question that arises from this novel is whether it is ever acceptable to sacrifice the life of one for the good of many.

6.3.3 References to South Africa: TRC and Myths

When Bran leaves his exile and reappears in his former community, people do not remember him and even deny that he has ever existed, which is a strong indicator of political amnesia and collective guilt. Even though there is no direct reference to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), *Wall of Days* still clearly hints towards the political experience and history of South Africa (Barris 2012b: 119).

A reference to the TRC can be seen at various points of the novel, but especially when Bruce gives insights into Bran's trial:

It was an unusual court case. Not strictly fair. I was allowed a defence but I was condemned months before the trial began. I knew I would not walk out of there free. The numbers against the Programme had grown too rapidly. There was anger. (Bruce 2011: 61)

Even though this passage shows parallels to the hearings of the TRC that took place in South Africa, they cannot be treated equally to the trial in *Wall of Days*. Bruce (in Barris 2012b: 120) also confirms this and claims that:

[w]hat occurs at Bran's trial is not what happened at the TRC. It is a trial after all. Likewise the process of deliberate forgetting of history, which seems to have taken place at the settlement, is not the same process as the TRC nor as what South Africa has been through since. The deposing of tyrants [...] and the erasure of their legacy is not peculiar to South Africa.

Bruce's comment shows that it was not his main objective to write a novel focussing on what happened at the TRC hearings. Nevertheless, he admits that the themes of apartheid and particularly individual and collective guilt are consistently present throughout the novel and, therefore, similarities between the TRC hearings and the trial in *Wall of Days* can be identified (in Barris 2012b: 120):

[A] paradoxical point of similarity with actual historical experience lies in the scapegoating of Bran, rendering him as the isolated rotten apple who thereby shields the collective from owning their complicity. (Barris 2012a: 51)

Contrary to South Africa, where people were more or less exonerated from their guilt by the TRC, Bran “walks into a wall of denial because the guilt that he wishes to inscribe into public memory would be intolerable to the collective” (Barris 2012a: 47). Bran’s community does not want to free him from his blame because that would make them plead themselves guilty, which was already dealt with in detail in section 6.3.2. Another important difference is that in *Wall of Days* it is the leaders who deny the process of public memory (Barris 2012a: 51).

Apart from references to the TRC, there are also other instances in the novel that relate to South Africa’s history. One of these references is the motto of the settlement Bran: “In unity, strength” (Bruce 2011: 140), which refers back to the era of apartheid and the highly ironic motto of the Republic of South Africa, which was ‘Ex unitate vires’ (Barris 2012b: 119). Another reference to South Africa’s history is represented by the Adamastor myth and Table Mountain (Barris 2012a 52). There are many versions of the myth of Adamastor, which has its origin in a story by the Portuguese poet Camoens written in the 1500s. Camoens claims that when Vasco da Gama and his fleet arrived at the Cape an enormous dark cloud in the shape of a human figure appeared and accused them of venturing into the seas. Furthermore, it augured that anyone who dared coming to the Cape of Storms would be attacked by disaster. The monster was Adamastor, who wanted to overthrow the gods in classical myth and, therefore, was punished by them and metamorphosed into a mountain in order to guard over Cape Point and the Southern Seas (Cyber Cape Town). A similar version of this myth is incorporated into Bruce’s novel, which links it more closely to South Africa and its history:

There is a myth in my land. One of the ancient gods – we no longer believe in gods – was banished by the council of the Heavens. His crime dissent. He sailed for weeks to the ends of the earth. When he finally found land he remained there for the rest of his days, hurling thunderbolts and storms at passing ships. When he died his petrified remains became a mountain on whose peak was engraved the visage of

the god, serving as a warning, a curse, that all who gaze on it will too become stone in an unfamiliar land. (Bruce 2011: 46)

Bruce also tells the story of another myth. It is the myth of a former king who dies on the battlefield and gets his head cut off by his countrymen. The severed head is put on a spike gazing out to the sea to repel invaders (Bruce 2011: 46). In a way this myth is similar to the first of Adamastor, as they both refer to certain objects protecting the country from harm. At the end of the novel, Bran somehow recreates this second myth after finding a prehistoric body on the island, which he plants outside his cave as a totem to protect him from anything bad. Even though nobody will see it, Bran takes pride in this action and “envisions himself as a human deity, sacrificing himself for the collective good” (Thurman 2011). By introducing these two myths, Bruce also makes a statement about the importance of memory and history, as we can always learn from them. The following passage might also be seen as a request towards South Africans to take pride in their national identity and learn from their history:

[T]hese stories, still told sometimes, are indicative of who we are as a people; both our sense of duty and respect and our pride and determination never to be defeated. [...] They speak of rejection and veneration, of how easily things can turn. Two faces staring out to sea. One will avenge, the other protect. (Bruce 2011: 47)

Apart from the references to the TRC and South African myths, also the depicted landscape of the novel alludes to it being inspired by South Africa. When asked about whether the island as well as the location of the settlement were completely fictional, Bruce claimed that whereas the island is located in the northern hemisphere, the landscape around the settlement is rather inspired by South African regions such as the Western Cape and little Karoo (Bruce in Anonymous April 2015).

