

Reassessing Thematic Crossings between  
South Africa and Nigeria: Postcolonial  
Leadership and Power in Mandla Langa’s  
*The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* and  
Helon Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel*  
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**Abstract:** While Chris Dunton has described Nigeria and South Africa as the two powerhouses of African fiction, their literatures have, for evident historical reasons, followed distinct trajectories. Thus far, little critical attention has been paid to comparing theorisations of contemporary South African and Nigerian novels. This article aims to contribute to re-enlivening the sorely lacking dialogue between the countries’ literatures by providing a comparative reading of Mandla Langa’s *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* and Helon Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel*. I argue that Langa’s allegorical novel dispenses with the idea of South African exceptionalism by exploring the lust for power in the postcolony. In particular, his representation of the postcolonial ruling class establishes an intertextual dialogue with writing from elsewhere on the continent. *Waiting for an Angel*, while engaging with post-colonial military dictatorships during the mid-1980s and 1990s in Nigeria, is also noteworthy for invoking a sense of placelessness and, therefore, offers itself for a comparative analysis. Relating the novels to their literary antecedents as well as to recent theorisations of third-generation Nigerian fiction and the post-apartheid novel, I suggest that their reflections on postcolonial leadership unsettle the boundaries of national literatures and invoke a sense of continental connectivity.

**Keywords:** post-apartheid novel; third-generation Nigerian fiction; comparative literature; postcolonial power and leadership; postcolonial utopia; Mandla Langa; Helon Habila

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## **Introduction: South Africa and the Wider Field of African Literature**

In a special issue of the South African journal *Current Writing* published in 1999, J. U. Jacobs acknowledges that “for historical reasons, South African writing and its reception [during apartheid had] been largely divorced from other African literatures and the debates around them” (i). The theme of that issue, “Return to Africa,” reflects its underlying objective to “try and re-situate South African literature in the larger context of African writing” (i). However, this aim turns out to be merely an initial step towards establishing a new field of comparative scholarship. While a new body of comparative scholarship dedicated to the study of South-South relations and migratory processes represented in works of fiction has begun to emerge, this mainly centres on the Indian Ocean world and India in particular.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the link between South African literature and other African literatures appears to be taking a good deal longer to forge.

Historically speaking, the gulf between South African literature and writing from elsewhere on the continent widened during the post-independence era of many African countries, when African writers felt propelled to voice their disillusionment and feeling of betrayal by the postcolonial leadership. This setting-in of post-independence seemed to diminish the future prospects of writers from independent African countries. South African writers, in contrast, had not yet experienced similar disillusionment and could still imagine a better future after apartheid. In his 1967 essay “The Writer in an African State,” Wole Soyinka notes that South African authors—given the dire political circumstances—could still rightfully infuse their writing with the hope for a better future, while the “non South African writer” no longer had this opportunity (11).

With the demise of apartheid in 1994, South African authors and critics began to envisage new possible trajectories for literary activity in South Africa. Mbulelo Mzamane, for example, predicted the appearance of a “honeymoon literature” similar to the literature produced in the aftermath of independence in other African countries (Mzamane qtd. in Hacksley and Solberg 80). While Mzamane drew a parallel to the conventional trajectory of African literature, Jabulani Mkhize aptly pointed out that “[w]hat Mzamane does not say . . . though it is a prominent feature of ‘post-colonial’ African literature which he uses as his model, is that ‘honeymoon literature’ could, depending on the performance of the government, soon be superseded by a literature of disillusionment” (176). Indeed, the euphoria about the new nation, prominently expressed in André Brink’s collection *SA 27 April 1994*, which details the personal experience of various authors on election day as well as the reconciliatory thrust of some literature of the 1990s, soon died off in the face of continuing and new inequalities and was superseded by a wave of considerably more disillusioned accounts.<sup>2</sup> As Rita Barnard maintains, it was particularly during the era of Thabo Mbeki’s presidency that a new “mood” set in, which gave rise to the “more disenchanting writing that has emerged in the new millennium” (652). With reference to Chris van Wyk’s neglected allegorical novel *The Year of the Tapeworm* (1996), Barnard further observes that “South Africa has not proven immune to the troubles of other African post-colonies: a grasping national bourgeoisie, dangerous forms of ethnic assertion, dire poverty and mismanaged disease” (653).

Referring to novels by Nadine Gordimer, Zakes Mda, J. M. Coetzee, André Brink, Ahmed Essop, Mike Nicol, Phaswane Mpe, Christopher Hope, and Achmat Dangor, Evan Maina Mwangi similarly observes “a sense of disillusionment with the emergent dispensation of wealth” (41). Written in the era of “poststructuralism and intense globalization,” these recent South African texts resemble the postcolonial African novels of disillusionment of the 1960s and 1970s but distinguish themselves from their predecessors by being overtly self-reflexive (Mwangi 42). What these theorisations appear to suggest, then, is a belated admittance of South Africa to the common model of literary periodisation across the continent.

While the term “generation” as an indicator of age and literary style has become the basis for the standard periodisation of African literature into first-, second-, and third-generation authors, South African writing, for obvious historical reasons, falls out of this model. Critics of Nigerian literature in English, by contrast, draw heavily on the distinctions among three generations of writers,<sup>3</sup> and the country has been singled out as “the most vibrant case study for third generation African writing” (Adesanmi and Dunton 14). Comparing Nigeria and South Africa may, therefore, be vital for assessing the relation between South African literature and literary production elsewhere on the continent.<sup>4</sup> Although Mwangi notes both connections and divergences between South Africa’s disenchanting fiction and earlier African novels of disillusionment, some pertinent questions remain unanswered. How, for instance, do these South African texts relate to third-generation African writing? And does Mwangi’s reference to poststructuralism imply that the novels he speaks of address the thematic concerns of second-generation writing with the stylistic means commonly ascribed to the third generation?<sup>5</sup>

The present article seeks to engage with the question of South Africa’s position in relation to these theorisations through a comparative reading of Mandla Langa’s *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* (2008) and Helon Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel* (2002). The texts share a disillusionment with the postcolonial state that expresses itself in a vivid portrayal of postcolonial leadership and power, and both novels invoke the entangled (rather than merely oppositional) relationship between ruler and ruled theorised by Achille Mbembe. In contrast to Mbembe’s work, however, they do not align power with the excessive and grotesque but portray it rather in terms of unspectacular adaptability and disguise.

