

**Interracial Mumbo Jumbo:  
Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom and Brett Bailey's Theatre.**

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by

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Interracial Mumbo Jumbo: Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom and Brett Bailey's Theatre.

## **Abstract**

This dissertation explores the use of the Black performing body in the works *Cards* (2002) and *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) by Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom and, *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) and *Big Dada: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* (2001) by Brett Bailey. With specific reference to the colonial *gaze*, this dissertation attempts to locate the disruptions (if any) of the colonial *gaze* in these playwright-director's theatre.

The first chapter provides an overview of South African Theatre history. This chapter examines postcolonial performance theory with regards to the past and the present situation in South African theatre. Locating postcolonial performance theory with postcolonial theory discourses and looking specifically at South African theatre history. It looks specifically at the effects of colonialism, not only in terms of economic and political disempowerment but also in terms of the psychological internalisation of subject position and identity. It provides a theoretical basis, through which critical analyses of both Bailey and Grootboom's work will occur.

The second chapter examines the colonial *gaze* and the Black performing body. Jonathan Schroeder (1998: 58) believes that the *gaze* signifies "a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze." In postcolonial theatre, through the transient nature of the performance language, one of the foci of this chapter of the dissertation is on how or whether colonial subjectivity can be re-envisioned: the disruption of the colonial *gaze*. In order to disrupt the colonial *gaze*, it becomes vital that the performing body on stage (should) become a key site of resistance. Postcolonial performance (and theory) aims to challenge the colonial imposition of identity through the human body in order for there to be a fragmentation of subjectivity. Postcolonial performance theory desires an important and effective meaning, particularly in the notions of representations and identities.

The third chapter examines the work of Brett Bailey using the following two particular texts/ case studies and analysing them: *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) and *Big Dada* (2001), in an attempt to locate disruptions of the colonial *gaze* with regards to

the Black performing body *or* to expose the exoticism within the use of such notions as *savage, primitive, strange, violent* that are attached to the Black performing body in his works. In *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997), with an emphasis on the *exotic*, the sangomas, the ritual (real and performative), Bailey does incorporate indigenous performance forms into his postcolonial and intercultural theatre – however does the integration of these indigenous performance forms into a new theatre aesthetic subvert the colonial *gaze*? Or, rather, does it feed into a colonial fascination with African exoticism.

*Big Dada* (2001) is a play about the rise and fall of Idi Amin – a ruthless dictator in Uganda who, according to Peter Stearns and William Langer (2001: 1064), caused a genocide which left over 300 000 Ugandans dead . This play has both *violence* and the *exotic* as signifiers attached to the black bodies performing.

The fourth chapter examines the works of Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom, focusing particularly on *Cards* (2002) and *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006). The analyses attempt to locate disruptions of the colonial *gaze* with regards to the Black performing body; *or* to expose the *extreme violence* and *carnality* that is attached to the Black performing body in his works.

With regards to *Cards* (2002), the question asked is: does the use of the carnal, the raw, the sex, perpetuate a vicious cycle of colonial prejudices within South African audiences within what should be a postcolonial South African theatre arena? The colonised subject's body (in this case, the Black performer's body) has always been an “*object* of the coloniser's fascination and repulsion (and, in effect, possession) in sexual, pseudo-scientific and political terms” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 203) (my italics). This chapter examines whether or not what is occurring in Grootboom's work/ theatre specifically is that the roles into which he has placed his Black performers are within racist discourses, “with perhaps even more emphasis on their supposed violence and sexuality” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 208).

This chapter seeks to interrogate whether or not Grootboom in casting the Other, the Black performing bodies, as corporeal, carnal, instinctual, raw... with his use of full nudity, simulated sex, simulated rapes, violence, explicit language, misogyny, obscenities, murder, drug use and religious rhetoric – has reintroduced colonial

ideologies and stereotypes? Is his theatre 'black Black humour'? Reinforcing colonial ideologies of the *savage*? Or does Grootboom's theatre (unconsciously) aid the location of the (sometimes) nude, sexual, black performing body in the arena/ site of resistance in order to fracture the colonial *gaze* to further the aims of postcolonial theatre.

*Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) is a brutal exposure of township life and the story revolves around a serial killer, the “G-String Strangler,” who is hunting down young women at night. The play traverses the bleaker and more desperate sides of human nature. As described by Robert Greig in *The Sunday Independent* (2005), *Relativity* is a panorama of extreme emotions and violence. However, does this perpetuation of the image of the Black as *violent* or attaching these signifiers of extreme *violence* challenge the colonial imposition of identity through the human body? Seeing the Black performing body being attached to notions of extreme *violence* begs to ask the question: Does this subvert the colonial *gaze* or does it feed into a stereotype of the *violent, savage* Black?

This dissertation is to be read as an examination of both Brett Bailey and Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom's theatre and the motives for the use of the Black performing body on postcolonial South African theatre stages/ sites.

# **Interracial Mumbo Jumbo: Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom and Brett Bailey's Theatre.**

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For Stephen and Etienne Keivy.

## Declaration

I, Jacqueline Keevy, declare that

- (i) The research reported in this dissertation, except where otherwise indicated, is my original work.
- (ii) This dissertation/thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university
- (iii) This dissertation/thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
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Signed: .....

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## **DISCLAIMER**

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It must be noted that in the Preface to this dissertation, the thoughts and words are my own and are not intended to be read as a racist diatribe but rather as a possible insight to my own acknowledged prejudiced colonial mind and viewpoints.

It is not intended to be offensive.



## PREFACE

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Introducing Brett Bailey, the “enfant terrible” and Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom, the “Township Tarantino.” Both of these playwright-directors are highly controversial and infamous and yet, at the same time, they are lauded on the current South African theatre scene. These two practitioners have emerged out of a previous dispensation, locating their work in a post-apartheid 'new' South Africa – within the Rainbow Nation. I have chosen to interrogate and examine these two South African theatre practitioners because of a ‘love-hate relationship’ with their work.

I believe that many more people are affected by racist ideologies and the unconscious acceptance of colonial aesthetic values than is actually realised; people behaving in a politically correct and a socially acceptable manner in public but in private or in homophilous groups are, in fact, still racist in speech, viewpoint and prejudice, “unfettered by public rainbow-nation politeness” (Dodd in *Mail & Guardian Online* 2007: 3)

The reason for choosing these two particular practitioners, Brett Bailey and Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom, is because they both infuriate me. They are the two current practitioners in South African theatre that have both made me angry with them and with myself. Allow me to elaborate: both Bailey and Grootboom use Black bodies in their works and through their use of the Black body which performs, I have been tremendously offended by my own thoughts and viewpoints on the Black performing body, with specific reference to the key words that I have attached to those bodies. I have attached *violent, savage, exotic, carnal, sexualised*. However, although I have offended myself by attaching these notions, I do not think that I have been helped to dispel these notions by either Bailey or by Grootboom. I have chosen to adopt a capital letter for the word Black. My reasoning for this is that how one writes racial signifiers indicates a political position around the constructedness with racial identity and inscriptions of power. Using the capital ‘B’, gives the word ‘Black’ emphasis. I believe that we should all embrace our race; Black, White, Coloured, instead of trying to downplay our colour. It is a part of who we are and we should embrace it as we should embrace the diversity within and around us.

In South Africa, what seems to be happening is that the media, and in particular, soap operas such as *Isidingo* and my personal favourite *7de Laan*, there has been an attempt to create racially-blind

communities. However, what is being offered to us by these stories are untruths. South Africa is still very much divided along colour lines and although we do not like to admit it, racism and colonial ideologies have been so deeply entrenched in us that it is near impossible to not look at the Other without a prejudiced lens or, without looking at them without attaching some kind of preconceived, prejudicial notion. I am not only talking from a white, female perspective. When I discussed my feelings with a class of third-years, some White, some Indian and some Black, they all agreed that this was, in fact, the case for them personally, and within their communities. The 'Rainbow Nation' concept perhaps has failed us. South Africa, I believe, is still seething with an undercurrent of racism; there have been the black-on-black xenophobic attacks, the attack on a Black woman by three White men at a rugby match who called her a 'kaffir' and manhandled her, the rape of a young White Johannesburg woman at the hands of 'black killers' (as stated in the website article <http://www.rense.com/general56/geen.htm>).

The website 'In SOUTH AFRICA UPDATE: Dispatches from a Darkening Corner of the Dark Continent' Snippets from South Africa (which, by the way, is a so-called Christian website) has horror story after horror story about attacks of Black on Whites, Black on Blacks, White on Blacks... It is interesting to note that every time a violent act or crime is perpetrated in this country, the race of the perpetrator and the victim is the very first detail that is disclosed. For example in the following article headlines from the same website mentioned above: Elderly **White** Farmer Survives Brutal Attack by **Black** Man; **White** Female Farmer Stabbed and Raped by Two **Black** Men; Father Tied Up, Daughter Gang-Raped by **Blacks**; **Black** Robbers Torture **White** Family on the Brink of Emigrating to Australia; **White** Youngster Kills Several **Blacks** in Shooting Spree; Student Video Ignites Racial Fury. This website that I found 'In SOUTH AFRICA UPDATE: Dispatches from a Darkening Corner of the Dark Continent' Snippets from South Africa' is a frightening one<sup>1</sup>.

The seething undercurrent of race-hate that I mentioned earlier is alive and kicking in South Africa. However, although my dissertation does look at race, identity, Black performing bodies, I desperately want to find out whether Bailey and Grootboom are using race/ identity and the preconceived notions that are attached to those markers to show what life is truly like in South Africa, how “the Black” behaves. *Or* are the writers trying to subvert our (my?) typical colonial, prejudiced response through the use of *ritualised exoticism* in the case of Bailey's work and the use of *extreme violence* and

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<sup>1</sup> This website can be located at the following URL: [www.thebibleistheotherside.org](http://www.thebibleistheotherside.org)

*carnality/ sexuality* in the case of Grootboom's works. Are both these practitioners turning the mirror back onto us (me?) so that we (I?) can see ourselves (myself) being racist?

## INTRODUCTION

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This dissertation seeks to interrogate the works of two controversial South African theatre practitioners: Brett Bailey<sup>2</sup> and Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom<sup>3</sup>. It seeks to analyse four plays (two by Bailey, two by Grootboom) within a postcolonial performance theory framework. This dissertation will interrogate the controversial signifiers/ notions of *extreme violence*, the *savage* and *exoticism* of the Black performing body in the particular works: *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) and *Big Dada* (2001) by Brett Bailey, and *Cards* (2002) and *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) by Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom.

The investigation of Bailey and Grootboom's theatrical works will be used to interrogate the use of the Black performing body within the postcolonial performance theory paradigm.

...it is not surprising that an emphasis on race is widespread in Post-Colonial drama, particularly when the projected audience includes a high proportion of white (or otherwise dominant) viewers (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 206).

Race is considered primary in this dissertation, rather than focusing on gender or class, because it is a visual marker of identity. Where gender and class can be altered through various means, race (the visual marker of one's identity) cannot be easily altered.

“For the post-colonial playwright, theatre has meant both traditional and indigenous performance – which has often had to be rediscovered and reinvented” (Banfield and Crow 1996: 11) and it is clear in Bailey's work that there is a reinvention of performance; it may be less obvious in Grootboom's work but I do believe that he has reinvented the Township Theatre form by dispensing with the overt didacticism that was so prevalent. This dissertation will examine whether Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom and Brett Bailey (both South African theatre practitioners) are showing the Black performing body as a site of resistance to colonial markers, resisting the colonial identity that has been forced upon them. Do Bailey and Grootboom pander to colonial prejudices and exploit African exoticism, and to what end?

The foci of this dissertation will be on: postcolonial theory, postcolonial performance theory and theatre and the colonial *gaze* within or specific to Bailey and Grootboom's use of the Black performing body in their work. This research will attempt to interrogate, within the colonial *gaze* framework and

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2 Refer to Appendix A for a biography on Brett Bailey.

3 Refer to Appendix B for a biography on Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom.

postcolonial performance theory framework, whether or not the incorporation of the colonisers fascination with “the strange or 'primitive’” (Boehmer 2005: 26) or the Other, into postcolonial theatre forms (used by Bailey and Grootboom) is perpetuating prejudices, for example, the association between black and magic, or black and violence. The binaries under discussion include those identified by Ania Loomba (1998:47):

If colonised people are irrational, Europeans are rational, if the former are barbaric, sensual, lazy, Europeans are civilization itself with its [sic] sexual appetites under control and its dominant ethic of hard work.

This research will draw on a critical study by Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins with regards to *Body Politics*<sup>4</sup> with a focus on race, one of the visual markers of identity. This seminal text posits that “the body functions as one of the most charged sites of representation” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 203). Gilbert and Tompkins (1996: 203) note that “The ways in which the reinscription and self-representation translate into performative strategies is obviously a key issue for post-colonial theatre.”

The *gaze* is how the audience sees the body on the stage; the work of Laura Mulvey (in Counsell and Wolf 2001) becomes a salient example of the analysis of power relationships between those who watch and those who perform.

Through transcending identities, the fixed (colonial) *gaze* on identity can be fractured and disintegrated – thus confusing subjectivity and transcending fixed ideas.

As postcolonial performance theory readdresses notions of identity, there is a need to look at the transient nature of the performance language; to see how colonised subjectivity can be re-envisioned.

This dissertation will interrogate the theatre that was being made in the pre-1994 'old' South Africa in order to discover how the socio-political climates differed from and have fed into the post-1994 'new' South African works of Brett Bailey and Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom.

The apartheid era gave theatre practitioners “a cause for which to fight and a social evil against which

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4 Chapter Five in Gilbert, H and Joanne Tompkins. 1996. *Post-Colonial Drama; theory, practice and politics*. London. Routledge.

to rally” (Bain and Hauptfleisch 2001: 15). The socio-political relevance of Protest Theatre meant theatre that was produced pre-democratisation, and that Protest Theatre is “almost all of the work that is remembered” (Bain and Hauptfleisch 2001: 15). Protest Theatre had in apartheid, a “focused, yet thematically complex, enemy” (2001: 15) and the theatre produced by Barney Simon and Athol Fugard “...gave expression to the sense of frustration and the day-to-day humiliations experienced by the black majority” (2001: 16).

The Protest genre dominated the new work that was being made in South Africa between 1960 and the rise of democracy in the early 1990s. The majority of this new work was almost exclusively workshopped or devised plays, with the aim of conscientising the audiences about the atrocities of apartheid.

The Protest genre drew its inspiration from many international theatre practitioners, for example, Grotowski's focus on the body, Brecht's principles of Epic theatre and Boal's notion of the theatre being used as a weapon. The result was a vibrant, physical and didactic theatre.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Protest genre was being refined to the point where in the 1980s one could clearly define the principle traits of Protest Theatre. There would be interludes of song and dance that would interrupt the narrative; the actors would directly address the audience; set design was based on the notion of Poor Theatre and found objects would be used creating minimalist sets; English was the dominant language used, but other languages would be integrated into the play. Sometimes this was done as a political act to disrupt the colonial language of English, but at other times, the inclusion of other languages was used as a marker announcing a character's racial group. Within the play, real places, names, government acts or policy, historical events and inspirational or exiled leaders were sometimes announced. It is to be noted that there was a strong move away from Aristotelian theatre – the Protest plays would avoid announcing a single protagonist.

The multitudinous range of issues being faced now<sup>5</sup> include: crime, violence, poverty, power abuse, social mismanagement, corruption, rape, racism, xenophobia, unemployment, HIV/AIDS and a whole host of other issues. Duma Ndlovu argues that there is a need to develop a “uniquely South African theatre which will speak a uniquely South African language and move away from the protest and agitprop which have characterised so much local work” (in Bain and Hauptfleisch 2001: 10). Duma

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5 Not that these issues were not being faced pre-1994. However, it was the overarching menace of apartheid that was the main topic in Protest Theatre.

Ndlovu is echoed by John Kani (in Bain and Hauptfleisch 2001: 11) who observes:

Playwrights who had, in the past, written about the injustices of the white regime, “found they had nothing to say...” producing “...a strange lull” and work which was “unsettled, undefined, unclear.”

Instead of having the complex enemy of apartheid to focus on, theatre makers were in crisis. As Greg Homann (2006: 1) explains:

The long standing routine of creating protest work was no longer necessary. Questions of “What now?”, “What are our stories?”, “What is theatre's function in this new society?” emerged...

What was there to reflect upon or to represent? This crisis of representation is the context from which Bailey and Grootboom's theatre emerged.

There has been a development in South African theatre, a growing out of a previous dispensation; a shift that marks post-1994 South African theatre as postcolonial and post-apartheid. Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom and Brett Bailey both have markers that identify them as postcolonial theatre practitioners.

The framing of the Black performing body as *savage*, *violent*, *exotic* occurs specifically when the Black body is viewed through the colonial lens; using the colonial *gaze*. As expressed by Boehmer (2005: 269):

From the point of view of the colonizer specifically, fears and curiosities, sublimated fascination with the strange or the 'primitive', are expressed in concrete physical and anatomical images.

This dissertation seeks to interrogate this 'imagery' and whether it has influenced the work of Bailey and Grootboom in relation to the controversial signifiers attached to the Black performing body in their work: with Grootboom attaching *extreme violence* and the *carnal* and Bailey re-introducing the colonial notion of the *exotic* and *savage*.