6.4 References to Other Texts

When reading *Wall of Days*, it becomes evident that Bruce uses various references to other literary texts, such as Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, Coetzee's *Foe* or Kafka's *The Penal Colony* and *The Castle*. Especially in the first part of the book when Bran is still on his exile island these references are extremely

prominent. Bruce claims that the islands of Coetzee's *Cruso* and Defoe's *Crusoe* inspired him for different reasons and the island he invented can be seen somewhere in between these two. On the one hand, *Robinson Crusoe* is a story known by almost anyone that just comes up when thinking about uninhabited islands, whereas on the other hand, Bruce thought that the idea of *Cruso* not cultivating Coetzee's island, but instead laying out stones on fields was very interesting (Bruce in Barris 2012b: 118):

[E]very day at dusk I would take a stone about three times the size of my fist and place it in an area of the grasslands where little that is edible grows. The day after I'd place one next to it. After a row of thirty I'd start another. Thirty-one rows, the last with just seventeen stones in it. Each day for nine hundred and seventeen days. And now each day I go back. It does not look like many. (Bruce 2011: 16)

This passage demonstrates how Bruce adopts Coetzee's idea and also incorporates a field of stones into his novel. However, this stone field has a deeper meaning in *Wall of Days* as each stone stands for one person killed by the Programme and, therefore, is an indicator for Bran's guilt and his sense of memorising the dead. Barris (2012b: 118) also states that another similarity between *Cruso* and Bran is that they both seem to be satisfied with their life on the island, but as the novel continues are discovered to be anything but. Furthermore, Bran enjoys to name, map and categorise the island and everything that grows and lives on it, even though, he appears to do this more as a matter of understanding and controlling his fate than a concern to increase his crop and riches, which becomes evident in the following passage:

My calculations prove I have at most twenty years left on this island and at least count there were one hundred and thirty-three trees. (Bruce 2011:8) When I arrived the island was larger in circumference, about eighteen miles. I have lost three miles in ten years. If it continues at the same rate the island will last another fifteen years. But it won't. [...] The cliffs are disappearing more quickly now than ten years ago, more quickly today than yesterday. [...] It will disappear one day and then I must go too, if I have not gone already. The end of both our histories. (Bruce 2011: 14-15)

Another parallel between *Wall of Days* and *Robinson Crusoe* is represented by the figure of Andalus, a castaway who just like Friday is silenced:

‘Hello’, I try again. My voice is coming back. ‘I am Bran. I live on this island. What is your name?’ He is still looking at me but says nothing. ‘Who are you? How did you come here?’ I feel myself growing annoyed at the silence. (Bruce 2011: 34)

Even though there is this parallel of muteness, Andalus can rather be seen as an exaggerated and almost satirical alter ego of Bran. Moreover, as long as Andalus is recognised as a ‘real’ person by the reader he is proof that Bran’s story is true. He represents a promise of truth, which he is not able to keep. Andalus is contingent on Bran’s imagination and will, but at the same time epitomises the void at the centre of Bran’s story (Barris 2012b: 122).

Apart from allusions to *Robinson Crusoe* and *Foe*, Bruce also refers to Kafka’s *In the Penal Colony*. He claims (in Barris 2012b: 118) that “[t]he rational brutality of the killing machine and the prophecy on the tombstone of the old commandant are themes explored in the novel”. Additionally, it is apparent that Kafka’s allegorical style influenced *Wall of Days*, as well as the reader gets reminded of Kafka’s *The Castle* by the labyrinth of denial Bran is confronted with (Barris 2012b: 121).