The depiction of postcolonial rulers and their misuse of power permeates much postcolonial African writing, beginning with the early, more realist works of post-independence disillusionment but also including more recent texts such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Wizard of the Crow* (2006). The theme features prominently in Nigerian literature of the older generations of writers, for example in Chinua Achebe’s *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987), Wole Soyinka’s *The Interpreters* (1965), and Kole Omotoso’s *The Combat* (1972). But a

new generation of writers, including Helon Habila, has equally taken up this subject.<sup>6</sup>

Mandla Langa's *The Lost Colours* not only won the prestigious Commonwealth Writers' Prize in the Best Book, Africa, category in 2009 but has also been praised for its "continent-wide reach" (Zvomuya 2), addressing themes that bridge across the invisible line drawn along the Limpopo River between South Africa and other parts of the continent. In the form of allegory, the novel dispenses with the idea of South African exceptionalism by exploring lust for power in the postcolony. In particular, its representation of the postcolonial ruling class establishes an intertextual dialogue with writing from elsewhere on the continent.

In the following analysis of Langa's and Habila's novels, the theme of postcolonial leadership will thus serve as a leading paradigm. I suggest that in their reflections on postcolonial leadership, the two works display continuities with their literary antecedents in Nigerian writing. At the same time, they ground their political stocktaking in what Garuba in his analysis of third-generation poetry has called the "refusal to cohere around a central organizing principle" ("The Unbearable" 63). The texts undermine conceptions of a consistent, untainted identity foundational to the writing of the cultural nationalist period and question the totalising opposition between rulers and ruled, echoing Mbembe's conceptualisation of power in the postcolony. Mbembe argues that "it would seem wrong to continue to interpret postcolonial relationships in terms of resistance or absolute domination, or as a function of the binary oppositions usually adduced in conventional analyses of movements of indiscipline and revolt" (*On the Postcolony* 104–5). His view of power is aligned with the resistance against totalities embraced by many third-generation writers. At the same time, however, the two novels rewrite central features of Mbembe's figuration of the postcolonial ruler. Although foregrounding the betrayal of newfound hopes, the novels are not devoid of utopian imaginings and can thus be read as more optimistic texts than the earlier novels of disenchantment. Their utopian import, I would suggest, lies in the open-endedness and multiplicity of their future projections. With regard to recent theorisations of the post-apartheid novel, the thematic crossings between the two texts testify

to the incipient embrace, noted above, of intra-continental dialogue in South African fiction.

I will first examine the portrayal of power and leadership in the two novels. My analysis will focus on the texts' deployment of allegory and narrative style as well as their relation (resemblances and differences) to theorisations of postcolonial power advanced by critics such as Mbembe. I will then proceed to highlight the novels' desire for a better postcolonial future.

### **Power in Langa's *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon***

Langa's critically acclaimed novel is set on the fictional Indian Ocean Island of Bangula. This testifies to the embrace of a wider geography transcending the national that critics such as Ronit Frenkel and Craig MacKenzie have observed in recent South African fiction.<sup>7</sup> Crucially, the novel's setting in a fictional African country, in conjunction with its allegorical mode, intricately connects South Africa politically and culturally with other countries on the African continent and their experiences of postcolonial rule. It thereby inaugurates a still sorely lacking dialogue between South African fiction and the wider field of African literatures.

As Chris Thurman aptly maintains, Langa's choice of setting "undermine[s] the tendency of South African citizens to flatter themselves that they are 'unique' in Africa—distinct from and, implicitly, superior to other African countries" (98). Thurman notes in this context that novels such as Langa's "evinces a desire to identify in South Africa elements of a 'generic' African country" (98). Allegory thus becomes a means of bridging across the continental divide by showing how "the individual" life no longer merely mirrors "the national." Instead, the novel intertwines the South African postcolonial experience with that of other African nations. In this sense, *Lost Colours* also draws attention to the limitations of Jameson's notion of "national allegory"—itself derived from his contentious view of "third-world texts" as an allegorical space of the political—which does not account for the complex and fragmented conception of the national that Langa's narrative embraces. As Jean Franco points out, "national allegory fails to describe adequately

the simultaneous dissolution of the idea of the nation and the continuous persistence of national concerns” (211).

As well as its geographical and cultural-political setting, the novel’s implicit and explicit intertextual references<sup>8</sup> to literary works by other African writers reveal its trans-African scope. One of the novel’s epigraphs, taken from Niyi Osundare’s poem “Forest Echoes” in *The Eye of the Earth* (1986), not only establishes an immediate intertextual dialogue with Nigerian literature but also provides the title for the novel. These references have implications that deserve a wider consideration.

In his monograph on intertextuality in contemporary African literature, Ode Ogede proposes that the study of intertextual cross-fertilisation among African writers may serve as a possible model of critical inquiry that eschews the conventional binary in African literary history: the assumed split between “a unanimous common African culture” and the more recent “retreat into region and nation” (201). In contrast to the exploration of postcolonial rewritings of the Western canon that have dominated postcolonial studies of intertextuality, Ogede’s model suggests a fruitful way of avoiding universalisations of African writing while highlighting intra-continental dialogue and rewritings of African literary works by African authors. Approaching Langa’s novel in this manner emphasises its embeddedness in the wider field of African literature, while at the same time paying attention to its references to a specific geographical and socio-political context. I would, therefore, contend that the epigraph already dramatises the novel’s refutation of South African exceptionalism that Thurman observes.

While the epigraph differs from conventional intertextual references inside the body of a text, its “most canonical” function, Gérard Genette argues, “consists of commenting on the text, whose meaning it indirectly specifies or emphasizes” (157). Utilising the epigraph in this manner, Langa quotes the following extract from Osundare’s poem:

Count your colours, oh chameleon,  
aborigine of wood and wind  
count your colours  
in the rainbow of the fern,

in the thick, ashen hide  
of the sappling tree. (Osundare 166–71)

The chameleon in the poem is part of a forest landscape threatened by destruction: “A forest of a million trees, this, / a forest of milling trees / wounded, though, by time’s axe / and the greedy edges of *agbegilodo’s* [timber lorry’s] matcher” (69–72; emphasis in original). While celebrating the chameleon for its deep interconnectedness with the forest through its “garment of a million mirrors,” (165) the poet also appears to reprimand it for its reliance on its ability to change colour for camouflage and survival: “Count your colours, / oh prince of easy wardrobe, / dandy hueman who walks / so natively naked because he has / a forest of a thousand garbs” (Osundare 172–76). Uzochi Nwagbara maintains that Osundare’s *The Eye of the Earth* displays “the poet’s aesthetic commitment to unearth the dangers inherent in global capitalism as well as man’s business in our environment, which is largely responsible for the loathsome state of our planet” (210). Langa, I would argue, takes Osundare’s ecological perspective to the realm of human relations with the theme of political power.