The fields of postcolonial theory and postcolonial performance theory are broad and encompass a diverse range of practices that are considered, formulated and theorised differently. For the purposes of this dissertation, it is important for the reader to note where I am locating my theory.

According to Loren Kruger (1999), the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the first (Black) president of a 'new' South Africa marked “the singular threshold of South Africa's unrepeatabe passage into the postcolonial era” (1999: 8-9). Kruger, however, observes that the problem with the “generalized idea of the postcolonial condition and its corollary, the notion that postcolonialism is “not a temporal concept” but rather a “mode of reading” and of “textual/ cultural resistance” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 2), is that it “suspends” history, including the history of cultural imperialism and the past and present of uneven development, in the name of a generalized “resistance” (McClintock 1992: 88 in Kruger 1999).

It is this generalised “resistance” that Anne McClintock (in Kruger 1999) and Loren Kruger (1999) argue spawned postcolonial theatre. Postcolonial theatre aims to have performances responding or resisting to the experience of colonialism, whether directly or indirectly. These acts are performed for the intended continuation and/ or regeneration of the colonised communities. They are (essentially) acts or performances that should be interrogating and thus resisting the hegemony that underpins colonial representation; and through those acts, the subject should be re-envisioned through performance.

However, although postcolonialism and postcolonial theatre may well aim to oppose colonial representations and colonial values, whether it fulfills the aims listed in the previous paragraph, remains a debated issue in this field.

Chapter One of this dissertation will examine postcolonial performance theory with regards to the past and the present situation in South African theatre. It will locate postcolonial performance theory with postcolonial theory discourses, dealing specifically at South African theatre history. It will look specifically at the effects of colonialism, not only in terms of economic and political disempowerment but also in terms of the psychological internalisation of subject position and identity. It will provide a theoretical basis, through which critical analyses of both Bailey and Grootboom's work will occur.

Chapter Two will examine the colonial *gaze* and the Black performing body. Jonathan Schroeder (2002: 58) believes that the *gaze* signifies “a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze”. Through the transient nature of the performance language of postcolonial theatre, one of the foci of this chapter of the dissertation is on how or whether colonial subjectivity can be re-envisioned. The disruption of the colonial *gaze*.

In postcolonial theatre, the body of the performer is a major physical symbol as it has the capacity to



offer a “multifarious complex of meanings” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 203). The performing body becomes a signifier.

Paying attention to the body can be a useful (and even essential) strategy for reconstructing Postcolonial subjectivity because Imperialist discourse has been both insidious and persuasive in its construction of the colonised subject as an inscribed object of knowledge (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 204).

As discussed above, in order to disrupt the colonial *gaze*, it becomes vital that the performing body on stage (should) become a key site of resistance. Postcolonial performance (and theory) aims to challenge the colonial imposition of identity through the human body in order for there to be a fragmentation of subjectivity. Postcolonial performance theory desires an important and effective meaning, particularly in the notions of representations and identities.

This chapter will examine whether or not the integration of indigenous performance forms into a new theatre aesthetic (postcolonial theatre) disrupts the colonial *gaze*. Or, as Schechner (2002: 233) suggests, is “colonial mimicry” being used to subvert, challenge and overthrow authorities (the colonial *gaze*).

While postcolonialism and postcolonial performance/ theatre may well aim to oppose colonial representation and values, this chapter seeks to examine and interrogate whether (or not) in a postcolonial, post-apartheid, post-1994 'new' South Africa, Bailey or Grootboom's theatre fulfills postcolonial performance theory aims – specifically with regards to the disruption of the harsh colonial *gaze*.

Chapter Three will examine the work of Brett Bailey using the following two particular case studies and analysing them: *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) and *Big Dada* (2001), in an attempt to locate disruptions of the colonial *gaze* with regards to the Black performing body *or* to expose the exoticism within the use of such notions as *savage, primitive, strange, violent* that are attached to the Black performing body in his works.

In *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997), with an emphasis on the *exotic*, the sangomas, the ritual (real and performative), Bailey does incorporate indigenous performance forms into his postcolonial theatre – however does the integration of these indigenous performance forms into a new theatre aesthetic

subvert the colonial *gaze*? Or, rather, does it feed into a colonial fascination with African exoticism? *Big Dada* (2001) is a play about the rise and fall of Idi Amin – the ruthless dictator in Uganda who, according to Peter Stearns and William Langer (2001: 1064), caused a genocide which left over 300 000 Ugandans dead. This play has attached both *violence* and the *exotic* to the black bodies performing.

Chapter Four will examine the works of Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom, focusing particularly on *Cards* (2002) and *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006). The analyses will attempt to locate disruptions of the colonial *gaze* with regards to the Black performing body; *or* to expose the *extreme violence* and *carnality* that is attached to the Black performing body in his works.

With regards to *Cards* (2002), does the use of the carnal, the raw, the sexual, perpetuate a vicious cycle of colonial prejudices within South African audiences within what should be a postcolonial South African theatre arena. The colonised subject's body (in this case, the Black performer's body) has always been an “*object* of the coloniser's fascination and repulsion (and, in effect, possession) in sexual, pseudo-scientific and political terms” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 203). I aim to examine whether or not what is happening in Grootboom's work/ theatre specifically is that the roles into which he has placed his Black performers are within racist discourses, “with perhaps even more emphasis on their supposed violence and sexuality” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 208).

This chapter seeks to interrogate whether or not Grootboom in casting the Other, the black performing bodies, as corporeal, carnal, instinctual, raw... with his use of full nudity, simulated sex, simulated rapes, violence, explicit language, misogyny, obscenities, murder, drug use and religious rhetoric – has reintroduced colonial ideologies and stereotypes? Is his theatre 'black Black humour'? Reinforcing colonial ideologies of the *savage*? Or does Grootboom's theatre (perhaps unconsciously and perhaps not) aid the location of the (sometimes) nude, sexual, black performing body in the arena/ site of resistance in order to fracture the colonial *gaze* to further the aims of postcolonial theatre.

*Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) is a brutal exposure of township life and the story revolves around a serial killer, the “G-String Strangler,” who is hunting down young women at night. The play traverses the bleaker and more desperate sides of human nature. As described by Robert Greig in *The Sunday Independent* (2005), *Relativity* is a panorama of extreme emotions and violence.

However, does this perpetuation of the image of the black as *violent* or attaching these signifiers of

extreme *violence* challenge the colonial imposition of identity through the human body. Seeing the black performing body being attached to notions of extreme *violence* begs to ask the question: Does this subvert the colonial *gaze* or does it feed into a stereotype of the *violent, savage* Black?

This dissertation is to be read as an examination of both Brett Bailey and Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom's theatre and the motives for the use of the black performing body on postcolonial South African theatre stages/ sites.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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This dissertation relies on in-depth textual analyses of the scripts of *Cards* (2002), *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) by Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom and *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) and *Big Dada: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* (2001) by Brett Bailey.

The in-depth textual analyses rely on two published scripts in the form of *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) and *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997). The other two plays, *Cards* (2002) and *Big Dada: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* (2001) are informal scripts, supplied by the National English Literary Museum, to which I owe a large debt of gratitude as the majority of my secondary sources for the research on Grootboom, which were supplied by Mr. Malcolm Hacksley and Mrs. Ann Torlesse of N.E.L.M in Grahamstown.

The reason for the close textual scrutiny is the limited access to visual material, the very ephemerality of theatre itself and the logistics of getting to watch the live performances of these plays. Therefore, this dissertation relies on the play texts themselves, critical reviews and limited audio visual material. My reflective style of writing is a methodological choice. Approaching only the text is an awkward task. Theatre is meant to be ‘alive’ and on stage. Thus, translating from the page to stage in my mind’s eye was a difficult and onerous task. Reading a play and watching a play being performed are two very different things. This obviously changes the nature of the research as I am relying solely on the word of the playwright.

It is important to note that a text’s meaning is not a stable one. Questions that should be asked are: who becomes the bearer of meaning? Is it the playwright or is it the reader? As the reader, one can always find or see what one thinks should be part of the text. However, the reader is always influenced by his or her own preconceived notions about life, politics, race issues and sex. These preconceived ideas are at constant war with whatever is being read, examined or studied. Should I get the opportunity to watch all four plays live, perhaps my findings would be remarkably different and all my preconceived and text-based notions altered?

The above works by Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom and Brett Bailey constitute post-apartheid theatre and consequently, postcolonial theatre. These works constitute postcolonial as they are produced post-

democracy, post-1994. Loren Kruger (1999: 8-9) writes that the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as the first (Black) president of a 'new' South Africa marked “the singular threshold of South Africa's unrepeatable passage into the postcolonial era.” The theatre examined in this dissertation documents the times, the difficulty and the history of the country, in which we, as ‘new’ South Africans, are living.

There is a large amount of research that has been done in the area of South African theatre; however the majority of this research has been done pre-democracy, pre-1994. The area, into which I am delving, with the analysis of these current South African theatre makers, is slightly murky. Analysis on postcolonial theatre is extensive.

In this dissertation, because of the lack of current criticism of the plays discussed, there is a greater reliance on critical theatre reviews, which are drawn from secondary sources such as Robert Greig , Anton Krueger, Greg Homann, Adrienne Sichel, Dawn Kennedy and Charles De Olim to name but a few. These critics discuss the live performances of the plays in great detail, allowing insight from an academic perspective while allowing with the potential to imagine, in one’s minds eye, the theatrical event. Obviously, to hold all the critics subject positions to account would be academically sound. However, there does not seem to be much disparity between the critics and how they interpret the plays. I, unfortunately, have to rely on what I have read. This indeed puts me at the mercy of the critic’s reviews.

## CHAPTER ONE SOUTH AFRICAN THEATRE

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### **South African Theatre History:**

According to Robert Kavanagh, it was not long ago that Africans and non-Africans believed that African history began with the arrival of Europeans on the west coast of Africa. Similarly many thought (and still do) that African theatre began with the first European inspired dramatic performances in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (1985: 43).

Ruth Finnegan writes that

... with a few possible exceptions, there is no tradition in Africa of artistic performances which include all the elements which might be demanded in a strict definition of drama – or at least not with the emphasis to which we are accustomed (1970: 516).

The statement of Finnegan's has been questioned by Kavanagh. He asks the following questions: 'could she be really sure that there is “no tradition”?’ 'Did she really expect to find in Africa exactly what she was “accustomed to” in Europe?' (1985:43).

### **An Introduction to 'Formal Theatre':**

Bhekisizwe Peterson (1990) writes about the introduction of Africans to 'formal theatre' and claims that that the introduction was largely due to missionary activities. Missionaries were faced with “serious social limitations” due to the differences in culture, world views and languages and they soon realised that in order to surmount these constraints *performance* would be key. “Performance demands for its success the harnessing of all one’s senses, be they visual, mental, oral, physical and sensual.” Peterson writes that these human attributes are transformed “during performance into cultural codes or representation, rhetoric and reception.” Peterson continues with this powerful statement about performance: “[Performance, then,] is potentially more accessible than other forms of signification such as writing“(1990: 229).

The stock themes of the theatre in the mission schools were those of “repentance, character training, habits of industry, diligence, thrift and obedience” and theatre was now becoming a 'tool' with which “to challenge the 'limited' capabilities of Africans” (1990: 230). Cropper (1932: 59) writes that “The

difficult gulf between the concrete and the abstract, which the Africans find so hard to step over, can be bridged by drama". According to Peterson, theatre was, in fact, being encouraged by the White communities and the Black elite as a better form of entertainment than the bioscopes and dance halls that were being frequented.

Performance has always been (and still is) central to an African way of life, whether it be in the use of mime, music, dance, costumes, props, make-up and ritual in the Khoisan communities; *Inguni-intsomi* (Xhosa), *inganekwane* (Zulu), *liboko* (Sotho), *izibongo* (Zulu) and *ingoma* which are all forms of praise-poetry and dramatic choral verse; and of course, the oral tradition of story-telling, the passing down of knowledge and folk tales through generations. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o comments:

Drama has origins in human struggles with nature and with others...it was part and parcel of the rhythm of daily and seasonal life of the community (in Losambe and Sarinjeive 2001: 96)

### **A New Urban Culture:**

By 1906, a new urban culture came into being. As Kavanagh states

Taken as a whole, black and multi-racial theatre in the transitional period before the 1950's anticipated what were to become some of the most important features of later drama. There was the importance of song, music and dance, improvisation and group creativity (1985:47).

During this time there was an increase in multi-racial activity and the commercialisation of Black and of White theatre. Theatre was becoming an important activity "in the cultural practices of the elite Africans from the Twenties" (Peterson 1990: 230) and this theatre was characterised "by a range of socio-political ambivalences and tensions" (1990: 230). However even though the Bantu Dramatic Society (founded in 1932) wanted to develop African drama, what happened was that because the African elite wanted to aspire to a European way of life (essentially), this was caused by the "thorough assimilation of the ideas and values inculcated at mission schools and expounded by liberal whites" (1990: 231). So, instead of developing African drama, there was a preference for written European work.

Kavanagh (1985:49) points out that there were "three major developments in theatre activity in the 1950s: the establishment of a substantial professional and amateur white theatre; the formation of the Union of Southern African Artists which was formed in 1955 and was composed of both black and of

white members; and the popularity of black variety concerts with white audiences.” Accordingly, during the 1940s and 1950s, it was still possible to organise multi-racial activity (as mentioned above) even though the apartheid regime attempted to obstruct or inhibit this interaction at all levels. However, by the 1960s there was a marked deterioration in the ability to organise multi-racial activity as the apartheid regime clamped down and introduced new legislation.

These laws inhibited the ability of whites and blacks to associate or collaborate outside working hours and working relationships... A series of proclamations and laws against mixed audiences and black performers culminated in the 1963 Publications and Entertainment Act... (Kavanagh 1985: 51).

### **Attempting To Collaborate:**

Temple Hauptfleisch (2005) discusses that from 1956 – 1975 there were attempts to collaborate across racial barriers that had been set up by the apartheid system. He elaborates:

This slowly developed into a whole world of non-institutionalised and serious theatre, revolving around such diverse organisations and individuals as Leonard Schach and his superb *Cockpit Players* in the fifties, Leon Gluckmann, the *Serpent Players* in the Eastern Cape, Ian Bernhardt and the Union of Southern African Artists, particularly their school and performance space called *The Rehearsal Room* at Dorkay House, in Johannesburg (run for a while by Fugard), and the *Natal Theatre Council* in Durban (2005:12).

Hauptfleisch continues to point out that there was a growing interest (White interest) in musical township theatre at this time. This led to “further development and exploitation of the form by both the white entrepreneurs... and integrated Union of Southern African Artists who presented a series of extremely successful Township Jazz Concerts later in the decade” (2005: 12).

This, in turn, led to *King Kong* (1959) – “one of the most significant theatrical events of the period” (2005:21). This was a collaboration between Black and White artists, specifically Alf Herbert, Union Artists, author Harry Bloom, composer Todd Matshikiza and director Leon Gluckmann. Hauptfleisch (2005: 12) comments that

... the play itself gave the local story and local performance styles a legitimacy they had previously lacked in the world of fashionable show business. Though there was plenty of criticism about the exploitation of black artists in this and other similar shows, *King Kong* launched the careers of an



[sic] number of creative individuals who shared a distaste of the government and its policies and saw co-operative role of theatre [sic] as a [sic] one way out.

This success of *King Kong* had far-reaching effects on the theatre environment of South Africa. Hauptfleisch (2005: 12) notes that *King Kong* (1959) spurred on a new industry – namely, Township Theatre and “notable in this has been the commercial success of Sam Mangwane (*Crime Does Not Pay* 1963, *Unfaithful Woman* 1964) and Gibson Kente, and all their imitators”. This led to a “kind of voluntary submission to the Apartheid ideology, since it became a theatre by blacks for blacks, while the NTO was providing theatre by whites for whites” and the Group Areas Act of 1965 entrenched this as there could not be any multi-racial activity: “no racially mixed casts and no racially mixed audiences were to be allowed” (2005: 12).

### **The Black Consciousness Movement and Theatre:**

The emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement gave impetus to the positive notion of theatre in the cause of Black liberty: Black theatre came to mean theatre which espoused the principles of Black Consciousness. Black theatre had therefore to reintegrate Black people into their history and culture and to forge solidarity and political consciousness. In the face of apartheid, Black Consciousness had to unite Black people. The theatre would have to be a part of this attempt... (Hauptfleisch and Steadman 1991: 144). It was in 1969 that the South African Students' Organisation (an all-black organisation) formed, and from this grew an increasingly militant Black Consciousness Movement, “including the formation of a non-student organisation, The Black People's Convention (BPC) (Kavanagh 1985: 148).