6.5 Environment

Even though it is evident that themes such as political amnesia, collective guilt and complicity were Bruce’s main aim when writing *Wall of Days*, there is still another prevailing topic in the novel, namely climate change and the environment. One indicator for environmental problems and the change of climate can be seen in the two very contrary worlds depicted in the novel. On the one hand, Bran’s exile island is a place distinguished by its relentless rain, barren land and absence of sunshine:

It has been raining here for ten years. I keep an accurate record of time and can state this with no fear of contradiction. There have been whole days when it hasn’t rained and most days it stops for a few hours. But these are pauses in a relentless fall that promises to one day submerge this island. (Bruce 2011: 7)

On the other hand, the settlement of Bran is placed on an island that is desert-like and completely dry, the only similarity between the two islands is their infertility of land. This infertility caused the people of Bran and Axum to conduct

wars over their resources in order to guarantee their survival and consequently, this led to the invention of the Programme. The idea for this is not purely fictional, but arises from reality as

disputes over the world's resources have become more prevalent and will probably become even more so. The wars and the Programme of the novel are fictional depictions of a dispute over resources and a solution reached through, it seems, desperation. The brutality of the solution lies at the heart of Bran's struggle for redemption. (Bruce in Barris 2012b: 119)

Apart from dealing with problems of climate change and the resulting infertility of land as well as disputes over resources, there is one passage in the novel where Bran tells the story of an alleged myth from the past of his people:

A story I have heard tells of a black smoke covering the earth. People were born in it, breathed it, died in it. It went on for so long people forgot why it was there, if they ever knew in the first place. Many lived underground, became smaller, nourished by roots and foul soil. Slowly they started coming out. Some died trapped between the dark air and the suffocating earth. I pictured them with their legs held in soil, their arms lifted to the sky. Others woke and in the grey light the earth began to move. But it is just a story. (Bruce 2011: 16)

This myth can be interpreted as a critique on the environmental pollution and the way we live now. It might be an exaggerated warning of what might happen if people do not change their thinking and behaviour. The black smoke the author refers to can easily be read as a symbol of air pollution caused by emissions every day, which is already visible in the cities through smog. Even though Bruce claims that the novel is not about global warming and environmental problems, he at the same time exerts critique on these themes by using them as a device to construct a world his story takes place in.

6.6 Summary – relation to South Africa

Alastair Bruce's novel *Wall of Days* takes place in a dystopian, post-apocalyptic world in the future. Albeit this description of the novel does not promise to have considerable relevance for the real world, a close reading of it has shown how the novel relates to South Africa and its history of apartheid in various ways. Firstly, the novel's story deals with a tyrannical leader, who imposes a system of

homicide upon his people, which he claims to be necessary for their survival. Therefore, the resulting collective guilt and political amnesia strongly link the novel to South Africa's past and present. These two themes run through the story like a common thread and it becomes apparent that Bruce points towards the importance of not running away and forgetting about one's history, no matter how bleak it might be, but rather looking it in the eye and learning from one's mistakes. Secondly, just like Dovey's *Blood Kin*, also *Wall of Days* addresses the topic of complicity and people being bystanders in oppressive regimes. However, contrary to Dovey, Bruce does not explore this topic from various points of view, but introduces one main character as a bystander of the regime. This bystander is represented by the figure of Tora, who stands behind Bran's system even after he murdered her mother. Furthermore, the trials taking place in the novel, as well as Bran's longing for absolution and redemption represent a strong similarity to the hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission after the fall of apartheid. The main difference being that the people of Bran do not want to forgive their former leader, as it would make themselves guilty, which interrelates the TRC to the topic of complicity. Thirdly, there are various other instances in *Wall of Days*, which suggest that the novel is actually not only fictional, but also refers to and has relevance for South Africa. Examples for this are the myth of Adamastor, the usage of the same motto of the former Republic of South Africa for the colony of Bran, as well as the countryside and climate of Bran being similar to South Africa's desert-like areas.

7. Conclusion

The analysis of the three novels has shown that even though they are supposedly set in a fictitious country, each of them has strong references to South Africa, whether they may be to the country's cities and landscape, history, politics or people's post-apartheid feelings of guilt. The references are diverse, however, they suggest that the novels' implications are far wider than one suspects for a fictional novel, as the authors do not simply refer to South Africa, but in various ways level criticism at the government and their handling of certain social issues.

The analysis of the novels has revealed that there is one topic, which is situated at the heart of all three novels, namely the abuse of power. Dovey's *Blood Kin* starts off with a coup d'état and the overthrow of a tyrannical leader, however, revealing that his successor is his spitting image and compromises his own principles as soon as he gains power. *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* also deals with the takeover from a despotic regime. Even though the Colonel introduced the Reform and pretended things to have changed, the reader gets to know that in fact nothing has changed for the majority of the population, since it is still suppressed and living in poverty. Just like the other two, also *Wall of Days* is dealing with an overthrow of government after Bran misused his power as a leader and killed hundreds of his people and as a result is forced into exile. The sense that nothing has changed and history is repeating itself is closely related to the leaders of these regimes misusing their power. Here, analysis has shown that all three authors do not simply invent despotic regimes and, thereby, refer to and criticise South Africa's past and present government, but much more they are painting a bleak picture for the future of this country if there will not be made any considerable changes.