The poem provides Langa with a powerful metaphor for the post-colonial ruler’s struggle to obtain and maintain power. As we will see in more detail later, the image of the chameleon is used to comment on the ruler’s adaptability to circumstances of personal advancement. Moreover, Langa’s analogy represents a clear reformulation of the notion of postcolonial leadership present in the literature of earlier generations of African authors. Here, in contrast to first- and second-generation writers, his portrayal eschews any clear opposition between rulers and ruled, which testifies to his closeness to the writings of authors of the third-generation in Nigeria, in whose work, as Adesanmi and Dunton observe, “the tropes of Otherness and subalternity are being remapped by questioning erstwhile totalities such as history, nation, gender, and their representative symbologies” (15). The fluidity, adaptability, disguise and camouflage of identity that the metaphor of the chameleon suggests poignantly articulates the critique of a “united, coherent self and a stable, uncontaminated identity” that Garuba observes as char-



acteristic of third-generation Nigerian poetry (“The Unbearable” 64). As Langa notes in an interview with the *Citizen*, “[p]eople in power inevitably become what they have to become and take on the character that has the best appearance” (qtd. in Bayne 2).

The opening words of the novel, like the epigraph, contain central ideas relevant to the text’s understanding of power and the postcolonial ruler. Of these, the idea of opposition is crucial. But before going on to Langa’s dramatisation of power and opposition, I will examine the presence of rumour, which is so often part of the background music to these themes:

August this year has become a very important month for the people of Bangula. There is expectation that President Abioseh Gondo, who was actually born in August, will not survive the inquiry. Rumour has it that Zebulon, in league with the Provincial Authority for Progress, has already tasked the carpenters to construct a gallows. Not waiting for the rumour to be confirmed, people are fleeing the island in droves. (3)

Within the chronological order of events narrated in the novel, the prologue belongs to the end rather than the beginning of the narrated story, for it points to a future after President Abioseh’s rule. Significantly in this context, the narrator’s reference to rumour draws attention to a level of popular discourse running parallel to the official information released by the state authorities. Jean-Noel Kapferer defines rumour as “the emergence and circulation in society of information that is either not yet publicly confirmed by official sources or denied by them” (13). He emphasises that rumour is a political as well as sociological phenomenon, observing that “*rumor constitutes a relation to authority*. . . . As information that runs alongside and at times counter to official information, rumors constitute a counter-power, i.e., a sort of check on power” (14; emphasis in original). In its very first sentences the novel thus questions and undermines the sole authority and power of the postcolonial ruler.

Yet in contrast to what Robert Spencer, in his analysis of Ngũgĩ’s *The Wizard of the Crow*, refers to as the postcolonial “dictator novel,” the notion of opposition in Langa’s novel is more complex. The central char-

acteristic of the “dictator novel” for Spencer is its contestation of “the strident, monologic voice of the dictator” (151). “Invariably modernistic and many-voiced,” Spencer notes, “dictator novels disrupt the myth of the dictator’s omnipotence by portraying the various factors that aid the dictator’s rise and sustain him in power in addition to the diverse forces of opposition that oppose his rule and seek to supplant it” (151). The multivocality and multiplicity of the narrative voice, in Spencer’s view, thus stands in clear opposition to the dictator’s monologic voice. While Langa’s novel equally favours multivocality, as we shall see below, this does not, however, stand in opposition to the ruler’s voice. Rather, the Colonel and his son are an integral part of the many voices included in the novel. Langa includes not only a military dictator turned president-for-life in his novel but also a more or less democratically elected president. Their sympathetic portrayal suggests an “entanglement” (Nuttall)<sup>9</sup> rather than polarisation of the people and their leaders.

The novel features multiple focalisers, mainly the Colonel and the three half-brothers Abioseh, Hiero, and Zebulon, who share the Colonel as a father but have different mothers. The novel thus employs the age-old motif of fraternal strife between official and illegitimate or bastard sons competing with each other. Abioseh, who, as the prologue reveals, later becomes the president of Bangula, initially appears to be the only legitimate son of the Colonel—his mother MaZembe being the Colonel’s wife. Hieronymus Jerome, referred to simply as Hiero throughout the novel, suspects that he too is a son of the Colonel and consults various oracles to find out the truth. He grows up as a friend of Abioseh’s and, becoming Head of Security Affairs, is not immune to the corrupting influences of power. Zebulon, probably the only biological child of the Colonel as we learn towards the end of the narrative, grows up without the privileges of his half brothers but acquires a strong social consciousness through his mother’s education. After her death he becomes a leader of the Trade Union Movement. These multiple focalisers not only testify to the novel’s multivocality but also bring into focus the complex conceptualisation of power in the novel, which bears a resemblance to Mbembe’s work. Mbembe famously argues that the “postcolonial relationship is not primarily a relationship of resistance or of collaboration

but can best be characterized as convivial, a relationship fraught by the fact of the *commandement* and its ‘subjects’ having to share the same living space” (*On the Postcolony* 104; emphasis in original).

After the proleptic opening sentence of its prologue, Langa’s narrative lapses back in time to relate the era of the Colonel’s leadership. It is here that we find prominent analogies to the South African situation.<sup>10</sup> One of these is a blood plague, a disease resembling South Africa’s AIDS crisis, of which Bangula’s people are “dying in droves” (96). And indeed, Bangula’s political leadership is beset with denial similar to that of the extra-textual South African world. Various ministers during the time of the Colonel’s rule “announce that the blood plague did not exist” (90) and the Colonel himself is convinced that “[t]here’s no plague in Bangula” (96). Rather, he believes “[t]he people dying have turned their back on the principles of sanitation that the rest of the world adheres to” (96).

Whilst alluding to the specificities of the South African situation, the text, as Annie Gagiano writes, is at the same time “a sardonic study of the combination of ruthlessness and masquerade that construct the postcolonial *commandement*” and is therefore “[i]n line with novels such as Ousmane Sembène’s *The Last of the Empire*; Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Wizard of the Crow* or Theresa Dovey’s *Blood Kin*” (110; emphasis in original). Yet in contrast to Mbembe’s figuration of the postcolonial *commandement*, the political regime in Bangula is not inscribed by the “aesthetic of vulgarity”—the cult of the obscene and grotesque. Arguably, the conditions of the people living with the blood plague are portrayed in a grotesque mode, but neither the Colonel nor Abioseh possesses the features commonly ascribed to the physique of the postcolonial ruler.