The Black Consciousness Movement urged a defiant rejection of apartheid especially among black workers and the Black youth. Stephen Bantu Biko believed that for Black people to liberate themselves, they had to redefine their values, their self-image and entire outlook on black culture and identity. Biko (in Biko and Stubbs 1987: 30) wrote that “Black Consciousness seeks to show the black people the value of their own standards and outlook. It urges black people to judge themselves according to these standards and not to be fooled by white society who have white-washed themselves and made white standards the yardstick by which even black people judge each other”. Biko diagnosed the problem of oppression in South Africa as a problem of culture. This relentless denigration of Black African culture (for example: Whites describing African culture in derogatory terms) created a sense of inferiority that rendered Black South Africans incapable of action and revolt. Biko realised that

political revolution would have to be preceded by a revolution in how Black people saw their past and their culture. A revolution in how Black people saw their 'blackness'. Biko (in Biko and Stubbs 1987: 49) defines Black Consciousness as:

in essence the realisation by the black man of the need to rally together with his brothers around the cause of their oppression – the blackness of their skin – and to operate as a group in order to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude. It seeks to demonstrate the lie that black is an aberration from the “normal” which is white. It is a manifestation of a new realisation that by seeking to run away from themselves and emulate the white man, blacks are insulting the intelligence of whoever created them black. Black Consciousness therefore, takes cognizance of the deliberateness of God's plan in creating black people black. It seeks to infuse the black community with a new-found pride in themselves, their efforts, their value systems, their religion and their outlook to life.

From its beginning, the Black Consciousness Movement launched an attack on traditional White values and also attacked what they saw as the condescending values of the Whites of liberal opinion. The view of the Black Consciousness Movement was that even well-intentioned White people often re-enacted the paternalism of the society in which they lived (Kavanagh 1985: 152).

Within the Black Consciousness Theatre movement there was a rejection of the multi-racial activity that had preceded it, (in fact, it was a precondition for the early advocates of Black Consciousness) and, a turn towards an ideology that “required expressly that they perform to blacks only in black areas” (Kavanagh 1985: 53).

Black Consciousness Theatre was now changing in form, and in content, in order to achieve its specific aims. Black Consciousness took on board several themes “including Black initiative, self – definition, determination and liberation” (Peterson 1990: 233). Culture was now being used as a weapon. Black Consciousness theatre used poetry, African music forms, dance, direct confrontation, gum boot dancing, choral verse. These forms were utilised as they stressed *Blackness on Black terms*. According to Peterson, “cultural practices were accorded a prominent political role within the movement” (1990: 233). Black theatre has been forced to change, develop and metamorphose from one stage to another as dictated by the experience of the black masses:

Theatre, at its best, is the communication and exploration of human experience; it is a

forum for our values, political, moral and ethical. It is concerned with the interaction of these values at a philosophical, emotional and intellectual level (Pammenter in Jackson 1993: 42).

Black Consciousness theatre became that very forum for black values, politically, morally and ethically. Biko (1987) reflected the concern for the existential struggle of the Black person as a human being; a human being who should be dignified and proud of his Blackness.

### **Shifting Trends:**

By 1976, the socio-political and economic isolation through race policies was increasing and being experienced in many ways. Hauptfleisch writes that there were three major shifts during this period:

Firstly theatre and theatre practitioners finally seemed to discover the power of *performance* as a socio-political weapon<sup>6</sup>. Secondly the first genuine and wide-ranging attempts at transcending the racial, linguistic and other barriers at understanding through the process of theatre were undertaken... (through the workshop form). Thirdly there is a significant and noticeable shift in the theatrical paradigm, away from the institutionalised and imported European forms towards the more informal yet pervasive indigenous performance tradition (2005: 16).

With theatre and performance utilising more indigenous theatre/ drama forms (dance, song, narrative) it discovered its “very ephemerality” (2005: 16). What started to occur is that Township Theatre began to flourish because of the legislation of the time. According to Hauptfleisch, the theatre of the post-1976 era seemed to move away from being a 'theatre of anger' to a 'theatre of reflection' in the late 1980's. During the traumatic 1970's, theatre was angry, abrasive, propagandistic and confrontational. As mentioned above, at the end of the 1970's decade, there was an increased migration of black performers to the city theatres and the establishment of the Market Theatre in 1976 accelerated the re-emergence of multi-racial activity.

In the late 1980's, there seemed to be a broadening of the cultural struggle and a broadening of the liberation struggle. There was also a “growing proficiency and independence among performers and writers” (2005: 17). It seemed that audiences were thirsty for a difference, change in the theatrical menu. It seemed they had grown slightly weary of the overtly political theatre that was becoming stale.

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<sup>6</sup> Although it must be noted at this point that theatre practitioners had been using theatre/ performance as a socio-political weapon before 1976.

What emerged from this dispensation were the “workers' plays” (Junction Avenue Theatre Company, Ari Sitas). However, the state viewed these polemic works (made for, performed by and viewed by workers) as dangerous – a threat, and some were banned or censored. As previously noted, “the style and content of protest theatre broadened, to encompass numerous additional issues, a variety of different performance forms, and a growing awareness – even among critics – of the need for a broader interpretation of what constituted “theatre” in South Africa” (2005: 17). There was an expanding body of student work that was being shown at festivals, township theatre “still continued on its dual way of entertainment” (2005: 17), workers' plays were crossing over into the city theatres (notably the *Market*) with playwrights such as Maishe Maponya, Percy Mtwa and Mbongeni Ngema.

However, because of the worsening socio-political and socio-economic situation in South Africa, a sense of insecurity was affecting everyone, performers were leaving the industry, existing power structures and hierarchies were beginning to crumble and “while others fought to democratise the existing structures from within and without” there was a fundamental flaw. “The concepts of “people power” translated into art-by-committee and similar simplistic and reductionist principles, eventually hobbled a large number of potentially exciting projects” (2005: 18). One of the more popular forms of theatre that survived (and survived well) in that time of uncertainty was popular commercial theatre. For example, the work of Peter Toerien. He retained his white, upper-middle class English audiences by bringing in Broadway and West End hits. And as the nineties approached, it was clear that there was such a vast array of eclecticism in form and theme in South African theatre that audiences “supported what they felt comfortable with” (Hauptfleisch 2005: 18).

In 1990, South Africa went through a watershed: a new President – F.W. De Klerk and the release of Nelson Mandela, all of which had a “phenomenal impact on the arts” (2005: 20). It is vital to note that Hauptfleisch indicates that two “striking but very general trends may suffice to indicate some parameters in this beginning period of the latest phase of theatre history in the country” (2005: 20). Firstly, people across all groups who, “for ideological reasons” (2005: 20) had not been able to come together, share ideas or communicate began crossing the divides that were now breaking down and began “planning all kinds of joint ventures” (2005:20). The second effect and the one that pertains specifically to this dissertation was “an almost farcical scramble to find *causes*” ('farcical' according to Hauptfleisch. Personally, I do not think that 'farcical' is the correct word to use as the theatre community now seemed at a loss) (2005: 20). As Greg Homann (2006: 1) notes:

For over thirty years indigenous South African theatre concerned itself predominately with new work of protest and resistance against the apartheid system... The long standing routine of creating protest work was no longer necessary. Questions of “What now?”, “What are our stories?”, “What is theatre's function in this new society?” emerged, leaving well-established playwrights puzzled at what to reflect.

As noted above by Homann, Protest Theatre and Political Theatre were out. People were now seeking entertainment for entertainment's sake and theatre was now becoming a more commercial entertainment industry. Perhaps it is out of this dispensation that Bailey and Grootboom's work emerges. It becomes vital to note at this point that Protest and Political Theatre, too, were entertaining. The previous statement should not imply that it is not entertaining. Although Grootboom's theatre does remind one of the Township Theatre that was being produced in the past, it seems that it has dispensed with, as Robert Greig (2005: 1) puts it, the “treacly moralism” within the entertainment. Both Bailey and Grootboom are commercial theatre makers<sup>7</sup>. Bailey refers to the 'showbiz' of theatre and Grootboom refers to the business of theatre. Of course, it is important to note that theatre has had to become a ‘business’, considering the new economic environment and the reduction in State funding. Productions demand saleability for survival. Perhaps it is for these reasons that their work has garnered acclaim. It entertains. However, I do not think that because it is entertaining theatre that it negates the politics of performance. Rather, their theatre could and should be bringing the politics of performance to the fore.

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## **1.1 THE EFFECTS OF COLONIALISM: THE COLONIALISTS & THE COLONISED**

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<sup>7</sup> However, this point could be argued in Bailey's case. In the case of his many tours through the Transkei, Bailey does not have a cover charge for spectators but rather, the spectators give what they can in order to show their appreciation.

Enlightenment philosopher and writer Diderot (1713 - 1784) was critical of the barbarity of colonialism and challenged the idea that Europeans had the obligation to civilise the rest of the world. Diderot challenged the view that indigenous people benefited from European civilisation; Diderot also argued that the European colonists were the uncivilised ones. He claimed that culture helped to inculcate morality and reinforce norms of respect, but that these norms tended to dissipate when the individual (the coloniser) was far from his country of origin. Colonial empires, he believed, frequently became the sites of extreme brutality “because when the colonists were far away from legal institutions and informal sanctions, the habits of restraint fell away, exposing natural man's full instinct for violence” (Kohn 2006).

According to Banfield and Crow (1996: 1), the British Empire, at its peak in the 1930's, covered almost a quarter of the world's land surface, “it spanned every continent except Europe”. According to Banfield and Crow, the colonies (including South Africa, the focus of this dissertation) had been

settled by whites who had either decimated the indigenous peoples in their push for territorial expansion and their desire to reproduce European society, or ruthlessly exploited and controlled them. (1996:1)

Colonialist ideology is rooted in patriarchal ideals of power and is associated with the forceful taking over of territories and the domination of the peoples indigenous to them. This kind of ideology is closely linked to hegemony which can be defined as the representative power of the social system, structure or ideology over another, based on its perceived *superiority* or, as Gramsci states, its “cultural leadership” (in Williams and Chrisman 1994: 134).

The classification of 'civilised' in Western culture stems from Aristotelian typology for identifying and “assessing alien people and dividing them into the civilised and barbarian” (Earl and Lowe 2005:8). Africa essentially represents alterity; for, as Jan Nederveen Pieterse notes, “when the Greeks and the peoples of the Roman Empire wanted to represent a far off, prestigious but different land, they used the black as the sign of differentiation” (1992:23). Using the aforementioned assumptions of civilisation, the classification, status and colonisation of many of the groups of sub-Saharan Africa were determined and supported by these ideological codes of difference, which in turn fueled a colonial ideology that denoted anything different as *other*, but more so, a commodity that could be owned.

The implication is that the subordinate society, in this case the Black, is evaluated in cultural and moral terms defined by the hegemonic society. Important to an understanding of hegemony is that, similar to the establishment of colonialist ideology, hegemony does not occur instantaneously. In fact, “the most important feature of hegemony is that it always implies historical process” (Williams and Chrisman 1994: 15). In South Africa one could add coercion or the ruthless exploitation and social control of the indigenous peoples culminating in the Nationalist government’s official policy of apartheid from 1948. The psychological and cultural impact of this subjugation is best described by Franz Fanon, who identified what he called

'a massive psycho-existential complex' in relations between the coloured Colonised and white colonialists, involving 'an existential deviation' forced on its victims by white civilisation and European culture. (Banfield and Crow 1996: 3)

Fanon succinctly states that “the effect consciously sought by Colonialism was to drive into the natives' heads the idea that if the settlers were to leave, they would at once fall back into barbarism, degradation and bestiality” (in Williams and Chrisman 1994: 37).

Colonialism was/ is a lucrative commercial operation, bringing wealth to Western nations through the economic (and other) exploitations of others. This endorses Elleke Boehmer's judicious definition of colonialism as the “settlement of territory, the exploitation or development of resources, and the attempt to govern the indigenous inhabitants of occupied lands” (Boehmer 1995:2). In fact, it is safe to say that the majority of people have, in one way or another, been affected by colonialism; nine-tenths of the earth's surface has been under colonial rule. Europe, during the mid-nineteenth century, was subjected to a growing notion of imperialism and capitalism, a major contributing factor to the ‘Scramble for Africa’. This ‘Scramble’ resulted in Africa's territories, lands and people being physically divided up between the invading countries of Europe (such as Britain, France, Germany, Holland and Portugal).

Coupled with the 'competitive' nature of nationalist growth and industrialisation, the need within most European countries was to find new markets to export to as well as to import from.

Commodity and ownership of markets thus fuelled the drive for exploration into the African continent and evolved into the marking off of boundaries and borders. As a legacy of colonialism, the physical borders established then as the extent of the colonies' territories still remain today as the borders of independent African states.

Colonialism is seen to be a widespread illness which has indeed altered the world fundamentally. Through the tour of colonialism and the 'Scramble for Africa' there was (and still is) no regard for pre-colonial cultural structures and thus cultural imperialism ensued. With cultural imperialism came the fundamental shaping of identity and this is what postcolonial theatre aims to re-interpret.



## 1.2 POSTCOLONIALISM AND DRAMA/ PERFORMANCE

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When Europeans settled a colony, one of the earliest signs of established culture/ 'civilisation' was the presentation of European drama which, according to official records, obliterated for many years any indigenous performance forms. (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 7-8)

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To make the statement that Postcolonial theory started in literary theory with the seminal work *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin becomes problematic as they are three Western academics. However, it is important to note that this body of work became vital as it asked pertinent questions, such as: why are particular colonial notions foregrounded while other notions that may conflict with colonialism are suppressed? Why is the Black, non-White, working class, child or female voice constantly being marginalized? When this work was written it was challenging what was considered hegemonic at the time.

To re-iterate what has been stated before: postcolonialism does not define a radically new historical era and is not a temporal term. Postcolonialism does not “herald a brave new world where all the ills of the colonial past have been cured” (McLeod 2000:33) but rather, postcolonialism is an “engagement with and contestation of colonialism's discourse, power structures and social hierarchies (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 2). In Alan Lawson's words, postcolonialism is a

politically motivated, historical-analytical movement [which] engages with, resists, and seeks to dismantle the effects of colonialism in the material, historical, cultural-political, pedagogical, discursive and textual domains. (in Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 2)

It is important to note that in the discussion of the effects of colonialism and apartheid, postcolonialist thought must be introduced – the theory of postcolonialism responds to more than the “chronological construction of post-independence, and to more than just the discursive experience of Imperialism” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996:2). What was happening in the socio-political and cultural arena of colonialism was/ is also happening in theatre. Rustom Bharucha likens critics and practitioners of theatre (Peter Brook, Richard Schechner and Eugenio Barba) to the large multinationals that were mining the “exotic’ – usually 'third world' cultures for theatrical raw materials” (in Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 10) with no regard or appreciation of cultural differences. Hence it becomes important

to understand what postcolonial theatre aims to do in order to challenge colonial ideology.

Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins go on to define postcolonial performance as including the following features:

- acts that respond directly to the experience of imperialism;
- acts performed for the continuation and/ or regeneration of the colonised (and sometimes pre-contact) communities;
- acts performed with the awareness of, and sometimes the incorporation of, post-contact forms; and
- acts that interrogate the hegemony that underlies imperial representation (1996: 11)

Bailey's theatre contains features of postcolonial performance, especially in his plays *iMumbo Jumbo*, *Ipi Zombi?* and *The Prophet*, as well as *Big Dada*. His theatre does seem to respond to the experience of imperialism and colonialism by re-inventing and re-interpreting historical African stories. His theatre most definitely includes post-contact forms which are integrated with pre-contact or indigenous forms. For example: the integration of real and performative rituals in *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997), this could be considered as an act that could help to regenerate the colonised amaXhosa culture. This is discussed in more detail later in the dissertation.

Grootboom's theatre is slightly more difficult to pin down under the term of postcolonial. His theatre, however, could be seen as responding to the experience of colonialism by showing what has happened to the communities that were oppressed by apartheid and colonial ideologies; for example, the townships that are represented as places of violence. Perhaps by showing what he deems as the 'truth' of what is occurring in the townships of South Africa, Grootboom's theatre is performed for the continuation of those colonised communities. Grootboom's theatre does incorporate post-contact forms and he does integrate those with the Township Theatre style that his theatre takes on. His cinematic directorial choices are indicative of a hybridisation within the postcolonial theatre/ performance framework. It could be argued that Grootboom gives a heightened realism of the 'in-yer-face' style violence in order to depict the suffering of the working class, or the township people in South Africa today. This is discussed in more detail later in the dissertation.

**Always use the word 'Africa' or 'Darkness' or 'Safari'...'Zanzibar', 'Masai', 'Zulu', 'Zambezi', 'Congo', 'Nile', 'Big', 'Sky', 'Shadow', 'Drum', 'Sun', or 'Bygone'...treat Africa as if it were one country. It is hot and dusty with rolling grasslands and huge herds of animals and tall, thin people who are starving. Or it is hot and steamy with very short people who eat primates. Don't get bogged down with precise descriptions. Africa is big: fifty-four countries, 900 million people who are too busy starving, warring and emigrating to read your book...so keep your descriptions romantic and evocative and unparticular...Describe, in detail, naked breasts, or enhanced genitals. Or any kind of genitals. And dead bodies. Or, better, naked dead bodies. And especially rotting naked dead bodies. Bimyavanga Wainana 'How to write about Africa'.**

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## CHAPTER TWO: THE COLONIAL GAZE AND THE BLACK BODY, PERFORMING IDENTITY

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The above quotation by Wainana locates the typical *gaze* on Africa. Africa is a continent that is viewed by many non-Africans as the 'dark continent', wild, untamed, warring, violent, drought and HIV/AIDS riddled. There are stereotypes that are perpetuated by many writers, documentary makers and film makers. Even those who are acquainted with Africa and the people of Africa are inclined to perpetuate the perceived exotica of the country. When the genocide in Rwanda occurred in 1994, the media chose to show the devastating pictures of bloated bodies dumped in the Kigara River, in pit latrines; and showed the brutal footage of Hutu's and the *interahamwe*<sup>8</sup> murdering Tutsi's with *machetes*<sup>9</sup>. No gory footage was spared in the coverage of this genocide. What seems to be happening in the coverage of Africa in the media is that every shock tactic is used relentlessly until it numbs the viewer who then shrugs it off. There is a quote from the movie *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) where the journalist Jack (played by Joaquin Phoenix) says to Paul Rusesabagina (played by Don Cheadle), when he thanks him for shooting footage of the genocide:

Jack: I think if people see this footage, they'll say Oh, my God, that's horrible.  
And then they'll go on eating their dinners (2004).