Another topic that has turned out to be of great importance within South African dystopian novels is complicity. Especially *Wall of Days* and *Blood Kin* are dealing with this topic claiming that everybody in society is complicit of the atrocities committed through tyranny, as we are bystanders of the system and as long as we do not act against it, we accept it. Bruce takes this train of thought even further, by not simply dealing with complicity, but also introducing

the closely related concepts of political amnesia and collective guilt. These concepts imply that not only single people, but also a community or at least a part of it feels so guilty for past atrocities, such as apartheid, that they experience collective guilt, which furthermore can lead to political amnesia and the active act of forgetting and denying. All of these themes of complicity, political amnesia and collective guilt can be identified as a critique on how South Africa is dealing with its history of apartheid.

Besides the three novels thematically referring to South Africa, all three authors managed to create a fictitious world that in many ways is similar to their home country. Langa clearly situates *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* in his hometown Durban, which is made apparent by the way he describes the city itself, as well as its surroundings and climate. Out of the three novels, his references in terms of the setting are the most obvious ones. However, also Dovey and Bruce place their novels in countries similar to South Africa in terms of their landscape, nature and climate. Due to these similarities it becomes evident that the authors intentionally designed their fictional settings so that they are perceived as a resemblance to South Africa and not to leave room for speculation with regard to the setting.

All of these examples have proven that contemporary South African dystopian novels are not only fictional stories of imaginary worlds and their leaders, but actually entail more than just a germ of truth, as they refer to South Africa's history, politics and society in various ways.

8. Appendix

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8.2 Abstracts

8.2.1 English Abstract

Throughout the last decades, South Africa's literary output has been vastly dominated by historical novels, dealing with the country's past of colonialism and apartheid. Dystopian novels, which are set in a non-existent 'bad' place, have only played a minor role, but became increasingly popular after the fall of apartheid. Because of their minor importance, they did not attract most critics' attention, as their allegedly fictional worlds are not seen to be contributing to the country's account for the past. However, this thesis explores in how far contemporary South African dystopian novels are not just representations of fictitious worlds, but actually refer to South Africa and its history, politics and society. An in-depth analysis of Ceridwen Dovey's *Blood Kin*, Mandla Langa's *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* and Alastair Bruce's *Wall of Days* will show how much truth and critique is incorporated within these novels. The analysis also displays the authors' predicted outlook on South Africa's future, which entails a purport of hopelessness and fear.

8.2.2 German Abstract

In den letzten Jahrzehnten wurde die südafrikanische Literatur maßgebend von Geschichtsromanen, die sich mit der Geschichte des Kolonialismus und der Apartheid des Landes beschäftigen, dominiert. Dystopische Romane, welche in einem nicht existierenden 'schlechten' Ort eingebettet sind, spielten daher nur eine geringe Rolle, erfreuten sich jedoch nach dem Fall der Apartheid zunehmender Beliebtheit bei Südafrikas Autorenschaft. Diese Romane erregen nur selten die Aufmerksamkeit von Literaturkritikern, da ihnen aufgrund dieser vermeintlich rein fiktiven Welten die auf den ersten Blick nichts zur Bewältigung der Vergangenheit beitragen nur eine geringe Tragweite zugeschrieben wird. Das Ziel dieser Diplomarbeit ist es jedoch, diese ihnen zugeschriebene unbedeutende Rolle in der Vergangenheitsbewältigung zu widerlegen und zu beweisen, dass zeitgenössische südafrikanische dystopische Romane sich sehr wohl mit der Geschichte, Politik und Gesellschaft Südafrikas beschäftigen. Eine

tiefgehende Analyse von Ceridwen Dovey's *Blood Kin*, Mandla Langa's *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* und Alastair Bruce's *Wall of Days* zeigt wie viel Wahrheit und Kritik wirklich in diesen Romanen steckt. Letztlich enthüllt die Analyse dieser Werke auch den von den Autoren prognostizierten Werdegang Südafrikas, welcher ein Bild von Hoffnungslosigkeit und Angst zu vermitteln scheint.

8.3 Curriculum Vitae

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