Analysing novels by Sony Labou Tansi and Dambudzo Marechera, Flora Veit-Wild argues that “[i]n their works the postcolonial state appears embodied by the figure of the fat, lecherous, imbecile dictator which lends itself to hyperbole, caricature, and parody and the most absurd forms of postcolonial travesty” (228). Rather than following this pattern common to many African texts, Langa endows his postcolonial autocrats with a distinctly ordinary, unspectacular physique. The Colonel is described as “stately” even when kneeling down barefooted (6); during an official function, while others wore elaborate outfits, he

also “walked barefooted to the centre of the room, a smile of humility on his face” (80). His son Abioseh is regarded as “one of Bangula’s most eligible bachelors” (168), and even though the novel does not feature a detailed description of his physiognomy, one assumes Abioseh to be fairly handsome. Langa’s reluctance to endorse the clichéd physique of the postcolonial leader clearly calls for a different theorisation of the postcolony that pays closer attention to unspectacular manifestations of power.

Moreover, Langa’s leaders possess an impressive ability for self-reflection, a trait absent from other “dictator” or “autocrat” novels. A conversation between the Colonel and Abioseh in Part One of the narrative demonstrates the Colonel’s awareness of the corruptibility of power and its continuous violent reinforcement, as he acknowledges that “with every new political dispensation comes a refinement of criminal methods” (37). Gaining access to the Colonel’s thoughts in the ensuing lengthy confession (presented in free indirect discourse), the reader encounters not a power-hungry tyrant but rather a reflective man, aware of his own entrapment in the webs of power play.

In this context the Colonel confesses to Abioseh that he has another son, Zebulon, with a woman called Madu, his first love before he met his wife MaZembe. Although their relationship appears to have been fulfilling and passionate, Madu became increasingly more withdrawn when the Colonel, then still a simple captain in the military, told her about his investigation of murders committed by a group named the Blood of the Ancestors, whose leader—as the narrator reveals during the arrest scene—is Madu’s own father, Vezi. This group, exercising vigilante justice, sparks dispute among the island population. In striking resemblance to the South African situation, people in the novel “felt that the long route towards nationhood had skipped a crucial phase, namely, the shedding of blood, and had for the moment averted the inescapable through appeasement” (41). The Colonel, while compelled by his superiors’ orders to arrest Vezi, admits that he feels “a grudging sympathy” (41) for the man, stressing his belief that the benefactors of the old regime did not have to give up any of their privileges with the arrival of the new dispensation.

The issue enables Langa to move sideways to the morality of exceptional circumstances. To illustrate his moral dilemma to his son, the Colonel resorts to telling him a story about the Front for National Liberation in Algeria, whose members were debating whether they “could suspend their own humanity for the sake of a greater good” (44). The concluding discussion with Abioseh reveals the Colonel as a supporter of the temporary suspension of one’s own humanity and that of others for a greater purpose. Even if not enshrined in law, the Colonel’s attitude resembles Agamben’s reformulation of Carl Schmitt’s notion of the “state of exception” by designating a conscious suspension of the normal legal order by the government in order to protect state sovereignty (Agamben 23). As such, the torture of Vezi’s supporters no longer constitutes an unlawful, criminal act but is justified as a security measure.

Although the novel locates the motivations for this “state of exception” in the historical injustices of colonialism, the Colonel’s trajectory, from his early years as a boy reluctant to become a soldier, to a captain, Member of Parliament, and finally leader of a military coup against his predecessor General Gabriel Ramala, also betrays another underlying model of power. Once he has entered the system, the Colonel is unable to escape the self-perpetuating—albeit precarious—mechanisms of power. This becomes clear in the lyrics by Dodo Madelia, “Bangula’s celebrated singer” (38), cleverly interwoven into the conversation between father and son. Madelia’s song comments on political power play by referring to the metaphor of the chameleon: “*What happens when we all see the hidden lion / Don’t we wish for the colours of the chameleon?*” (38; emphasis in original). Another line from the song advocates the “skin of the chameleon” as a protective covering that ensures one’s survival in threatening circumstances: “[*In this thrashing hour under the boot of iron / We’ll be safe in the skin of the chameleon*” (40; emphasis in original). Langa uses this technique of interweaving to reveal how power has the ability to transform us into tyrants. Again, power is not aligned with the excessive and grotesque as in Mbembe’s work, but rather described in terms of unspectacular adaptability and disguise.

While Abioseh initially tries to resist assuming a more powerful position within the political hierarchy of Bangula after his father’s death (he

neither has personal aspirations nor does he take to heart his mother's pleas), his eventual decision to become president of the island is sparked by sexual drive:

It was the woman's browned shoulders, isolated and seemingly not part of Jacqui herself, that elicited a rush of lust so sharp in Abioseh that he had to avert his eyes and grab hold of the rail to steady himself, not a second before intercepting a fleeting exchange of glances between Carlos [the interim president] and Jacqui, so brief it could have been in his imagination. It was this moment that decided him that, indeed, a lot was at stake. Abioseh's disinterest in the race was a blasphemy against the memory and energy that had thrust the Colonel onto the supreme seat of the land. (138)

At first glance, this description may reflect the "desire for sexual pleasure" that Mbembe regards as characteristic of the postcolonial bureaucrat (*On the Postcolony* 126). More clearly than this, however, Abioseh's portrayal in the remaining narrative demonstrates his political trajectory from a fervent advocate of "non-racialism" in Bangula society to an aloof president, disconnected from the realities of the people on the street.<sup>11</sup> However, Abioseh, like the Colonel, is also a highly self-reflective president who questions the politics of leadership in his country: "What about the presidents, prime ministers, potentates, monarchs, emperors, kings, rulers, some of whom, like himself, were not really elected but erupted onto the epidermis of the country's surface, like a boil or a growth that suddenly announces the importance of its presence?" (318–19). Unlike Mbembe's *commandement* with its "lecherous living" (*On the Postcolony* 106), Abioseh appears incorruptible: he pays the taxman religiously and, contrary to the norm, has no reserves in a foreign bank account (Langa 319).

Thus Langa's portrayal of postcolonial leadership displays certain distinctive features of Mbembe's theorisations of the postcolonial *commandement*. At the same time, the novel rewrites common portrayals of the postcolonial leadership, divesting them of the spectacular and grotesque and, perhaps more importantly, endowing them with the ability for self-

reflection. This is achieved primarily through a narrative form that favours multiple focalisation and thus dismantles the binary of ruler and ruled characteristic of earlier novels from the continent. In this sense, Langa's text displays many of the stylistic and thematic features of third-generation writing.