This chapter will examine the colonial *gaze* and identity, and the Black performing body. In postcolonial theatre, through the transient nature of the performance language, one of the foci of this chapter is on how or whether colonial subjectivity can be re-envisioned; the disruption of the colonial

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<sup>8</sup> The Hutu paramilitary organisation.

<sup>9</sup> The *machete* is a large cleaver-like cutting tool. The blade is typically 60cm long with a razor sharp blade not more than 3mm thick. It is extremely sharp. It is an agricultural tool that soon transformed into a weapon of mass destruction.

*gaze*. In order to disrupt, fracture or even subvert the colonial *gaze*, it is important that the performing body on stage (should) become a key site of resistance (whether directly or indirectly).

In postcolonial theatre, the body of the performer is a major physical symbol as it has the capacity to offer a “multifarious complex of meanings” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 203). The performing body becomes a *signifier* and thus as Gilbert and Tompkins note:

Paying attention to the body can be a useful (and even essential) strategy for reconstructing Postcolonial subjectivity because Imperialist discourse has been both insidious and persuasive in its construction of the colonised subject as an inscribed object of knowledge. (1996: 204)

This chapter will discuss identity: identity as David Woodward (1997: 301) defines it as the means by which individuals can be “bonded on the most fundamental levels: national, 'racial', ethnic, regional, local”. Identity is about the negotiation of difference. Fanon remarks that identity arises from the interaction with others and that even though identity may be signified by the body, it actually lies outside of the body, in the reciprocal relations with others. In Lucien Taylor's words, the body is the “phenomenological aspect of human being: it is the way human being becomes known to the human sense” (2004: 15). Woodward, again, refines this further by referring to the body in relation to the visual: “the visual offers a very powerful medium through which identities are presented. This applies to the bodies we inhabit as well as the images we look at. The body thus becomes the medium through which messages about identity are conveyed” (1997: 118). This chapter will attempt to examine how the fixed colonial *gaze* on identity could be fractured or subverted, to be completely overthrown: how the colonial subjectivity can be confused, allowing fixed colonial notions to be transcended. How can colonised subjectivity be re-envisioned?

Pertinent to this chapter is the concept of the *gaze*: how the audience sees the body on stage; how an audience interprets the performers presented.

Power relationships are between those who watch and those who are performing; as Jonathan Schroeder (1998: 208) argues,

to gaze implies more than to look at – it signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze.

The concept of the *gaze* became popular with the rise of postmodern philosophy and was first discussed by Lacan in 1936, with his analysis of the *gaze's* role in the mirror stage of development of the human psyche. This mirror stage of development also links directly to the process of identity formation. In Lacan's development of Freudian psycho-analysis, he suggested that every child, through gazing at him, or herself, experiences

in play the relation between movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates... the child's own body, and the persons and things around him. (in Weedon 1999: 50-51)

In this way, the child becomes aware of his (or her) identity in the very process of othering himself (or herself); “the child's ego becomes split into the I that is watching and the I which is watched” (in Weedon 1997: 51).

Discussing Lacan's mirror phase analysis suggests that the consciousness of the Black self is shaped by a mirror which holds up the image of a White construct of Blackness. The mirror is that in which the Black person misrecognises himself (or herself) as in control of his/ her unified identity. Lacan, in this analysis, reveals that “there is thus an ongoing system of identification where we seek some unified sense of ourselves through symbolic systems and identify with the ways in which we are seen by others” (Woodward 1997: 45). In terms of theatre, audiences identify with those characters that are most like themselves, there is a symbolic system of representation that occurs on stage.

Fanon (in Fanon and Markmann 1991: 154) explains that what occurs then is that an awareness of self is sought outside the self. In the case of Black identities, history, economy, sexuality and colour (pigmentation) combine to contribute to the sense of the Black self, which, because of these outside influences is a neurotic state of self-identification, a fractured sense of identity, based on the foremost signifier of difference, a dark skin.

Fanon suggests that Blackness is a state of being which Black people are forced into adopting, through the marker of corporeal alterity or otherness. He argues that as a result of this corporeal location of identity, Black people are locked into being the eternal Other. It seems that the consciousness of being Other is internalised within the Black person to such an extent that the Black person believes that the essence of being Black is linked to his or her corporeality.

David Chandler (2000) explains that there are several forms of the *gaze*:

- the *spectator's gaze*: the *gaze* of the viewer at an image of a person, this is often the audience of the text;
- the *intra-diegetic gaze*: one character looking at another;
- the *direct* [or *extra-diegetic gaze*] address to the viewer: such as an aside, or acknowledgment of the fourth wall;
- the *director's gaze*: the *gaze* of the camera or the director's gaze

However, it is important to note that these are not the only forms of the *gaze*. Theorists such as Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996: 199) state that they provide the idea of “the 'gaze' as a relationship between offering and demanding 'gaze', and the subject is not aware of this, and the direct 'gaze' as a demand by the subject, who looks at us, demanding our 'gaze'.”

The *gaze*, *gazing* or seeing someone *gaze* at another person provides one with much information regarding relationships to subjects, or the relationships between the subjects upon whom one *gazes*, or the situation in which the subjects are doing the *gazing*. The mutuality of the *gaze* can reflect power structures, or the nature of the relationships between the subjects, as proposed by Lutz and Collins (2008: 134-149) where this “tell[s] us who has the right and/ or need to look at whom”.

Laura Mulvey (1988) discusses framing and representation. She writes about the 'male gaze': this is a theory about the power relationship between those who watch and those who perform. The people who watch or *gaze* have a 'male' role and that they are the dominant, the powerful. Those who perform are feminised and are seen as inferior or powerless. However, this analysis is located within feminist film theory and practice and it becomes vital to note that the theatrical *gaze* is not as regulated as the cinematic *gaze*. The cinematic *gaze* is “where the viewer is generally locked into the camera's viewing pattern” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 248). This issue of the cinematic *gaze* versus the theatrical *gaze* is explained and expounded upon in the following statement by Elin Diamond:

theatre semiotics posits a spectator whose active reception constantly revises the spectacle's meaning. (in Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 248)

It becomes necessary to note at this point that it is arguable that theatre-goers/ audience members/ spectators have a choice of how to receive the spectacle's meaning. The spectator is influenced irrevocably by other factors that occur during performance, such as: directorial shaping and crafting, the aesthetic functioning of the piece as a whole, performance traditions, spatial design and the role of

the performer. However, it is the spectator who would control the *gaze* as they are the ones doing the *gazing*. They may be influenced by all the above theatrical elements; it is still the spectator who controls *how they see what is being presented on stage*.

The colonised subject's body (in this dissertation, the Black performing body) has always been an “*object* of the coloniser's fascination and repulsion (and, in effect, possession) in sexual, pseudo-scientific and political terms (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 203) (my italics), as Elleke Boehmer explains below:

From the point of view of the colonizer specifically, fears and curiosities, sublimated fascinations with the strange or the 'primitive', are expressed in concrete physical and anatomical images. (In Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 203)

Stereotyped images of Blacks have circulated in European culture throughout the era of Western imperialism, slavery and, of course, colonialism. The negative representation of the Other was necessary in order to legitimate “the continuance of European slavery of Africans, and the violent acts carried out under the auspices of 'Western civilisation’” (Carrington 2002: 6).

Ben Carrington goes on to say that Blackness itself was “pathologised as a deviant entity” and that the Black male was stereotyped as “a hyper-sexed, almost animal-like entity”<sup>10</sup> (2002: 6). Of course, this is not to imply that the representation of Black female identity and sexuality in particular remained unproblematic. “Clearly black femininity has been devalued, within a system of racialised heterosexuality that privileged white femininity, and subordinated via the patriarchal parameters within both wider society and black masculinist cultures” (2002: 6).

As Hegel (1770) postulated, “The negro is an example of animal man in all his savagery and lawlessness, and if we wish to understand him at all, we must put aside all our European attitudes... nothing consonant with humanity is to be found in his character (in Eze 1997: 128).

Stuart Hall notes, that the Black man “can only exist in relation to himself through the alienating presence of the white 'Other’” (1997: 18). Carrington (2002: 34) argues that one of the central components to the “emasculating discourses of white racism is an attempt to simultaneously

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<sup>10</sup> In which case, Grootboom would appear to have bought into this stereotype.

dehumanise and sexualise the black male body, as an attempt to deny him his humanity.” As Fanon argued, “the black man is thus reduced to his biological essence: 'The Negro symbolizes the biological’” (in Carrington 2002: 34). It is suggested that historical colonial fantasies about the excesses of Black sexuality continue to exercise a hegemonic role in the representation of Blackness. This, of course, also applies to Black females for example the iconic figure of Saartje Baartman provides, according to Carrington (2002: 7) there is “clear evidence that the European colonialist gaze was just as fixated with pathologising black female 'hyper-sexuality'... with its fascination in studying black female genitalia as the supposed 'external signs of a deviant excessive sexuality.’”

Using the Black performing body (both male and female) as the central theme in this dissertation will question whether Grootboom and Bailey show the Black body on stage as a site of resistance in order to undermine the colonial *gaze* or whether their particular use of the Black body on stage caters basically to colonial and racist prejudices and exploits African exoticism.

In Grootboom's work/ theatre, the roles into which he has placed his Black performers are within racist discourses, “with perhaps even more emphasis on their supposed violence and sexuality” (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 208) as shown very explicitly in *Cards*. The following statement by Gilbert and Tompkins reinforces my viewpoint in relation to Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom's *Cards*:

In these prescribed spaces [racist discourses], imperialism's colonised subject is denied its full humanity; it performs an imposed representational function rather than being a focal point in its own right. And while some roles can be subverted in performance, there is little scope in such plays for significant interrogation of dominant assumptions about race. (1996: 208)

This image of the black as *violent* and *sexualised* or attaching these signifiers to the Black body does not challenge the colonial imposition of identity through the Black human body. As stated before, postcolonial performances should interrogate the hegemony that underpins colonial representation and the subject (should) be re-envisioned through performance. Seeing the Black body performing and being attached to notions of *violence* and *sexualised carnality* begs to have the following question answered: does this subvert the colonial *gaze* or does it feed into a colonial, racist stereotype of the *violent, carnal/ sexualised* Black?

I believe that Brett Bailey may cater to a colonial prejudice by exploiting African exoticism by re-



introducing the notion of the *savage* and attaching it to the Black bodies that perform in his works. Within the framework of Bailey's theatre, questions are also raised as to whether the re-introduction of the *savage* or *violent* Black, for example: Idi Amin in *Big Dada* (2001); the sangomas in *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997), the ritualistic and exotic caters basely to the colonial *gaze*. Or is Bailey subverting the colonial *gaze* by holding a mirror up to itself? In *iMumbo Jumbo*(1997), Brett Bailey does incorporate pre-colonial forms into his postcolonial theatre – however, does the re-integration of indigenous performance forms into the postcolonial theatre aesthetic disrupt the colonial *gaze* or does it rather feed into a colonial fascination with African exoticism. The next chapter will examine Brett Bailey's theatre, with specific focus on *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) and *Big Dada* (2001) and the Black performing body. In order to answer the above questions, these plays need to be analysed in detail with specific regards to the colonial *gaze* and the Black body that performs.

**Everything about Brett Bailey shrieks didgeridoo-blowing, teepee-weekending white boy who's managed to coil his tongue around a Xhosa click and thinks he's in heaven... Yet Bailey's bean-curd image doesn't fail to expose him as an entrepreneur of entrancing wit and theatrical power.**  
(Janet Smith M&G Online 1997: 1)

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**CHAPTER THREE  
BRETT BAILEY  
ACTING 'AFRICAN'**

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Brett Bailey (2003: 6) believes that his art and spirituality are inextricably linked and that in his search for a spiritual truth “he has stumbled on a rich vein that springs from beneath the ground on which he stands”. This form of mining terminology immediately reminded me of Rustom Bharucha's (1993) attack on critics and practitioners such as Schechner, Barba and Brook for “*mining* 'exotic' – usually third world – cultures for theatrical raw materials...” in much the same way as “multinational corporations have been known to exploit materials and cheap labour from the developing world” (in Gilbert and Tompkins 1996: 10).

Brent Meersman (2007: 2) in an interview with Brett Bailey, in Scotland at the Edinburgh Festival in 2007, notes that at a seminar hosted by the African Consortium United Kingdom and The Africa Contemporary Arts Consortium (United States), Bailey is pointedly asked “whether he isn't pandering to European prejudice and exploiting African exoticism”. Bailey (in Meersman 2007: 2) counters this by agreeing that he was “naive”, and that he has learned his lessons. “Never, he says, will he bring the works like *iMumbo Jumbo* to Europe again... The standing ovations every night were patronising” (2007: 2). It is interesting to note Bailey's viewpoint on this. *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder* (2003) came to constitute an early phase of Bailey's theatre which ends with *The Prophet*. Bailey explains how in this production, *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997), he pushed “too hard” the exploration of Xhosa spiritual beliefs, rituals, *sangoma* ceremonies and trance performance, “burning a couple of the performers” (2003: 198). He “withdrew in fear” and “began to question [his] right to work with this material at all” (Bailey 2003: 198).

Perhaps it was due to his projection or false modesty that he thought that the European audiences were patronising in giving standing ovations. Why did he think that the audiences were patronising? Could it not be that the audiences responded to the extraordinary theatrical spectacle? It is an interesting

question that links with the colonial *gaze*. Perhaps Bailey, with his preconceived notions about Europeans, particularly “the nice Dutch women” that he has worked with “who come from soils without Spirit” (Bailey 2003: 21), watched his own theatre through their (allegedly) prejudicial, colonial lens. Perhaps Bailey saw on stage what he *thought* the European audiences would see. Perhaps Bailey was hoping for audience participation that was akin to the participation in ritual ceremony and liminal states, instead of a standing ovation that he perceived as patronising.

Although Bailey has (allegedly) learned his lessons, there is still the question to be asked: did he not realise that when he exoticised the subject matter he was working with or introduced his 'ethnographic' displays, that he would not be asked whether he isn't pandering to European (and essentially a colonialist and racist) prejudice. Meersman writes that Bailey now makes works “with either European or local audiences in mind... Europeans cannot be blamed for seeing a work about witchcraft as whacky and absurd” (2007: 2). While some people, like cultural commentator Ashraf Jamal (2003) writing in the journal, *Art South Africa*, see Bailey's work as a place where “First and Third worlds converge, challenge and undo each other”, others label it a “kind of anthropological tourism” and take offence at his stomping on sacred ground.

Rudakoff (2004: 81) writing about Brett Bailey and his reputation, describes: “a white South African who grew up in a middle-class environment... the bad boy of the theatre scene”. Brett Bailey is an innate story-teller. He writes in his book, *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder* (2003), of growing up in white suburbia in the 1970s and 1980s where the only Black people he knew (until he graduated from university in 1991) were the maids that his family employed, Rosy, Katrina and Virginia (and in all likelihood, these were not their real names but rather 'English' names that were easier for white people to pronounce than their given African first names)<sup>11</sup>. He describes these women as “buxom... from the far-away villages of the Transkei who wore pastel overalls and matching doeks<sup>12</sup>, and smelled of over-

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11 Ntsiki Mazwai talks about this happening to her when she was at school: “I confess, I temporarily lost sight of my identity. My name (well, most our names, really) began to change accents. Became a little more ... exotic. A different kind of black name. My name changed from being Nontsikelelo to Ntsiki to Nsiki to Seeki (hell, I don't even know how to spell that!).

At school, with the white kids it made things better, because it made it easier for them to pronounce my name. The real challenge came back at home, where my people were wondering "what kind of name" this was. This is when the loyalty of my true friends was tested, as they would not only have to admit to knowing me, but also pronounce my name for me properly” (Litnet 21 October 2004).

12 These are caps or head wear that the domestic workers would wear as part of their uniforms; domestic workers would wear them inside the houses of their employers.

ironed cotton, floor polish and pungent creams” (2003: 12).