### **Power and Complicity in Habila's *Waiting for an Angel***

In contrast to Langa's fictional setting, Habila clearly anchors his narrative in the Lagos of the military years (the mid-1980s and 1990s), capturing the suffocating mood of violence and oppression during the dictatorial rule of General Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha. Depicting the impact of the rapacious military regime on the lives of a group of protagonists from a wide spectrum of social backgrounds, Habila skillfully interweaves his narrative with extra-textual references to historical events. We learn, for example, about M. K. O. Abiola's imprisonment and death, General Yar Adua's death in detention, the killing of journalist Dele Giwa through a letter bomb in 1986, the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa (157), the expulsion of Nigeria from the Commonwealth in 1995 (192), and the assassination of Abiola's wife Kudirat in 1996.

Notwithstanding this form of historical anchoring, the text, as Mwangi argues, is "pervaded by a sense of placelessness" (54). Although the "device of placelessness" suggests the similarity of the Nigerian situation to other postcolonial African nations, its primary function, Mwangi contends, is to allow the author to steer clear of a "direct confrontation with Abacha" (54). Moreover, as in Langa's text, the impression of placelessness emphasises the novel's dialogue with antecedent and contemporary works of African literature.

This impression is conveyed, for example, in the following comment by one of the characters in the novel: "One General goes, another one comes, but the people remain stuck in the same vicious groove. Nothing ever changes for them except the particular details of their wretchedness" (108). While referring to the local Nigerian context, this comment is equally applicable to other postcolonial countries. Like *The Lost Colours*, Habila's novel thus stages a careful balance between specificity

and generality. However, avoiding direct confrontation with the military regime is not a major concern of the novel. As I will argue below, the focus seems to be on revealing the complex inter-linkages and entanglements of power and the ambivalent relationship between the ruler and the ruled rather than solely on the demonisation of the ruler.

The trope of placelessness in the novel is evident in its non-chronological organisation and complex narrative structure, which underscore the chaos and disorder in the postcolonial nation without, as Mwangi highlights, “directly reproducing Nigeria in a referential sense” (54). *Waiting for an Angel* consists of seven loosely interconnected stories with multiple narrators. These stories are for the most part named after their central characters, who often also act as either focalisers or narrators. While the novel at first glance resembles a collection of short stories, Lomba’s recurrence as a character and narrator links its various parts. The first section, entitled “Lomba,” opens in the third person and alternates between this narration and the first-person diary entries written by Lomba from prison. Part Four, “Alice,” follows the same narrative structure, except that here Lomba writes his diary entries to Alice, directly addressing her in the second person. Lomba acts as a first-person narrator throughout Part Three, named after his university roommate, Bola, and in Part Five. Next to Lomba, the novel features two further first-person narrators, an unnamed friend of Lomba’s in “Angel” and the teenage boy Kela, who lives on Poverty Street, in Part Seven. An external heterodiegetic narrator again relates the concluding section, “James.”

*Waiting for an Angel* thus represents a conspicuous example of what Brian Richardson terms “multiperson narration,” referring to works of fiction that consistently “move back and forth between different narrative positions” (62). With its multiplicity of narrators, *Waiting* belongs to the subcategory of multiperson novels that Richardson calls “‘centrifugal’ texts,” works that “continue to proliferate an irreducible galaxy of different, heterogenous or antithetical, perspectives” (62). As is often the case with multiperson narration, Habila’s choice of narrative perspective appears directly connected to the novel’s politics, for the distinctive characteristics of multiperson narration, as Richardson contends, “allow the free play of multiple voices and can be seen as a practice that gener-



ates a greater degree of dialogism than more conventional techniques typically allow” (68). Habila’s polyvocality thus defies the monovocality of the postcolonial ruler’s voice and fractures hegemonic ways of seeing.

However, while Langa focuses on the lives of his postcolonial rulers, and the successive presidents even feature prominently as focalisers throughout his narrative, the military leaders in *Waiting* are physically absent. This again highlights the placelessness that raises Habila’s argument to a more abstract level, because, as Ali Erritouni emphasises, *Waiting* “dramatizes the instruments of their [the military’s] brutality, including the police, soldiers, security agents, and the penitentiary” (147). Habila not only presents state representatives as “instruments” of the postcolonial ruler but draws attention to the fragmentation of state sovereignty that occurs when such officials operate with their personal interests in mind.

Mbembe has frequently observed that the postcolony can be read as a space where conventional ideas of sovereignty that view power as embedded within the nation state no longer apply but where self-interested actors of this kind often hide “behind the mask of the state” (“Necropolitics” 35). The first section of Habila’s novel advances a dramatisation of precisely this line of argument, delineating the relationship between Lomba and the prison superintendent Muftau. When the superintendent finds out that Lomba has secretly obtained a pen and paper to write in prison, he orders two prison guards to assault him. Lomba notes:

I had waited for this; perversely anticipated it with each day that passed, with each surreptitious sentence that I wrote. I knew it was me he [the superintendent] came for when he stood there, looking bigger than life, bigger than the low, narrow cell. The two dogs [two prison wardens] with him licked their chops and growled. Their eyes roved hungrily over the petrified inmates caught sitting, or standing, or crouching. (6)

Couched in a language of animality, the portrayal of the prison wardens in this passage resembles Mbembe’s reconfiguration of the Bakhtinian grotesque body in the context of postcolonial leadership. The stark con-

trast between the towering figure of the superintendent and the two guards (referred to as “the dogs”) accompanying him and the “crouching” prisoners suggests a dichotomy between the prisoners and the guards. The narrative reinforces this impression further when the superintendent later visits Lomba in his solitary confinement cell: “He looked like a cartoon figure: his jodhpur-like uniform trousers emphasized the skinniness of his calves, where they disappeared into the glass-glossy boots. His stomach bulged and hung like a belted sack” (14). Unlike the unspectacular bodies of the Colonel and Abioseh in Langa’s novel, Muftau’s build, with his protuberant belly, recalls one of the “classic ingredients of *commandement* in the postcolony,” which according to Mbembe are “the mouth, the belly, and the penis” (*On the Postcolony* 126; emphasis in original).

This scene, along with Mbembe’s analysis, provides a useful theoretical lens to describe the relationship between Lomba and the superintendent, and that relationship, in turn, illustrates the entangled complexity of the exercise of power typical of the third-generation writing under consideration here. Thus Dunton, locating Habila’s texts within the tradition of prison writing, observes that “his distinctive contribution to the genre . . . is, though, in his construction of a relationship of mutual dependency between prisoner and superintendent, the latter an unexpectedly vulnerable, semi-articulate figure who commissions Lomba to write love poems he can pass off as his own” (Dunton, Review 150). This closely reflects Mbembe’s argument that the relationship between rulers and ruled is not one of opposition but one of “conviviality” (*On the Postcolony* 110). The conviviality in question in Habila’s novel has several aesthetic and sexual ramifications.

But focusing simply on the postcolony’s “tendency to excess and lack of proportion” (Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* 102)—a feature that equally pertains to the physique of the postcolonial bureaucrat—would not do justice to Habila’s portrayal of Muftau. However pervasive the superintendent’s attributes of Mbembe’s postcolonial autocrat may be, he does not share all of Mbembe’s “classic ingredients.” Significantly, the novel lacks the symbolic focus on the phallus and exaggerated sexual appetite of Mbembe’s postcolonial leader. Indeed, it is not sex that the superin-

tendent seeks in his relationship with Janice but transcendence of the confines of his prison work and participation in another, more refined world, the realm of creativity and poetry, which he (naively) considers free from the taint of politics. Although the superintendent's actions resonate with Mbembe's conception of the postcolony as a regime of pretence, Muftau's continuous courting of Janice displays an appreciation of the aesthetic, given that he could easily find sexual satisfaction elsewhere if his primary desire were sex. Yet, what he fails to notice is the interconnectedness of politics and art, which Habila foregrounds when Janice recognises in Lomba's adaptations of a number of canonical poems the S.O.S. message and comes to visit him in prison. Disconnecting aesthetics and politics, Muftau ultimately remains ignorant of the subtleties of literary expression and its role in resisting regimes of postcolonial domination.

Somewhat surprisingly, it is Lomba, rather than Muftau, who is presented in the vocabulary of physical sexuality. Describing his enervating fatigue and ruefulness at being regarded by his fellow prisoners as the superintendent's "fetch water," Lomba notes, "[w]hat is left here is nothing but a mass of protruding bones, unkempt hair and tearful eyes; an asshole for shitting and farting, and a penis that in the mornings grows turgid in vain" (23–24). Read through the prism of Mbembe's work, the pervasive language of sexual desire and physical reduction here might be seen as a sign of complicity rather than merely an indication of Lomba's wretched condition. Matching Langa's portrayal of the postcolonial ruler as a plurivocal being, Habila intricately interlinks prisoner and warden with each other, "inscribing" them "within in the same *episteme*" of sexuality and its aesthetic mirror (Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* 110; emphasis in original).

The trope of entanglement receives further unambiguous illustration when, in contrast to works like Ngũgĩ's *Wizard of the Crow* (where the ruler frequently holds lavish dinner parties for his guests), Habila stages a festive gathering of artists to draw attention to their complicity in the postcolonial regime. Initially organised as a reading for two poets who were arrested the previous day, the get-together, Lomba observes, soon transforms into a bizarre ritual:

Inside, the dancers are back on the floor, in each other's arms, clutching the inevitable beer in one hand. There should be wailing instead of laughter, tears instead of beer, Lomba thinks desperately; this is a crazy, reversed wake where no one is allowed to cry, and which has imperceptibly degenerated into a bacchanalia. (216)

What the passage prominently demonstrates is the remoteness of the group of writers from the reality of the people. While gathered to reflect on the recent crackdown of oppositional forces by the military regime and the ever-increasing violations of human rights and restrictions on freedom of speech, the artists do not seem to find the right words to respond to the fate of their colleagues. A young poet reads a light, effusive poem entitled "Now Is Time," which announces the imminent freedom from oppression with the following line: "The egg, waiting, is visited by Liberty's sunlight" (213). Lomba dismisses the poem as "[g]ratuitous" (214), noting to a fellow guest that "[o]ur gloom is not lifting. Our sun is setting. Look out the window, you'll see" (214). The pervasive impression of the artists' aloofness culminates in the following piece of advice Lomba receives from a fellow writer: "You really must try and get arrested—that's the quickest way to make it as a poet. You'll have no problem with visas after that, you might even get an international award" (215).

Rather than framing the writer as an oppositional figure, Habila here suggests the implication of the group in suppressive structures, implying that resistance may also be motivated by self-advancement. As Mark Sanders argues in *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid*, "[w]hen opposition takes the form of a demarcation *from* something, it cannot, it follows, be untouched by that to which it opposes itself. Opposition takes its first steps from a footing of complicity" (9; emphasis in original).<sup>12</sup> Displaying an awareness of the inadequate nature of the gathering, Lomba appears to be one step closer to an oppositional stance than his fellow artists. But it is on the nature and implications of opposition—in itself a socio-philosophical concern—that Habila's (as well as Langa's) dramatic focus lies. Accordingly, by giving prominence to the

notion of complicity rather than simply depicting the debauchery of the leadership, Habila abstains from either “accusing or excusing” the parties involved (Sanders x).

### **Writing Open-Ended Postcolonial Utopias**

Despite the ostensibly all-embracing disillusionment of *Lost Colours* and *Waiting*, both novels contain utopian moments, where different power-relations and forms of leadership seem possible. In this sense, they set against the more radical accounts of postcolonial disenchantment by second-generation writers of the 1970s more hopeful—albeit by no means enthusiastic—visions of the future (Mwangi 45). However, in contrast to classic utopias, which, based on a static concept of human relations, postulate harmonious cohabitation in an earthly paradise, the future imaginings in Langa’s and Habila’s novels appear more closely in line with postcolonial notions of utopia. An analysis of this dimension of their writing will shed further light on the concept of placelessness and hence on the location of their works within the landscape of African writing.

Bringing together postcolonial and utopian studies, a recent body of scholarship has attempted to theorise utopian imaginings in postcolonial literature from around the world, arguing that these texts frequently present open-ended rather than closed alternative futures. In his seminal 2001 study *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia*, Ralph Pordzik suggests that postcolonial heterotopias, in contrast to “static models of utopian or dystopian thought in western discursive practices” (170), are characterised by a pronounced commitment to hybridity, alterity and openness: “Although heterotopia extrapolates from an imperfect present-day society (the *nowhere* of utopian discourse) into the future (the *nowhere* of utopian discourse), it does not necessarily conceive of this future in terms of a place of unity, harmony and permanence” (4; emphases in original). Pordzik’s theorisation, however, tends to pit Western utopian writing against postcolonial utopian writing in a somewhat binary fashion. With respect to the two novels under consideration here, I prefer to use the term “open-ended postcolonial utopia.” This combines Bülent Somay’s and Darko Suvin’s theorisations of “open-ended” utopian texts

in science fiction<sup>13</sup> with Pordzik's notion of heterotopia to suggest a form of utopianism shot through with ambivalence and dislocation—a form that is critical of closure without, however, reintroducing a reductive opposition between Western and postcolonial texts. The point is illustrated in Langa's topos of resurrection and in several instances of utopian vision in Habila's *Waiting*.