He goes on to juxtapose the safe environment of Rosy, Katrina and Virginia's “warm, brown bodies” (2003: 12) with Pollsmoor Prison<sup>13</sup> that was just across the road from the family home, where Bailey (2003: 12) imagined that

...thousands of eyes watched us from the square, barred windows. Occasionally the great sirens would howl their red anger across our gardens and we knew there'd been a breakout. Black men with hot breaths and murderous intent were at large in the shrubs, crouching in the rockeries. My mother's face pale with Fear. Lock the children inside!<sup>14</sup>

In 1991, while studying Drama, Bailey and his friend Miranda Williams (who would later become the company manager for the plays *ZOMBIE* and *iMumbo Jumbo*) hitchhiked around Zimbabwe and Bailey felt that on this journey he had to meet a snake<sup>15</sup> and that the snake would tell him *something*. Two years later in Zimbabwe, heading towards the Mozambique border, the encounter occurred (according to Bailey):

Who was this being? To me he was the African Spirit, come to drink at the River of Life, devastated when he found it dry: the drought in the land was spiritual as well as climatic. This visitation or vision was to become a guide in my life, a calling to work with the African Spirit in some way... So when black sophisticates have challenged me - “Why are you messing with our culture, white boy” - I've had a clear picture of a scaled snake-man on the brink of an African night, communicating to me across the vistas of time and space – but somehow I doubt they'd understand me. (2003: 13)

Bailey believes that he was indeed visited by the African Spirit and believes that he should be communicating African history and ritual through a theatrical medium; “to fuse ritual and theatre in some way, to make drama that would transport performers and spectators the way I myself had been transported by the ceremonies I had attended in India. This is not a cerebral journey, *nor is it the stirring up of a social conscience*- so much theatre that rides those wagons has left me cold. Rather this is a trip akin to those we take in dreams that leave us haunted, enchanted, disturbed” (2003: 15)(my italics).

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13 Pollsmoor is a notorious prison in the Western Cape which housed apartheid-era political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela.

14 Even though Bailey writes this with a seemingly “tongue-in-cheek” tone, there was (and still is) a very real fear – a 'white' fear of the Black man with “murderous intent”. A fear that is perpetuated every time one turns on the news, opens a newspaper or walks/ drives in the 'Black' part of town.

15 Snakes, according to Bailey are the mythological messengers connecting the here-and-now with forgotten memories.

This statement of Bailey leaves me rather puzzled – if his work is not a stirring up of the social conscience then why does Lloyd O'Connor (2006) state that Bailey's plays “reflect on a psychological rift or 'illness' within the South African context. In each of the plays there is either a concrete, physical manifestation of this 'illness' or a conscious effort to purge its presence within the community” (2006: 73).

Bailey has secured a reputation as a very manipulative theatre-maker. Of course, every director has to be manipulative in order to create theatre in the way they envision it to be presented on stage. Bailey (2003: 21) himself has admitted to being manipulative and demanding:

I can push my actors hard: long hours, intense work in improvisation and trance, late at night and flame accompanied by wailing, fits and gnashing of teeth. I have blindfolded them for hours while they explored their animal selves, and then chased them screaming and stumbling blind down a steep river course. Let the energy flow, let it flow... A few people who have watched me work have found this shocking... They accuse me of being manipulative.

Perhaps the people who have watched Bailey work and who have accused him of being manipulative consider that he is manipulative through his ability to ‘mine’ the creative performance energies of unsophisticated Black people for his own experimentation and artistic gain.

Rudakoff (2004: 81) goes on to say that not only has he secured his reputation for creating large-scale, visually spectacular 'extravanzas', he has also included in these his dramatisation of the history, the myths and the legends (ancient as well as contemporary) of “black Africa, especially those of the [sic] amaXhosa people”. It is essential to note that even Rudakoff (2004: 3) writes that “this has not always endeared him to all audiences, particularly in a theatre climate where the issue of voice appropriation continues to grow in importance”.

Ritual forms and historical material are the basis for Bailey's Intercultural theatre. Intercultural theatre explores and operates as “dynamic systems of knowledge, values, artifacts, and articulations of a community in particular historical contexts” (Degenaar 1995: 60). Johannes J. Degenaar (1995), writing post-1994, comments on how theatre (and the arts) could or may operate as a constructive cultural process caught in a context of change and cultural tension:

Events in the past have to be interpreted in an imaginative way. Storytelling is the most appropriate way of doing this. Stories about the past enable us to create and share a common future. They contribute to the production and consumption of an informed culture, for it is through the art of storytelling that a culture is enriched with intertextual significance. Stories with an historical resonance are of great importance for they introduce us to that which is unconscious in the South African community. And if it remains unconscious it plays a negative role instead of a positive role. (1995: 65)

Richard Schechner (2003) observes that rituals operate as “dynamic performative systems generating new material and recombining traditional actions in new ways” (228). The act of 'performing' history involves a necessary re-reading of official versions of history and could be considered to be a strategy for revealing that which has been ignored. This strategy may highlight the ideological implications of using historical material within a theatrical context, as Bailey does.

According to O'Connor (2006: 3), Intercultural theatre practitioners use ritual forms in an attempt to generate 'new' meaning; in an attempt to transcend boundaries and re-establish a sense of social (and sometimes spiritual) communion. Intercultural theatre practitioners also attempt to facilitate a dialogue between cultures. The re-staging of history within a ritualistic theatrical form becomes a key element in Bailey's theatrical work.

However, there is a debate in Interculturalism which centres around *difference* as postcolonial critics of Intercultural theatre practice challenge Intercultural theatre practitioners who use forms and practices which are sourced outside of their (the Intercultural theatre practitioners and producers) immediate contexts. However, Schechner (2003: 30) posits that “Interculturalists probe the confrontations, ambivalences, disruptions, fears, disturbances and difficulties when and where cultures collide, overlap and pull away from each other”.

It is important, at this point, to note that the term 'culture' is complex and contested. The term 'culture' denotes and connotes many formations, articulations, practices and processes within a context – meaning that the meaning of culture can only ever be partially defined. Culture is what Patrice Pavis (1996: 2) calls, “human nature [as] a system of significations which allows a society or group to understand itself in its relationship with the world”.

Hence, there is a debate relating to ritual within theatrical practice in the performing arts, (in an African

context), which is, the “problematic relationship between notions of a sacred presence and secular representations of spirit, ritual, ceremony or rite in theatre” (O'Connor 2006: 56 – 57). Loren Kruger notes that “ritual in theatrical practice becomes contentious when one begins to unpack representations that attempt to 'act' Africa” (1999: 69).

In many cases, representations of African culture rely merely on the outer form where the inner meaning has been stripped away. According to Lloyd O'Connor (2006: 57), the debate stems from “early research into pre-colonial performance forms by European anthropologists whose views produced a pejorative and jingoistic representation of African people as simple, savage and culturally stagnant”. David Kerr (1995: 2) writes that

Many of the colonial Africanists shared a view of African pre-colonial cultures as almost unchanging for many centuries. This view suited colonial ideology because it made African culture seem outside of the dynamic process of history.

Ritual is the point from which all aspects of Bailey's work evolves. *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997), *Ipi Zombi?* (1998) and *The Prophet* (1999) are all staged as *iintlombe*<sup>16</sup>, which Bailey (2003: 20) describes as “a ritual enclosing a play”. By using this form of meta-theatricality, Intercultural theatre such as Bailey's makes a comment on the present by engaging with the past. *iMumbo Jumbo* is conceived of as a “play within a ritual”, which “climaxed with the *sangomas* calling their ancestors into the theatre to ask them to bless all present and to bring peace and light to the city” (Bailey 1998: 193). It is an “*ntlombe* to tell the people of the world about [Gcaleka's] beliefs, philosophies and predictions, and to strengthen the Spirit in the audience by incorporating them in this ritual” (Bailey 2003: 106).

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16 “*iintlombe*” is a Xhosa word for divining ceremonies. They are intended for the re-enactment of the past through ritual story-telling and sacrifice for the continued prosperity of the community for which the ceremony is performed. Please note that spellings of the word may vary from source to source.

**“I dream that Gcaleka and I are together under a wide-spreading old tree somewhere, somewhere near a cemetery. He leads me to a narrow gate-way marked by two tall rocks. On the other side is dense forest. He passes through the gate and calls me to follow. I am afraid, I don't want to go with him.**

**The Otherside.**

**He takes my arms and pulls me, but the gate is too narrow to allow me through, and I don't want to go with him. I don't trust him really”**

(iMumbo Jumbo workbook, May 1997).

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### **iMUMBO JUMBO (1997)**

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According to the National Arts Festival programme (1997:49), “Third World Bunfight presents Abanyabantu in a dramatic ritual recounting the quixotic, sacred and true Scottish quest of Chief Nicholas Tilana Gcaleka (b. 1949) to restore the stolen skull of his great-great-uncle King Hintsa of the [sic] Amaxhosa (treacherously beheaded while attempting to escape an imperial posse in 1836), to the Xhosa nation in 1996, thereby ushering in an era of new South African fertility and peace”. It is interesting to note that the 'official' version of what happened to King Hintsa and the African folkloric version are very different. It is vital to note that there is no author attributed to the ‘official’ and the folkloric versions of this story.

The 'official' version (according to the National Arts Festival programme) is a succinct and rather bland version: “On May 12, 1836, during the sixth frontier war in what is now the Eastern Cape, King Hintsa Kaphalo was shot dead while trying to escape colonial troops who were holding him to ransom for vast herds of cattle. According to reports, his ears were cut off as souvenirs by one George Southey; there is no record of his having been decapitated, though the practice was not unusual among English warriors” (1997: 49).

The African folk lore (as written in the National Arts Festival programme in 1997) indeed tells a different version:

In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century King Phalo, great-grandfather of Hintsa, sired twins: Gcaleka, who would become king in turn, and Namba, a black mamba who slipped from his mother's womb into the depths of the Ningxolo river, there to take up residence with the



ancestral River People. Gcaleka, longing for his brother, eventually joined him beneath the waters, and his son, Kawuta assumed leadership, but without paying the obligatory tribute of cattle to the River People. Enraged at this transgression, the powerful trinity of Phalo, Namba and Gcaleka avenged themselves of Kawuta's son, King Hintsu, allowing the British to kill and behead him. The headless hell spirit of Hintsu, unable to rest, has lumbered across the country ever since, possessing his people with evil and gradually rendering South Africa ungovernable.

In an effort to reign [sic] him in and restore peace to the nations, the ancestral kings approached Sangoma Nicholas Gcaleka in visions and ordered him to seek and return the head to its homeland so that Hintsu may ascend to the realm of light.

On February 24, 1996, after a 10-day search, Gcaleka found a skull on a farm near Inverness, Scotland, having been guided by dreams. Dismissive and sceptical Xhosa traditional leaders sent the skull to Cape Town University's forensic medicine squad for DNA testing. The team claimed that the cranium was that of "an adult female of European descent". Gcaleka dismisses science with a pinch of muti. The ancestors do not lie. But, he warns, unless the skull is buried very soon, "a great calamity will befall this country." (1997: 49)

*iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) is indeed a "theatrical event" which is "large scale" and includes "visually spectacular extravaganzas" (Rudakoff 2004:81). Acty Tang (2006: 93) writes that *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) is a "performance that is meant to be efficacious, performative of certain transformations perceived to be needed: the performers, some of whom are actual *sangomas*, 'use dancing, chanting and clapping to take them into the state of trance in which they may bring the restorative powers of the ancestors to all present'".

"The re-enactment of the journey to Scotland is a drama component within a larger ritual performance" (Tang 2006: 93-94). Reviewer Suzanne Joubert records that one of the *iMumbo Jumbo* cast members said "You think you are watching a drama show... We are doing much bigger work here" (2003). Bailey (2003: 20) writes in his *iMumbo Jumbo* workbook that his performers "need to believe that their actions, their presence, their energy during the performance have an effect on the world". It is interesting to note that within Bailey's commitment to ritual, there is also a cynicism: does the title *iMumbo Jumbo* ultimately affirm or mock the Spirit? (Matshikiza in Bailey 2003: 7). Miki Flockemann (2001: 37n4) in Tang (2006) notes that

Bailey's work incorporates simultaneously Brechtian effects that foreground the constructedness of the representation, while at the same time having a decidedly un-Brechtian involvement of the audience in processes of possibly cathartic emotional

experiences.

The play-within-the-ritual – the dramatic enactment of Gcaleka's quest – uses a cartoonish style that caricatures the characters involved in his story. It is interesting to note that when Bailey (2003: 94) first met Gcaleka, he found his “naïveté... pathetic”, and Bailey's two main actors shook their heads at the chief's ranting. It is clear that Gcaleka's own performance failed to convince his observers. When Bailey (2003: 96) later became aware of Gcaleka's forgery charges, he writes: “I know he's a bit of a conman and a power-monger and an opportunistic businessman with the gift of the gab”.

Although Bailey realises that Gcaleka is something of a 'fake', he focuses on a different framework for revealing the truth, and according to Tang (2006: 97) “Gcaleka's authority - his competence – rests on his shamanic<sup>17</sup> presence, his performing the required action with precision and to great effect. Bailey describes his 'affecting physicality' in 'the way he talks, the way he flings his arms about, the way he touches people' (Bailey 2003: 97). Bailey counters against the charges of Gcaleka being a conman; he says “if the spirit of the Xhosa Nation chose a rather gregarious and offbeat messenger, who are we to question” (Bailey 2003: 96)

The majority of the song-and-dance routines in *iMumbo Jumbo* are traditionally based, yet they seem to have been amplified in *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997), a frenzied amplification. In the scene “Bad Times, Sad Times”, the stage direction calls for “the CHIEFS and others [to] sing and clap like frenzied dolls, the masked YOUNG BLOODS [to] do a foot-stomping dance” (2003: 116).

“Bad Times, Sad Times” is a song from the 1950s musical *King Kong* – which can be put under the umbrella term of Township Musical Theatre. At this stage of South African Theatre history there was still multi-racial activity in the theatres. However, it is important to note that there was “plenty of criticism about the exploitation of black artists in this [*King Kong*]” (Hauptfleisch 2005: 12). The choice of song is of interest, as Bailey, with his knowledge of South African theatre history, should surely know this song and the musical it is from. It becomes obvious that the song would indeed have connotations about Black exploitation, which is something that Bailey is accused of. However, it is interesting to note that the song was written by Todd Matshikiza, who grew up in the rural Eastern

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17 The etymology of “shaman” is the Manhu-Tungus word *saman* deriving from the verb, *sa* – to know (Karafistan 2003: 151).

Cape. Bailey may have used the song in order to link eras and locations.

While this display might be entertaining, the audience could be *gazing* at the performance through a colonial, racist lens – observing 'happy natives', the Black bodies performing, putting on a titillating show. When one examines the photographs of the play one notes that the make-up is used to paint gaudy, cartoon-like caricatures on the actor's faces (Bailey 2003: 114). Painting the face white is Xhosa practice (for both spiritual and practical reasons, for example, to protect against the sun), however Xhosa people do not regularly paint caricatured frowns and facial expression or beards on themselves, as is seen in *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997).

These pantomimic make-up effects may aid only in pandering to a colonial, racist *gaze* that sees the Xhosa (the Black bodies and faces in particular) as clown- like. According to Tang the “amaXhosa leaders are portrayed by precise ensemble action, stylized delivery of lines, and wearing thick white make-up outlining eyes and lips, as if they are clowns” (2006: 116). Is this stylisation catering to the colonial racist *gaze* that may see the Black bodies performing as 'less than', absurd and cartoon-like *or*, because it is theatre, the audience is seeing it as theatrical and stylised. Tang (2006: 116) notes that this is the aspect of the play which often makes the most impression; one review states: Imumbo [sic] Jumbo makes wonderfully escapist theatre” (Joubert, 2003) - “a far cry from the Spirit of ritual theatre” (Tang 2006: 116).

However, it is important to note that this is theatre. Could it be fair to say that just because the Xhosa people don't use stylised make-up in their every day life that this is a cheapening of their culture? Theatre is a place where boundaries are allowed to blur. This can be likened to the way Kabuki Theatre (traditional Japanese theatre) is known for the stylisation of its drama and the elaborate make-up worn by some of the performers.

NICHOLAS: All we want is for you to pay back ten  
cattles, not money, we need cattles,  
yes please.

QUEEN: !

NICHOLAS: The Spirits are very hungry, *makhosi!*



the colonial *gaze* by showing the shallowness of how the *gaze* commodifies what it *gazes* upon. It is important to note that the body of the performer on stage

acts as a place where the audience fantasises at the level of the represented image using it as a type of mirror that allows for transformation of the everyday body. The external representation is then the place to which the audience constantly refers to sustain their identity (Rimmer 1993: 209).

The use of a Black body to represent a stereotyped 'White' character certainly ensures that (White) audience identity (as mentioned above) is fractured. Thus ensuring that if there is any colonial *gaze*, that that is also subverted, by using caricatured, humorous representations of the colonisers (such as the Queen).

Bailey is clearly informed by the hybridity that he sees in everyday situations. He (2003: 93) writes about how when he went to go and visit Chief Gcaleka in Nyanga East, he found him “hold[ing] court” while a “soap opera flickers blandly on the TV”. Later, Gcaleka sacrifices a goat. Bailey describes the blood as it “froths onto the electric blue linoleum, and two American soapie stars kiss on the screen in the background” (2003: 94-95). Bailey describes his ecstasy in “all this impurity, these minglings, these collisions. This is the Africa of today” (2003: 95). Acty Tang (2006: 117) asks the question: “Is this impurity a reason that Bailey’s work offends some black intellectuals?” John Matshikiza<sup>18</sup> (2002) describes the objections from “Johannesburg's black glitterati” that Bailey, a White man, “dared to stray into nervous African territory – a mixture of witchcraft, corrupt tradition and dodgy politics”.