Comparing Langa's novel to the “post-independence novel of decay, bloody coups, juntas and corruption,” Pumla Gqola observes that *Lost Colours* is “a much larger and more optimistic work” (5). This optimism is foregrounded particularly towards the end of the novel when Zebulon miraculously rises from the dead. The undertaker Baluba Jambo, in an internal prolepsis, already points towards Zebulon's pivotal role in Bangula's future:

‘Although the people have nominated him as their leader, they are confused. On the one hand, they remember the Colonel. But they know that their troubles actually began with the Reform. On the other hand, they are attracted to the radical anarchy of Vezi—and Zebulon is the direct heir of both men. He comes from two branches of a strong tree. Since our people believe that power derives from the sovereignty of the dead, Zebulon will have to be initiated in death first, before he can be allowed to lead.’ (251–52)

Bringing together the qualities and blood of both the Colonel and Vezi, Zebulon appears a conciliatory figure who may well have the potential necessary for leading the country into a different future. Moreover, the workers value him as a leader “unafraid to speak the truth,” someone who does not pursue the disguises and pretence of the chameleon but whose language is “[s]tripped of artifice” and therefore able to express “their own unspoken feelings” (150).

Heralding the resurrection scene, the narrator tells in biblical language how the people of Bangula witness an eclipse, with “the sun darkening and the shadow of the moon creeping in like a black coin, investing the land with menace” (320). This passage resonates with references to the eclipse prior to the advent of Christ in the apocalyptic visions of

the New Testament and thus likens Zebulon to the Messiah.<sup>14</sup> It is in this surreal apocalyptic context that the narrator describes the actual resurrection:

[E]veryone gasps as Zebulon's eyes flicker open; he raises himself from the encumbrance of the box. Slowly but steadily he rises to a great clamour and stands arms akimbo, legs bent at the knees in a fighter's stance. Dressed in a frilly white shirt and black trousers, Zebulon seems to have grown bigger in death. His resurrection causes a stampede. People run helter-skelter. Some scabble to touch Zebulon, the way pilgrims strive to make contact with icons possessing healing powers. (325)

While we may be compelled to read the biblical allusions as a proleptic sign of Zebulon's Christ-like role, the scene is at the same time physically dynamic and parodistic. Zebulon appears to rise from the grave as a hybrid between Christ and a melodramatic fighter hero. This might well be called a dramatic dislocation of the utopian horizon and suggest an implicit open-endedness of the novel. In this way, Langa appears to endorse Somay's notion of an open-ended, dynamic utopia characterised by a potential—yet also possibly fraught—opening of the “utopian horizon” rather than presenting the “new Bangula” under Zebulon's reign as a precast, reconciled, and stable society.

Like *Lost Colours*, *Waiting*, as Erritouni points out, “incorporates . . . utopian projections, tentative as they are, that anticipate an egalitarian dispensation” (145). In line with his postmodernist reading of the text, Erritouni contends that Habila's novel avoids “the messianism and prescriptive dogmatism” (155) that postmodernists reject in conventional utopias. Drawing on Russell Jacoby and Jameson, he argues that Habila's utopian imaginings resemble these theorists' endeavours “to rehabilitate utopia in response to the postmodern critique, precisely by realigning it with the postmodern rejection of closure and affinity for ambivalence” (155). Against the background of this argument, I would suggest that a reading of the text through the notion of an “open-ended postcolonial utopia” helps us bring into clearer focus the novel's relation not only to Langa's text but also to its own literary antecedents.

*Waiting* contains three striking utopian moments, two of them located in the local Nigerian context while the third transcends the boundaries of the national. The first occurs in Part One of the narrative, when the narrative voice imagines how Lomba (of whose whereabouts no record is available after he has been transferred to a prison in the north following a coup against Abacha) may eventually regain his freedom. Assessing Lomba's personality and strength throughout his time in prison, the narrator concludes that he must have survived by living by the prisoner's acumen "not to hope too much, not to despair too much" (32). Deploying a vocabulary of likelihood or probability rather than certainty, the narrator then continues to imagine the circumstances of Lomba's release after Abacha's successor, General Abdulsalam Abubakar, has discharged the political prisoners:

This might have been how it happened: Lomba was seated in a dingy cell in Gashuwa, his eyes closed, his mind soaring above the glass-studded prison walls, mingling with the stars and the rain in elemental union of freedom; then the door clanked open, and when he opened his eyes Liberty was standing over him, smiling kindly, extending an arm. And Liberty said softly, 'Come. It is time to go.' And they left, arm in arm. (32–33)

Presenting a possible rather than certain scenario, this utopian instance mirrors the open-endedness of postcolonial utopian texts, which as Pordzik notes tend to "leav[e] the reader with a suggestive and beckoning array of alternative interpretations which elude any ultimate certainty" (32). The inclusion of the allegorical figure of Liberty once again highlights the novel's sense of placelessness and echoes Langa's allusion to the Christ figure.

The second utopian moment is when Brother, a prominent inhabitant of Poverty Street, imagines a more communal future for the people. He envisions himself as a winner of the lottery, but his naive daydreams are nonetheless grounded in a communal ethics, as he intends to improve the living conditions of his community. According to Erritouni, "Brother anticipates a dispensation where communal imperatives take precedence over individual ambitions" (156). However, his inclination



towards hyperbolic self-fashioning—although endorsed by the teacher Joshua as a “legitimate device in storytelling” (129)—resonates uneasily with Langa’s image of the postcolonial leader as chameleon. Indeed, the description of Brother’s eyes as “red [and] heavy-lidded, like a reptile’s” underscores this impression (130). In this sense (like Langa’s invocation of a hyperbolic Christ figure in Zebulon’s resurrection scene), the novel’s utopian vision is permeated by ambivalence.