Tang (2006) continues on to say that the desire for a truth that is purely African ironically reaffirms a colonial subjectivity:

the desire to re-discover an authentic African epistemology in order to establish African philosophy as autonomous subject, ironically re-iterates Western, enlightenment notions of the autonomous subject. Here, in the pursuit of an autonomous subject the terms of historical oppression are necessarily duplicated in the terms of liberation. (in Praeg 2000)

Tang (2006: 118) speaks about the audience: that the audience is nevertheless “constructed on the same terms as the western (colonial) subject; its autonomous detachment is secured as it casts its perspectival gaze over the stage”. Perhaps this is the reason that Bailey thought the standing ovations every night

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<sup>18</sup> John Matshikiza is, ironically, the son of Todd Matshikiza, the composer for *King Kong* (1950s).

were patronising. Even though his theatre may have, in some instances, subverted the colonial *gaze*, it did not do so for long enough, thus ensuring “autonomous detachment” (2006: 118).

**Who will Mr Crocodile – of the River Nile have for dinner today?  
He eats the elite, is what they say, but he has a lovely smile.  
Sorry Mr Crocodile, but I can't come for dinner today,  
But there is a buck I can pass your way,  
if you wait a little while... (Bailey 2002: 14)**

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### **Big Dada: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin (2002)**

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*Big Dada* (2002), distributed to the UKZN Drama Department by Third World Bunfight, satirises the brutal regime of Idi Amin in Uganda.

The play begins with the song '*Awimba-we – the lion sleeps tonight*'. This iconic 'African' song was made famous in the movie *The Lion King* in 1994. A Disney animation, it managed to reach millions of people globally and became an international smash-hit; becoming the highest grossing animated film of all time. Interestingly, there was some controversy with the song being used in the film which led to disputes between Disney and the family of South African, Solomon Linda, who originally composed the song (originally titled "Mbube") in 1939.

Brett Bailey, in his cleverly manipulative use of the song right at the beginning of the play, reinforces the stereotype that is used in some Western representations of Africa – singing natives that are concerned about being eaten by the wild animals that lurk in the 'jungle'. However, in this play, it becomes obvious from the outset that the 'lion' does not sleep tonight.

The twist happens when the narrator of the play MANDLA starts his monologue:

MANDLA:            Please God keep that lion asleep in his mighty  
                              jungle for a long time far away from all of us,  
                              and any lions that are causing chaos in the  
                              villages, please God they must vanish deep  
                              into the *heart of darkness*<sup>19</sup> where they came

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19 This reference to Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* is noteworthy in light of Bailey's colonial commentary.

He cried in a whisper at some image, at some vision—he cried out twice, a cry that was no more than a breath—"The horror! The horror!" – *Joseph Conrad, Heart of Darkness*

Africa was known as "The Dark Continent" in the Victorian Era with all the negative attributes of darkness attributed to

from, and they must take all their hyena  
friends with them! We have had enough of  
these *monsters*<sup>20</sup> in Africa!

(Bailey 2002: 3)

Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe famously criticised the *Heart of Darkness* in his 1975 lecture, *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's "Heart of Darkness"*, saying that the novel de-humanised Africans; it denied them language and culture, and reduced them to a metaphorical extension of the dark and dangerous jungle into which the Europeans venture.

The play's title, *Big Dada: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* lets us know that the play is about Idi Amin. The history and stories about Idi Amin are reasonably well-known. Thus, it becomes obvious that when MANDLA speaks about the 'lion', he speaks about Amin. The animalistic metaphors are abundant in this play and Amin is variously symbolised by a series of animals, for example, the lion, the bull and the crocodile. MANDLA goes on to say:

My brothers and sisters, welcome to our theatre tonight, where we are going to present to you the story of one of those wild *lions*, the man who called himself the *Bull* of Africa.”  
(Bailey 2002: 3)

The chorus on page 18 also sing:

The *bull* is in charge and the *bull's* here to stay.  
The *bull* is in charge and the *bull's* here to stay.  
(Bailey 2002: 18)

And later in the play, the animalistic parallels are brought to the fore again at the end of one of

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Africans by the English. One of the possible influences for the Kurtz character was Henry Morton Stanley of "Dr. Livingstone, I presume" fame, as he was a principal explorer of "The Dark Heart of Africa", particularly the Congo. Stanley was infamous in Africa for horrific violence and yet he was honoured by a knighthood. However, an agent Conrad himself encountered when travelling in the Congo, named Georges-Antoine Klein (Klein means 'small' in German, as Kurtz alludes to *kurz*, 'short'), could have possibly served as an actual model for the Kurtz that appears in *Heart of Darkness*. Klein died aboard Conrad's steamer and was interred along the Congo, much like Kurtz in the novel. Among the people Conrad may have encountered on his journey was a trader called Leon Rom, who was later named chief of the Stanley Falls Station. In 1895 a British traveller reported that Rom had decorated his flower-bed with the skulls of some twenty-one victims of his displeasure, including women and children, resembling the posts of Kurtz' Station.

20 Monsters: creatures having strange or frightening appearances; one who inspires horror or disgust.



MANDLA's speeches:

...You know, when a *crocodile* catches his victim – a buck or even sometimes a person – when he catches his prey he puts it in his cupboard under the water so the meat can get a nice soft texture, easy to chew. Let us now look at what is rotting in this *big crocodile's* cabinet. (Bailey 2002: 12)

An interesting experiment was done by Dr Nick Haslam and PhD student Stephen Loughnan (2007) of the University of Melbourne who reported their findings in a recent issue of the journal *Psychological Science* written by Anna Salleh. Haslam and Loughnan asked psychology undergraduates to associate certain traits with different groups of people. Haslam says one set of traits was associated with being "uniquely human" - these traits, generally believed to distinguish us from other animals, were linked with civility, moral sensibility, intelligence and rationality. The research suggests some people are stereotyped as lacking these traits and are at risk of being subtly dehumanised as stupid, uncultured and amoral. "In short, they are classed as more like other animals than humans", says Haslam (*News in Science*, 7 May 2007).

Is this what Bailey is intending to do in *Big Dada: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* – rather unsubtly dehumanise Idi Amin and liken him to animals; as being stupid, uncultured and amoral (according to Haslam and Loughnan)<sup>21</sup>. I believe that Bailey has indeed, purposefully, succeeded in creating an image of Idi Amin as animalistic, untamed, dangerous, a brute – incapable of morals, culture and compassion. As Hegel (in Eze 1997: 128) postulated, "The Negro is an example of *animal man* in all his savagery and lawlessness, and if we wish to understand him at all, we must put aside all our European attitudes... *nothing consonant with humanity is to be found in his character*"(my italics).

Bailey definitely reinforces colonial racist stereotypes when it comes to the representation of Idi Amin; he is represented as an uneducated fool, a buffoon:

AMIN: [*haltingly reading from and then disregarding notes; he is quite nervous, unsure of himself, frustrated with this speech he did not write himself and **which he can barely read***]. (Bailey 2002: 4)

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21 For the purposes of this dissertation, I will follow along with Haslam and Loughnan. However, I personally do not believe that animals are stupid or amoral. Each species has its own unique behaviour and to always refer to the human species as most superior is rather inane.

Amin carries on with his speech and in it, he admits:

I am not a man of words, I am a man of action: I don't have any school certificates – not even for nursery school. But I got very good brain, in fact I know even more than Ph.D.s because as a military man I know how to act. (Bailey 2002: 4)

In researching Idi Amin and his education, or lack thereof, there are many news articles and stories about Amin that note that he was hardly educated and barely literate. This is re-iterated in the play by the above stage direction and the stage direction on page 12, in the scene MR CROCODILE:

*[Curtains open. AMIN sits at the head of a foreshortened brilliant green table, flanked by six MINISTERS; each holds a pen, and has notepaper before him; they gaze straight out at the audience. Subtle alliances are played out by the MINISTERS, particularly between Minister of DEFENCE and the scheming KYEMBA. AMIN is reading a newspaper upside down, the headline goes: 'AMIN PUTS UGANDA ON ITS FEET'. A couple of the MINISTERS snigger at AMIN, he looks up and catches them!]*

MINISTERS:            *[singing]*  
Oh God!  
Who will Mr Crocodile – of the River Nile have  
for dinner today?  
He eats the elite, is what they say, but he has  
a lovely smile.  
Sorry Mr Crocodile, but I can't come for dinner  
today,  
But there is a buck I can pass your way, if you  
wait a little while. (Bailey 2002: 14)

It is interesting to note that there is a parallel with *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) at a point in *Big Dada: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* (2002). In the scene OVERSEAS, Idi Amin meets with the Queen of England and with Golda Meir, the Prime Minister of Israel.

In a similar scene *from iMumbo Jumbo*, Gcaleka asks the Queen of England for help:

NICHOLAS:            Yes, please, with your support I can  
convince the people.

QUEEN:                Oh.

NICHOLAS:            All we want is for you to pay back ten  
cattles, not money, we need cattles,  
yes please.

QUEEN: !

NICHOLAS: The Spirits are very hungry, *makhosi!*

QUEEN: And what more do you want?

NICHOLAS: *Amakhosi* – I want... I want everything  
that you can give me, *makhosi!*  
(Bailey 1997: 129-131)

The similarities are evident in the following scene, where Idi Amin sits down with the Queen of England and Golda Meir and requests aid:

QUEEN: Mr President, we love developing:  
developing, developing, developing,  
but not fighting – we can give you  
money, but not weapons!

GOLDA: And I'm very sorry, our missiles are all  
busy now in Lebanon – we can help with  
training and planning, but with  
missiles...

AMIN: Ah, come on ladies.

QUEEN: How much money do you need, Mr  
President?

AMIN: Well it's for development, schools,  
hospitals, everything – it's for the people  
of Uganda – I need a lot.

QUEEN: okay, okay, we will give you £ 4.5  
million a year, and £ 10 million special  
bonus.

*[Amin fills his Harrods shopping bag, and dances into flight again]*  
(Bailey 2002: 9-10)

There are definitely two stories happening in this scene above. Golda Meir and the Queen are obviously in support of Amin and his plans but do not want to assume direct responsibility for arming Uganda in order for Amin to invade Tanzania. However they are prepared to give him money (and facilitate training and planning for that very invasion) in order to 'develop' Uganda with schools and

hospitals. It is obvious that the colonial Queen is catering to Amin's whims in order for the coloniser's goals to be attained. Perhaps it is here at this point that Golda Meir and the Queen “pass the buck”, as mentioned in the MINISTERS’ song (Bailey 2002: 14). However, they both know full well what Amin is going to do next:

- GADDAFFI: Eh, Amini, I have heard of your needs. Now, as you know, we in Libya are scared of nothing, nothing, we've got plenty of missiles – plenty tanks, submarines, oil, everything, *[handing an assortment of weapons for AMIN to inspect]*
- AMIN: hehehehehe
- GADDAFFI: But, we have one problem: the Jews *[spitting phlegm]* – the Zionist Israelis, who have stolen Palestine from our brother with backing of United States. According to my figures you have 500 Zionists in Uganda.
- AMIN: They are all aid workers: doctors,engineers, military trainers, things like that.
- GADDAFFI: Kick them out of Uganda and we can talk business. *[hands him a tank]* Here, I give you a gift to help you think about it.
- AMIN: *[greed devouring him a moment]* General Gaddafi, Sir, I have no need to think, you are my brother in Islam, and as a moslem it is intolerable for me to suffer one more week with the Zionists in my country, hey, I was blind, but now I see! The deal is done. (Bailey 2002: 10-11)

Amin is represented here as a war-mongering, greedy, corruptible, megalomaniac Black African dictator – what has come to be seen as 'typical' of Africa. There is a very interesting website that I came across while researching Idi Amin called: “A Rogues Gallery of some Political Profligates of Africa – A Collage of the Corrupt!”<sup>22</sup> This website has detailed descriptions of many African dictators. The central themes in this website are what I have stated above: war-mongering, greed, corruption, megalomania, murder and so forth.

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22 This can be found at the following URL <http://village.africanpath.com/profiles/blogs/1555598:BlogPost:29557>

The Black body performing this role of Idi Amin is then seen as what he (Amin) represents. Which could pander to the racist and colonial ideologies of many people worldwide, not only to White people (like myself) in South Africa/ Africa. Amin is seen as a *savage* – not only in the re-representation in the play, but worldwide. And attaching these signifiers to the Black body performing on stage reinforces the colonial racist stereotype that all Black African dictators are mad, cannibalistic, megalomaniacs with a penchant for murder, rape, torture and numerous other atrocities.

My colonial, racist *gaze* is not being subverted in this play. It is being reinforced. I do realise that *Big Dada: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* is meant to be a biting satirical cabaret, however, my own colonial, racist ideologies are obviously so deeply entrenched that I am seeing on stage what I have come to expect of Black, male, dictatorial leaders in Africa. Perhaps the colonial *gaze* is not what is at issue here and Bailey does not need to subvert the colonial *gaze* because what I am seeing on stage is the truth. Idi Amin was a ruthless, murderous, evil dictator who was preposterous to all and what is being represented is terrifying.

A very topical theme that is explored in *Big Dada: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* (2002) is the ethnic cleansing and the xenophobic attacks.

The following scene shows the forced removal of the Asians in Uganda: ECONOMIC WAR – THE DREAM:

AMIN: Now this is not a protest, I am not registering a complaint; I am a man of action. This is Economic War: Africa for Africans, African jobs for Africans! No self-respecting country can allow its economy to be run by aliens! This is not South Africa. This is not Rhodesia. God has given me a command.

GOD: You have ninety days, Amini, to drive out every Asian man, woman and child! You have ninety days to deliver every business to the Ugandan people. For too long the people of Uganda have had their noses pressed to the shop windows; It's up to you Amini. Open the door and let them in.

(Bailey 2002: 16)

The ASIAN responds by begging Amin to not chase them away and goes on to explain that the Asians

are major investors in Uganda, and that they are the financial backbone of Uganda.

After Amin re-distributes Asian businesses and industries, in an obvious display of nepotism, to his friends, (Brigadier Hussein is given the Khan Tea Plantations and General Azo is given the Singh Sugar Works), he directly addresses the audience:

AMIN: *[downstage, addressing the audience directly]*

My friends, it's nice you come here tonight to this theatre, see nice drama show, laugh a little bit, cry a little bit, nice African music for your entertainment. Nice little African cabaret sponsored by the Super Powers. President Amin is very happy. Do not worry about this little incident *[gesturing to MANDLA]*<sup>23</sup> I can see you like him very much, but only because he tell you the things you like to hear. His skin is black, but inside he is like your poodle, licking your fingers, barking at every black that passes your fence. I am tired of this barking. Now I am telling my own story. Nothing to worry about, thank you very much. This is Head Quarters of Entertainment! My friends, you are beautiful audience, Idi Amin is dedicating this next scene especially to all of you. (Bailey 2002: 20)

It is at point that Amin becomes aware that MANDLA has been denigrating him and what he [Amin] has been doing thus far in the show (and in history), and that the audience might just be agreeing with what MANDLA has had to say. Here, Amin's neurotic paranoia begins to emerge.

What also emerges is Amin's *savage, brutal, violent* tendencies. The audience is now being held captive by Amin – at this point I begin to feel very uncomfortable, knowing that if I was in the audience and if I got up to leave, I would be spotted... and then what? When Amin says that he is dedicating the next scene to us, the audience, it becomes a not so veiled threat that if we (the audience) should do what Mandla has done and if we are caught, the same thing will happen to us:

AMIN: Hang him, Ben, Britain must be taught a very big lesson at last.  
(Bailey 2002: 20)

The play continues with a scene between BEN (who was made Chief Justice of Uganda by Amin himself) and MAXENCIA (Ben's wife), this scene is characterised with melodramatic action which, I presume, is to downplay the horror of the situation by making it amusing for the audience.

However what the following scene does for me is reinforce the terror of the situation – that this horrific scene and the violence in it can be played out in “clownish Concert Party style” (2002: 21-22) and not

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23 MANDLA who has been narrating throughout the play thus far and who has been denigrating Idi Amin had been spotted on stage by Amin, which Bailey describes in the stage directions as “ a fatal mistake” (2002: 19). MANDLA has now been beaten, gagged, stripped to his underwear and tied to a post on the right of the stage.

with brevity.

AMIN: And I say to him, 'Context, what's context? [*bash!*] You know, I wouldn't even hurt a fly, it's not in my nature, I speak frank to you – but a mosquito, for mosquitoes there can be no mercy, [*bash!*] you see, too much malaria going around, [*bash!*] He was the most ambitious parasite on the arse of Uganda, our Benidicto Kiwanuka, God rest his Catholic soul. [*bash!*] And I called Major Farouk. 'Apply the hammer to this ex-prime minister, ex-Chief Justice of the Second Republic, Farouk.' I tell him with great sadness.

FAROUK: The hammer! [*bash!*]

AMIN: says Major Farouk with a very big smile, Major Farouk who must better watch his ambitions or also he will have his brains beaten out through his nostrils with that hammer that is making him to be so happy. [*bash!*] 'Apply the hammer'. I repeated and, Fee Fi Fo Fum, dead Ben turned white as an Englishman. [*bash bash bash!*]

*[Drums burst alive: Ben is dragged away, he's pushed to the floor downstage left in the 'hammer line' with a man before him and one behind<sup>24</sup>. At gunpoint he's forced by soldiers to beat the brains out of the man in front of him with AMIN's silver gavel; then the hammer is passed back and the sobbing guy behind him smashes BEN's head. AMIN is watching all between his fingers like a kid at a horror movie. Drums cease as BEN collapses. MAXENCIA, downstage right begins her haunting Ugandan lament.]*

This is a ritualistic killing that has been staged as a musical interlude. The aim of torture and brutality is virtually the same everywhere: to gain information about subversives, terrorists, opposition groups, and to intimidate would-be dissidents. A show of brutality can be a devastatingly effective way of keeping people in line. Perhaps at this point in the play Bailey turns the audience into accomplices and thus *savages* (perhaps turning the mirror back onto us, so that we can see what role we are playing in this show): "If we lose our capacity to be outraged when we see others submitted to atrocities, then we lose our right to call ourselves civilized human beings" (Herzog 1976: 1).

Bailey describes Amin as an "icon of sex, blood, death and fire, with a flywhisk" (Bailey 2002: 23), in the scene FIRE IN UGANDA. How can a leader of a country be described as an "icon of sex, blood, death and fire, with a flywhisk" (Bailey 2002: 23) without the signifiers of *savage*, *carnal* and *violent* being attached to the Black body performing the role? The images of sex, blood, death and fire are all violent images. The flywhisk is used by people to whisk away flies; however it is also used by *sangomas* in their divining practices. Amin has become the violent, base *sangoma*/ spiritual leader by having these images attributed to him and by his carrying of the flywhisk.

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24 Reminiscent of a production line. But instead of manufacturing, there is murdering.

Amin himself, after incapacitating Mandla (the narrator), again addresses the audience and invites them to take a ten-minute interval: “now is the chance to go, before it's too late” (2002: 24). This statement of Amin's hearkens back to the forced removal of the Indians from Uganda, for if they had stayed, he would have had them executed.

The audience return to the theatre after an Islamic call to prayer has been sounded. This is rather ironic as Amin has always thought of himself as a good Muslim. However here he summons people to witness his killing spree with a religious (sacred) call to prayer – mixing the sacred with the profane.

Idi Amin is now dressed in a surgical outfit and starts ordering the execution of nameless actors who stylise their deaths by firing squad. In this scene, entitled CORRUPTION, there is a refrain that is sung by the chorus: “Corruption makes things fall apart... things fall apart” (2002: 25). This is an obvious reference to Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1959). Achebe's first novel portrays the collision of African and European cultures in an Igbo village in Nigeria. Okonkwo, a great man in Igbo traditional society, cannot adapt to the profound changes brought by the British conquest of Nigeria. Yet, as in classic tragedy, Okonkwo's characters as well as external forces contribute to his downfall. The same could be said of what happens to Idi Amin in the play.

The second act of the play marks a rapid descent into Amin's madness and paranoia. The use of an actor who plays the part of the ventriloquist's dummy, who is then playing the character of Ondoga, the Minister of Finance, is a clever device in order to show how Amin has total control over Ondoga and thus the economics of the country. Literally Amin makes Ondoga speak and move by manipulating him as one would a puppet. Of course when Ondoga tells Amin that the country is in financial ruin, Amin's paranoia makes him accuse Ondoga of wanting to take over:

AMIN:                    You think you can be president of Uganda after I have done all the work? (Bailey 2002: 26)

Amin orders Maliyamungu (his henchman) to bash him, Maliyamungu “*bashes him [Ondoga] in the face in that Concert Party Style fashion. Bash! Bash! Dance off*” (2002: 26). Amin's paranoia now has him suspecting everyone of trying to overthrow him, even his wives.

He suspects everybody in Uganda of plotting against him and sings a song to illustrate what he plans to do:



AMIN:                   ...We purge whole villages,  
amputate hands at the elbow,  
pull out the tongues!  
Kill the babies too, or we'll have to come back, damn it!  
Piles of corpses rotting in the forests,  
bodies decorating the shores of the lakes.  
Ugandan people what are you doing?  
Look upon this and shiver!  
Save Uganda!  
Obey me!  
What must a leader do?  
Must I kill every man, woman and child before I can govern this land?  
(Bailey 2002: 27)

Maliyamungu then comes in to tell Amin that they are under attack. Amin's paranoia and his distrust burst out in a terrifying display when he turns on the audience. Amin breaks the fourth wall. There is no Brechtian alienation or distancing when Amin screams:

...Turn on the lights! Turn up the house lights again! [*stops music*] This place stinks of betrayal! Guards! I have sacrificed and sacrificed, I have bled for you, and wept for you. [*pointing randomly into the audience*] (2001: 28)

Amin then tell Maliyamungu to “sterilize the rest” (2002: 28) and goes on addressing the audience, telling them how he is cleaning up the mess that was made “by you whites” (2002: 28) in Africa. That what he is doing is not genocide but rather “surgery, this is African medicine, umuti” (2002: 28). “Umuti” immediately brings to mind the horrific muti killings that occur across Africa. People are mutilated and murdered for their body parts. These body parts are then used to prepare medicine or cures for any number ailments.

It is important note that there is a parallel between Idi Amin (*Big Dada* 2002) and Jean Christian Mubara in *Cards* (2002). In the scene IDI IS MY FRIEND, Amin, while crouching in a fetal position, laments about his childhood, how his father chased his mother and him onto the streets and how his mother became a prostitute. Amin tells of how the British trained him, but would beat him on the head... Mubara, in *Cards* (2002), also tells of his unfortunate childhood. And in the case of both Mubara and Amin, one could almost start to feel sympathy for them. But then their true nature comes out.

*[AMIN calls a diviner who brings a tray of potions. AMIN doctors himself while talking to audience: he blackens his face, paints white rings around his eyes and reddens his lips; removes his hat and puts a golliwog wig on.] (2002: 29)*

The stage direction above clearly denotes the transformation of Amin (who is already played by a Black performer) into a “golliwog”; he becomes a caricature of the Black body minstrel style. It begs the question: what does it mean to paint the Black body with more blackness?<sup>25</sup> While dressed as a “golliwog” Amin threatens the audience directly, he speaks about how he knows that they think they can kill him, but, he knows when he will die. He tells them whatever he has dreamt has become a reality. He then says:

...I know who you are, I can see you, I can see your family, your children, your village, and they will all be crushed by God. (2001: 29)

In fact, the attack on the audience from Amin is so aggressive that two ministers uncoil a roll of barbed wire in front of the stage, between the audience and the actors. Amin has been saying that:

... there is no escape for you and who you are working for and what Zionist, racist, neo-colonialist, communist, imperialist, capitalist, mother-fucking, confusing hyena cunt fucking, colonialist, apartheid, CIA subversive, scum you are! I am Life President Al Hajji Doctor Idi Amin Dada. (2002: 30)

The ministers now have to scrape and scramble to pacify “*the raging bull*” (30) and even while Amin is telling them to throw themselves into the Nile, they keep chanting the refrain, “Idi is my friend” (30). However this attempt at pacifying Amin is not successful and again Amin attacks the audience; breaking through the fourth wall over and over – ensuring that the audience is gripped in the horror of the situation. Amin, still made up to look like a golliwog becomes hysterical, screaming:

You think you can kill me, coconut? You think you can kill me whitey? You can't touch

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<sup>25</sup> Is it the fact that the Black performing body which has now made itself blacker, makes the character of Amin seem more terrifying? Bailey does not seem to make theatrical/ directorial choices lightly. This choice to blacken the already Black performing body makes sense. Bailey reaches out the audience – the majority of which may have had a “golliwog” doll that they would have played with in childhood (I certainly did). It may be an absurd comparison to make, but I believe that Bailey wishes to deform our happy childhood memories of playing with those dolls and make us realise what that doll represents.

me! I'm your worst fucking nightmare, madam; there's nowhere to hide. [*breathing heavily, aiming his gun into the audience, muttering, confrontational... the golliwog's gone berserk!*] You are living on stolen land, European, stolen land and borrowed time. Nobody can run faster than a bullet. Blow up this whole fucking theatre and all its capitalist audience! (Bailey 2001: 31)

Amin is then led to the corner to prepare for his boxing bout with Archbishop Luwum. Archbishop Luwum tries desperately to talk some sense into Amin. However Amin, still in a heightened state of paranoia, accuses Luwum of hiding guns for Obote in the church and decides to kill him and several other ministers.

Amin uses the ruse that they were all killed 'tragically' in a car accident, while in fact Archbishop Luwum, the Minister for Land Resources and the Minister of Internal Affairs are murdered.

The scene THINGS FALL APART is probably the most contentious scene in the play. The reason being is that in this scene Amin is shown, on his throne, with a white butcher's apron on and with Mandla's (the narrator) dead body draped over him, "Pieta-style" (2002: 34). Amin is then seen cutting into Mandla's body and "loses himself in cannibalistic gluttony and whiskey" (2002: 35). Actors portraying puppets "The Dead" (2002: 35) rise up to sing a lament while this cannibalism occurs. According to various sources, it was never in fact proved that Idi Amin was a cannibal or not. However, Bailey decides to portray him as one, which does indeed fit in with the descent into madness that Amin is experiencing. Amin becomes the animal, the lion or the crocodile, feasting on human flesh.

Things do begin to fall apart for Amin and his regime at this point in the play. Maliyamungu reports that there are multiple uprisings in the country because of a lack of food and a lack of payment and the Tanzanian troops have entered the country crushing the Ugandan invasion. Amin realises that it is all over.

AMIN: [*pushing the remains of MANDLA off his lap.*] The show's over old friend.

MALIYAMUNGU: Colonialist puppets everywhere, Sir.

AMIN: The more you cut the more they grow.

MALIYAMUNGU: The corruption!

AMIN: Africa is not what it used to be.

MALIYAMUNGU: No Sir.

AMIN: Where you go now?  
MALIYAMUNGU: Zaire, Sir, there's always a job there. You, Sir?

AMIN: Me I go visit Gaddaffi, then I live happily ever after in Saudi Arabia with many wives and children, it's no problem. I be Life President in exile.

MALIYAMUNGU: All Africa will miss you, Sir; you have been inspiration to many leaders... (Bailey 2002: 37)

At the end of *Big Dada: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin*, Amin becomes repositioned as both a dictator/ butcher *and* cabaret artist, wearing an apron covered in blood, singing *I Did It My Way*<sup>26</sup> in defiance of all possible criticism of his actions. Amin dances off with his aeroplane and leaves the stage, dimly lit, littered with dead bodies and a mirror ball slowly revolves.

It is important to note that Bailey's characters are caricatures – exaggerated and distilled. The analysis and discussion about this particular play has forced a question: Is it racist to portray a dictator responsible for countless, vicious, heartless acts as vicious and heartless if he is Black? In this play, the Black body performing the role of Idi Amin is seen as what he (Amin) represents. Amin is seen as a *savage* – not only in the re-representation in the play, but worldwide. And attaching these signifiers to the Black body performing on stage reinforces the colonial racist stereotype that all Black African men have the capacity to become dictators who are mad, cannibalistic, megalomaniacs with a penchant for murder, rape, torture and numerous other atrocities. Brett Bailey in this play does not subvert my colonial *gaze*. Even though it a highly intelligent, creative and, at points, humourous piece of theatre,

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26 The section of the song sung by Idi Amin, *I Did It My Way* by Paul Anka, as follows:

And now the end is near, and so I face the final curtain,  
My friends, I'll say it clear, I'll state my case, of which I'm certain.  
I've lived a life that's full. I've traveled each and every highway;  
And more, much more than this, I did it my way.

Regrets, I've had a few; But then again, too few to mention.  
I did what I had to do. And saw it through without exemption.

I planned each charted course; Each careful step along the byway,  
But more, much more than this, I did it my way.

Yes, there were times, I'm sure you knew, When I bit off more than I could chew.  
But through it all, when there was doubt, I ate it up and spit it out.  
I faced it all and I stood tall and did it my way.

Bailey could be reinforcing colonial ideologies that if “a Black” is in charge of running a country, specifically in Africa, then things will fall apart (with apologies to Achebe).

However, perhaps it is Bailey’s intention to reveal how this oppressive behaviour is learnt from the colonials – violence begetting violence. Then who is the savage?

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**MPUMELELO PAUL GROOTBOOM**  
**PLAYING THE HAND YOU ARE DEALT**

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The state of South Africa is indeed a traumatised one. As Greg Homann (2006: 4) states: “Acts of violence loom large in the South African psyche, leaving many in a state of trauma”.

In reading an interview with Charles De Olim (2005c), it becomes obvious that Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom has experienced his share of trauma: “He talks of an unhappy childhood in which he was abandoned as a baby” (2005c:2) and in the documentary *Life is Art: The Story of Paul Grootboom* (Kevin Harris Productions 2008), he says, “I had a horrible childhood, man”. An elderly couple from his extended family adopted him but, as Grootboom explains, never failed to remind him of his bastard status” (De Olim 2005c: 2). Grootboom says that as a boy he “used to hate people, even as a young man I was very angry. When I wrote *Relativity* that character was very personal to me” (2005: 2). “There was a point where I did hate everyone around me, so it is easy for me to understand why someone would kill” (Kennedy 2005b: 11). Dawn Kennedy (2005b: 11) goes on to say that “Grootboom writes what he feels passionate about. Admittedly his passions veer towards sex and violence...”

Life for Grootboom while growing up was not an easy one – as he recounts, while living in Soweto, he was surrounded by feuding gangs, police brutality, alcoholism, drug abuse, violence and rape; and these were common everyday occurrences. He recounts in *Life is Art* (2008), how one night in Meadowlands, Soweto, he was sitting at his desk at the window and witnessed a hi-jack victim being thrown out of the vehicle. He also speaks about how his social life was stunted by his caregivers, how he was not allowed to play with other children outside of the yard thus, according to Grootboom, causing him to become socially inept (Kevin Harris Productions 2008).

After Grootboom finished high school, he was sent by his 'granny' to the University of the Witwatersrand, however he decided after three months that the downtown art cinema was more alluring. It was at this art cinema where he was exposed to the works of Fellini, Scorsese and Bergman. It was also here that his idea of film entertainment was forever changed when he watched the prison drama *American Me*, “there were rape scenes in it. It was very realistically done and people walked out.

They couldn't take it, they were very angry. I liked that effect” (in De Vries 2008: 1). Grootboom went on and tried his hand at film acting but then soon realised that scriptwriting was “more his thing” (in De Vries 2008: 1). John Rogers, in 1993, after reading a scene that Grootboom had written, became his mentor and confidante. “Forget about film, explore theatre, was Roger's advice” (in De Vries 2008: 1).

After being kicked out the house by his 'granny', Grootboom moved in with John Rogers in 1994. Rogers taught him about the British theatre world and introduced him to local top writers Barney Simon and Aubrey Sekhabi. “John was a stimulating influence because instead of literal teaching, he would provoke ideas that would make me think for myself” (in De Olim 2005c: 2). Grootboom started to develop a passion for the theatre: “[It] demands the soul of everybody involved. It's almost as if they have to delve deeper. I don't know how to put it, but the corniest way is to say 'you lose yourself in it'. Theatre is almost a fantasy. Whatever is unpleasant, you are in control of it” (in De Vries 2008: 1) [brackets inserted].

Grootboom, in the interview with Fred De Vries (2008), says that he writes from “personal experience. Sometimes something really embarrasses me and humiliates me and hurts me. And as time goes on I try to write about it. I assume a Godlike status on that incident, and then I can manipulate it. It feels really good” (1).

De Vries goes on to say, in the following somewhat contentious statement, that “Grootboom and theatre were made for each other” (2008: 1). In an e-mail to De Vries in September 2008, Grootboom writes of his influences and rails against his work being labeled as 'Township Theatre':

My theatre is always classified as “township theatre”, which is a title I hate. I write about my own experiences and I try to make them artistic. One common misconception (even by township artists) is that white people cannot do black stories (by black stories they mean 'township stories'). It's bullshit. (2008)

Of course, Grootboom's point is valid. It is inherently racist to presume that White theatre practitioners cannot write or direct 'township stories'. It is also inherently racist to presume that, because he is Black, he can only write and direct 'township stories' and not Shakespeare, for example.

White South Africans also by the same argument believe that black directors and writers can only do 'township stories' (which is a racist concept) and not Shakespeare. So, in

summation, my approach to writing is much like Fellini's or Herzog's... it's not some obscure township style. The only difference is, I do it my own way. Which has more to do with feeling than with thought. And feeling is very difficult to describe.” (2008: 3)

Charles De Olim (2005c: 2) writes that “Grootboom explains that as a result of his informal training, he used to be apologetic, as he puts it 'for bringing the cinematic into theatre’” (2005: 2). His love of film explains the cinematic quality of his plays. Grootboom mines cinematic conventions and manages to put them on stage and make them work. He weaves in such elements as dance interludes, on stage scene rewinds and slickly choreographed scenes. Anton Krueger noted, in a personal e-mail to me, that Grootboom's plays have defined him (Grootboom) as one of the most idiosyncratic new voices of South African theatre.