Thirdly, Habila presents the United States, “where people go to when they can’t live in their own country” (182), as offering an alternative future for the teacher Joshua and his student Kela. America appears to epitomise Joshua’s optimistic belief that “everything lay within our grasp, if only we cared to reach out boldly” (125). As Adélékè Adéékó notes, “in the mind of the impressionable youth in Habila’s . . . Nigeria, America signifies the location of exilic recuperation” (14). Yet Habila, as Adéékó further points out (15), juxtaposes this idealised view of the US to the rather disillusioned vision of immigration adopted by the editor James Rafiki, who represents an older generation. Rafiki says, “What dignity would I have, over fifty in some cold, unfriendly capital in Europe, or America, washing dishes in a restaurant to make ends meet?” (217). These two contrasting views of the US by members of two generations thus infuse the novel’s utopian vision with a measure of ambivalence. At the same time, these different views—one holding on to the nation, the other transcending it—also highlight the coexistence rather than strict demarcation of some characteristics of second- and third-generation writing.

In contrast with pre-independence authors, whose works tend to imagine the postcolonial nation in a language saturated with utopianism (Ashcroft, “Remembering” 703), Habila significantly avoids presenting his readers with a potential future leader for the nation. *Waiting* also diverges from the novels of post-independence disillusionment, which, Ashcroft argues, notwithstanding their dystopian view of the present, often convey an equally strong investment in utopianism, triggered precisely by sombre postcolonial realities (Ashcroft, “Remembering” 709). Later texts, in contrast, frequently abandon the realist mode of earlier writing and continue to imagine a different future. What distinguishes

contemporary “[p]ostcolonial utopian thought,” Ashcroft observes, is “a form of hope that transcends the boundaries of the nation-state, because that concept represents disappointment and entrapment rather than liberation” (“Post-Colonial Utopianism” 30). Habila’s utopian vision reflects Ashcroft’s argument not only inasmuch as he chooses to set one of his utopian moments in another country but also and above all because of the ambivalence and instability of its perspective.

Admittedly, the local utopian visions in the text notably only pertain to the individual and a small community, not to the entire nation. Thus, although steering clear of closure and perfection, Langa’s open-ended utopia remains located within the national confines of Bangula. And while, as we have seen, *Lost Colours* displays a number of similarities with third-generation Nigerian texts, its utopian vision of a national future for Bangula might suggest that South African literature’s embrace of wider geographies is accompanied by a continued hold on the national.

The concepts of postcolonial leadership and power offer striking insights not only into the connections and divergences between Langa’s and Habila’s novels but also into the texts’ relations to their literary antecedents. This complex relationship is characterised by concomitant patterns of continuity and discontinuity. While sharing the disillusionment with the postcolonial state permeating second-generation writing, both texts exhibit open-ended utopian visions partly located beyond the space of the nation, and the absence of images of excess, decay, and death also set them apart from the work of earlier generations.

Examining thematic and structural crossings between South African and Nigerian literature in this way and relating the different (local) critical vocabularies used for literary analysis and periodisation may thus open the door to a deepened form of intra-continental dialogue between the literatures of the two countries. Post-apartheid novels such as *The Lost Colours of the Chameleon* appear to join wider third-generation African literature inasmuch as the novel evokes themes and stylistic characteristics that have been postulated as identifying features of this generation. It would, however, be overhasty to argue that the embrace of the African continent that features so prominently in Langa’s novel

is present in the majority of contemporary South African texts. In particular, the portrayal of African migrants from elsewhere on the continent in recent literature suggests the continued demarcation of the South African nation from African countries beyond the Limpopo River (Fasselt 71).

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### Notes

- 1 See Frenkel; Gupta, Hofmeyr, and Pearson; Hofmeyr; Samuelson.
- 2 See Renders.
- 3 For a problematisation of the “generation” paradigm see Garuba’s “The Unbearable,” Okuyade, and Dalley.
- 4 Comparative analysis of contemporary writing from Nigeria and South Africa seems particularly fruitful in light of the two countries’ frequently noted exceptional position within the broader field of African literature. Not only do Nigerian and South African authors dominate the shortlists of literary prizes such as the Caine Prize for African Writing and the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize (African region), they also occupy a unique position within scholarship on African literature. This comparative approach will allow us to review notions of exceptionalism without, however, dismissing specific local features of the two literatures.
- 5 Concerning the differences between second- and third-generation writing with regard to the theme of disillusionment, Mwangi notes: “While the theme of disillusionment with the modern state continued in the 1980s and 1990s, the mode in which it was presented changed into highly self-conscious metaphors of rotteness and the disintegration of African nations. . . . Further, while the radical novels of the 1970s were more open in their expression of disillusionment, the novels of the 1980s expressed their sentiments in labyrinthine narratives that not only heightened the sense of alienation and fragmentation of self pervading the society but also signaled some hope for more democratization and acceptance of nonofficial senses of reality and history” (45).
- 6 While engaging with postcolonial military dictatorships during the 1990s in Nigeria, *Waiting* also invokes a sense of placelessness, resembling the allegorical mode of Langa’s novel.
- 7 Frenkel and MacKenzie have proposed the term “post-transitional literature” for new South African writing that “is often unfettered to the past in the way that

- much apartheid writing was” (2). Moreover, the authors note that this literature “often renders nugatory traditional markers like nationality, race or ethnicity” (2).
- 8 In his work on intertextuality, Helbig suggests a scale of greater or lesser degrees of intertextual marking, distinguishing between unmarked, implicit and explicit, thematised intertextual allusions.
- 9 In *Entanglement*, Nuttall emphasises the intersections of “identities, spaces, histories” otherwise thought of as separate and different—such as the strict opposition between oppressor and oppressed during apartheid (20).
- 10 As Gqola observes, “Langa visits some of our preoccupations complexly in this book. We can discern a critique of various forms of reckless sexuality, of carelessness about blood plague-infected lives, and of the male obsession with lineage. In these respects then, this is a very South African novel. At the same time, there is something of the Caribbean rhythm of a Maryse Condé novel” (5).
- 11 It is for these reasons that Thurman sees in Abioseh a reflection of former South African President Thabo Mbeki.
- 12 Sanders’ monograph can be regarded as one of the inaugural studies of South African literature that marks the shift from difference to connection in recent scholarship (Chapman). This body of scholarship, rather than focusing on the difference between the identities, histories, etc. of South Africans, aims to find points of interconnection. Chapman evades regimentation into the straightjacket of binary opposites by addressing and sampling reading strategies that diverge from the paradigm of apartness between South Africans classified as different under apartheid and their histories.
- 13 As Somay contends, “an open-ended text . . . portrays a utopian locus as a mere phase in the infinite unfolding of the utopian horizon, thereby abolishing the limits imposed on it by classical utopian fiction” (26).
- 14 In Matthew, God’s wrath preceding the arrival of Christ is described as follows: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun shall be darkened, the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken: and then . . . all the tribes of the earth shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (24: 29–31).

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