To define Grootboom's theatre is a difficult task. There are many contradicting views on his work and where it fits in. Robert Greig (2006: 10) writes about *Relativity: Township Stories* that it has the “moral courage, freedom of expression and freedom from commercial pressure that the township theatre icon, Gibson Kente, did not or could not have. And, oddly, this is a play that behaves as if the political theatre of the 1970's and 1980's did not exist, neither preaching nor demanding change.”

His works typically feature large ensemble casts, multiple levels and scenes that are saturated with eclectic soundtracks and feature rape, crime and unparalleled levels of violence. Diane De Beer (2006: 2) writes that “Paul already knows exactly how to capture the soul and the spirit of an emerging country and its people”. However, this dissertation does not aim to pin down Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom's style of theatre, but rather what he does with the Black bodies in his hyper-real theatre – what signifiers are attached to those bodies on stage, if audience members are viewing them through the colonial lens.



**Secretly hooked on the porn that floods late night weekend TV? Well stop hiding your shame and get down to the Market Theatre in Jozi's Newtown precinct, where the sexy production *Cards* has got tongues wagging...**  
(Mohlabeng 2005: 29).

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## CARDS

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*Cards* is a play about the seedy underworld of Hillbrow, Johannesburg, and in particular about prostitution, pimps, drug dealing and the twisted sordidness of the dark underbelly of life in a brothel “The Wild Cats Nite Club”. This play focuses on the day-to-day lives of prostitutes and hangers-on, in which sex, drugs and money are the order of the day. This play has been adapted by Grootboom from an original script by Mothusi Mokoto and the primary character is (ironically named) Jean Christian Mubara, the Nigerian pimp and brothel owner. His middle name ‘Christian’ is ironic as he is not a Christian but rather portrayed as Muslim – he is dressed in muslim robes throughout the play. The other characters are the prostitutes that work there, the patrons and the people who work there in a non-prostitute capacity. According to Robert Greig (2005a: 11), *Cards* is “funny, dark, sardonic and hard-edged. It explores the basics – sex and death – displaying both on stage. HIV/AIDS is part of the weave but not the theme. The steady eye of *Cards*'s writer/director observes, documents and re-creates rather than proselytises”. Rather than having a single plot, *Cards* has many narratives of lust, deceit and treachery. According to Anton Krueger (2007: 1), “It [*Cards*] is a grand-scale sex spectacle of the first order, using multiple levels, blaring music (of a quite extraordinary range) and gratifyingly large dollops of nudity and simulated sex”.

Jean Christian Mubara is a larger-than-life character who epitomises brutality and vice. He is a misogynistic, ruthless whoremaster and is described by Charles De Olim (2005: 10) as a “wicked dictator in his pimp kingdom”. Mubara is a heartless character who rules his brothel's residents with an iron fist, dictating to them how to live, behave, strip and 'fuck'. Eva is a daredevil prostitute, who relishes her profession and being a “wild cat” (Grootboom 2002:31). Vixen is the drug addicted prostitute who numbs herself with drugs and reveals that she

[will] never enjoy making love with any man – every time I try, I just see my uncle's dick

coming all the way between my legs. Sex with these men, I just do it for cash, nothing more (2002: 48).

Vixen reveals that the reason she takes drugs is that she does not “want to feel anything” (2002: 51).

Mimi, a prostitute and a singer, falls pregnant (by Olayx, her regular 'john' and the only one that she has sex with without a condom) and has to try and hide that fact from Mubara. She cannot decide what to do with the unborn child, until Mubara threatens to abort it himself.

Joyce is an aging prostitute who has worked for Mubara for many years. Joyce's niece, the fourteen year old Nono, comes to stay with her at the brothel, putting Joyce and Nono into dangerous situations. Joyce, like the other prostitutes, has a regular client or 'john', Leo Chauke. However, because Joyce is aging and not as appealing as she used to be, Leo decided to try out another one of the girls – Tana.

Tana is convinced that Shereen, another one of the prostitutes is Mubara's spy, giving up information so that she that can remain on his good side. Tana is Leo Chauke's and Mubara's victim; she refuses to have sex with Leo without a condom. She calls for Mubara to intervene. However, instead of Mubara coming to her aid, he turns on her and tells her that she will do “whatever the fuck I tell you” (2002: 40). Mubara orders Bruno (the bouncer) to take Tana to his office and give her a 'tsunami' (slang for heroin) while he decides what to do with her. Bruno, who is a more sympathetic character throughout the play, and has his sense of self intact, is the man who ends the destitution of the prostitutes at the end of the play. He raises his concerns, saying that it might kill her. However, he follows his orders, and when Mubara returns, Tana is dead. Mubara orders Bruno and Steve to “take her to number Eleven and bury her there” (2002: 42). In the meantime, Leo has gone off with the sex-crazed Eva.

Sela is the scheming prostitute who uses her sexuality to convince Tsepho who is Mubara's accountant and the son of The Machine, Jones Mazibuko, to rob Mubara and to run away with her. The Machine, Jones Mazibuko is Mubara's lawyer. He received his nickname because, according to Mubara “he slept on pussy, and woke to it – hell pussy was his life I tell you!... It was as if pussy was invented especially for his dick” (2002: 4). However, The Machine, Jones, is now riddled with TB and AIDS; as Tsepho replies to Mubara “Pussy was his life, you say?... Last I heard it was killing him” (2002: 4).

Baba (the bouncer/ doorman) is a typical stock character, providing amusement at his doltish actions

and lines. Piper is a regular patron at “The Wild Cats Nite Club” who regularly has sex with Eva. He is a sex-crazed man who introduces the uptight, married Modise to Eva. Modise returns near the end of the play, desperate and crazed, with a gun in one hand and a bible in the other, after he has contracted HIV/AIDS from having unprotected sex with Eva.

Molemela is the judge that Mubara is hoping to be able to bribe, as he has a pending court case against him for organised crime, drug trafficking and murder. Mubara institutes a plan of action in order to bribe the judge – 14 year old Nono. Molemela is a paedophile who likes them “black and young. Young and tight, my friends, young and tight. The younger, the tighter, the better for me” (2002: 58).

*Cards* reflects the aspects of the dangerous life that is led by prostitutes, showing that the sometimes romanticised notion of the pimp as a caring father figure could not be farther from the truth. Robert Greig (2004 :10) notes that *Cards* (2002) is a brave new work as “it sees a particular world with discomfoting clarity” (10). The actors in *Cards* do things on stage that no actors, neither Black nor White, have done on a South African stage before. A few examples: simulated, vigorous, athletic, passionate, heterosexual sex on stage, African constraints on nudity are jettisoned: “the audience sees a male character for minutes in full penis-dangling nudity” (2004: 10), child prostitution and paedophilia are portrayed on stage, the township theatre stock character of the priest (and all his self-evident truisms) evolves into a religious fanatic who, infected with HIV/AIDS returns to kill Mubara and Eva, and, HIV/AIDS “is treated as a fact of life and love” (Greig 2004: 10).

Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom's *Cards* has attached controversial and evocative signifiers to the black bodies that perform in this play. The signifiers that are attached to the bodies are that of *carnality*, *sexuality* and *violence*. Ania Loomba (1998: 47) states:

If colonised people are irrational, Europeans are rational, if the former are barbaric, sensual and lazy, Europeans are civilization itself with its sexual appetites under control.

It could be considered that Grootboom is (unintentionally) catering to the colonial *gaze* that sees the Black body as hyper-sexed. However, it is important to note that according to Anne Duncan in *Performance and Identity in the Classical World* (2006), for the Romans, actors and prostitutes were confined to the same social category, since they were both pretending to be what they were not (124). Actors also “aroused fears of gender instability, fears of deception, and fears of corruption” (188). In

this play, however, I do not think that any fear would be experienced by the audience. It is vital to note that there are several reviews of *Cards* (2002) in which the reviewer writes about the reactions of the audience members. The reactions seem to stem from the nudity, the simulated sex and violence presented on stage.

Malena Amusa (2005: 2) comments:

The constant and disturbing laughter throughout the play from the opening night audience revealed that many people actually relate to this extreme reality, embodied in the lives of sex workers and pimps. Unfortunately, South Africa seems to value the quick-and-dirty solutions over slow meditations.

Perhaps the hyper-realism and cinematic devices employed by Grootboom throughout the play do not allow for any Brechtian alienation or distancing. The action on stage, in its realism, is reflecting/mirroring what society is. The hyper-realism succeeds in raising intense emotion in audience members, resulting in a form of catharsis rather than criticism. Perhaps here, the *gaze* of the audience is more about power relationships, rather than attaching controversial signifiers to the Black bodies performing. Perhaps here, the *gaze* is being subverted and the audience are recognising themselves (or someone they know) in the characters. De Olim (2005b) writes that “it felt like I was a patron in the brothel myself. In fact I felt dirty afterwards... but I still liked it” (10); and as Robyn Sassen (2005) notes:

...Thinking about the row of black men in front of me during the opening performance of *Cards*, and of how they howled with a kind of repressed hysteria at the mention of obscenities or the sight of members of the cast in sexually provocative situations, even if they involved a child or a rape, I wonder whether *Cards* has this type of power. I can vouch for feeling particularly unnerved walking alone back to the dark parking lot.

Perhaps the notion of fear discussed earlier was not experienced by the audience because of the actors on stage, but rather fear was experienced by audience members of other audience members and their reactions to what was taking place on stage. Perhaps the *gaze* on the Black bodies performing has been subverted, allowing the audience to *gaze* upon other members of the audience. It is important to note that some audience members, during the show, may cast their colonial, racist *gaze* over the audience itself, instead of directing it completely at the Black bodies performing on stage.

Grootboom himself makes many contradictory statements about *Cards* (2002): in the *Sunday Sun* (2007: 23), Grootboom says, “my concern has always been the audience, that they should be moved by

the storyline and understand that the people depicted in the play are victims of circumstances but with some willpower, they can turn their situation around if they realise the consequences of prostitution in this age of AIDS". It must be noted that it is difficult to create a truthful show which is also critical, because the show in itself becomes an erotic, seductive and titillating gesture which then defeats its own arguments.

The above statement by Grootboom is again contradicted by himself in an interview with Kwanele Sobiso (*Mail & Guardian* 2007: 5). Grootboom suggests that "the moral to the story... is that there are no morals, so we remain a nation happy to wallow in our own filth". However, in the official press release from the South African State Theatre (2004), Grootboom comments that this play is not about its controversial parts:

The way I see it, the sex... the nudity... and the language are only incidental to the story. Of course that gives the story an angle that it otherwise would not have had should it have been done less boldly, but it is not the "centre or core" of the play.

With Grootboom's education in foreign films, he has quite a different attitude towards nudity and sex. But then it could be fair to say that Grootboom himself is casting his prejudicial *gaze* over the audience when he says that now he considers *Cards* (2002) as "a bit fantastic, full of cheap thrills, nudity and sex, catchy phrases. I don't like it for that. It's for popular audiences" (Kennedy 2005: 11). Perhaps Grootboom realises that audiences may not walk away thinking about prostitution and all the ills plaguing that sector of South African society. As Sibusiso Mfeka Vosloorus (2005: 21) writes:

If the idea is to portray the life and issues of Hillbrow and the dark world of prostitution, pimping and drugs, how will the audience be educated if their minds are filled with explicit sex?

Perhaps what has happened rather is that the audiences have come away with the reactions of other audience members foremost in their minds. The colonial *gaze* may have been subverted away from the Black performing bodies on stage and redirected towards the audience members themselves. Sandile Ngidi (2006: 11) says that the creators of *Cards* (2002)

mistake every glimpse of nipple and penis for an ace up their sleeves. The problem with this shotgun syndrome is that audiences do not seem to get the point of the dramatic journey and often find amusement when women are debased and raped... this result is that *Cards* does not enrich the soul and mind; it just strokes sexual urges

and does little to take our theatre to new heights.

Perhaps this theatre is not meant to take South African theatre to new heights, or to enrich the mind or soul, but rather just represent this sector of society as it is. Not all theatre has to enrich the mind or soul. Perhaps it is not the aim to challenge the audience's intellect – but rather to show South Africa how it is. Grootboom holds our ugly reflection up to our own faces.

Mubara, however, may be the exception when talking about the *gaze* – because he is Nigerian. *Cards* does work, a lot of the time, on stereotypes. It could be said that the stereotype of the destructive outsider is damning. The reason being that in an attempt to perhaps interrogate xenophobia, Grootboom runs the risk of entrenching it in the minds of the audience (Amusa 2005: 2). Mubara is represented as what is considered to be a typical greedy, money and power hungry, misogynistic pimp. In Scene One, this representation is noted in the language he uses to speak about Joyce:

MUBARA: Did Joyce make any money last night?

TSHEPO: No.

MUBARA: I really must throw that bitch to the street, where she belongs. What the fuck does she think this is?... An old age home? I mean, how can one have a pussy and fail to make money with it?...

TSHEPO: You don't have to chase her out, she'll come around – you'll see.

MUBARA: Get her to sell her pussy!... That fucking thing of hers will decompose.

The prostitutes in the play perhaps aid in the redirection of the prejudicial *gaze* onto society as the play uses their lives and misfortunes to show the dirty truth about rape and sex, about being used. And when the audience leaves the theatre and sees the prostitutes on the street corners, they may *gaze* at those 'performing' bodies and think, 'at least I am not a prostitute'.

At first, the play introduces the prostitutes as most people would expect prostitutes to act. The interesting point to note, however, is that they are not addressing the other actors on stage, but rather, they directly address the audience members:

Stage Direction: They start talk [sic] straight to the audience members (and NOT the club's clients)...

TANA: Hi... My name is TANA,  
 (and then mischievously, with a very sexual smile)  
 “tlomo re tlo JANA”  
 (growls as if she's horny)  
 if you looking for the best fuck, I'm right here...  
 touches her pubic area to emphasises [sic] the “here”)  
 if you have the right buck.

EVA: EVA is the name and fucking is my game... baby, I can give you such a  
 mind blowing blow-job -  
 (seductively mimics blow-job action with her thumb to her mouth)  
 - you'll never forget for the rest of your life...  
 (Grootboom 2002: 1)

Immediately, the audience is involved, the fourth wall has been broken and the actresses playing the prostitutes are themselves *gazing* at the audience, thus reversing the power relationship that sees the spectator as powerful and the actor as submissive. The shock tactics that Grootboom employs are averting voyeurism by totally involving the audience members. Now the actresses hold the power of the *gaze* – perhaps ensuring that audience members *gaze* back upon themselves and the others around them. It may be as simple as trying to guess who in the audience has been to a brothel before, or to guess who is aroused by what these women are saying, or who is squirming, embarrassed, in their seat. Ultimately, the *gaze* has been fractured – the audience members become the patrons in this brothel. The hyper-realism does not allow for any distancing and thus, the audience becomes part of the action, whether they want to or not.

The hyper-realism of the play does not help the audience to view Mubara with any form of compassion. In Scene One, in the section I have dubbed 'sex, drugs and stage directions', Mubara calls for Tana:

MUBARA: And heeeey!!!!... Call TANA in here!...

The stage action unfreezes when the music unpauses... TSHEPO walks out the office and goes into the bar area... MUBARA remains in the office sniffing some drugs... TANA goes into the office... She goes to his side of the desk... He relaxes in his chair and unzips his trousers for TANA to give him head... TANA gets down and performs fellatio on him... When MUBARA has had enough, he starts to undress her and they fuck...

(Grootboom 2002: 4)

Mubara, as mentioned before, is presented as a vile, money and power hungry pimp. He is also

presented as corrupt and racist. Jones comes in and tells Mubara that they have a serious problem that the judge they had bribed, Matanzima, has died from an overdose from the cocaine that Mubara himself supplied. There is more bad news when Jones tells Mubara that Morgan (a former business colleague) has turned state witness. Mubara responds:

MUBARA:                     Fuck!!... Mother fucking Zimbabwean mother fucker!!... I  
                                   should've killed him when I had the chance.  
   (Grootboom 2002: 6)

Mubara's sense of what is right and wrong is highly skewed (and this is true of him the whole way through the play) and the conversation between Jones and Mubara continues:

MUBARA:                     The first thing we should do is eliminate that Zimbabwean  
                                   rat!!...

JONES:                         MUBARA I told you not to talk about eliminating people when  
                                   you're with me.

MUBARA:                     Well then, can you come up with a better solution?

JONES:                         I'll have to hear from LEO who the replacement judge is. And if  
                                   at all he's bribable.

MUBARA:                     What if he's not?

JONES:                         I prefer to have a positive mind frame. And well, with regards  
                                   to MORGAN... if at all we can bribe the judge then MORGAN  
                                   means very little as a prosecution witness...

I'll do my best to crucify him as a credible witness – which won't  
be that difficult to do.

MUBARA:                     I'd like to crucify him literally. Shove a stake up his ass and  
                                   leave him hanging to die!... Fucking Zimbabwean!!...  
   (Grootboom: 2002: 10)

Perhaps, here, it should be re-iterated that the stereotype of the destructive outsider may be damning. Mubara is a Nigerian, who talks about crucifying a “Fucking Zimbabwean” (2002: 10), (who, interestingly, has the same name as the MDC leader in Zimbabwe, Morgan Tsvangirai), in South Africa. But it should be noted that perhaps that is not one of the aims of the play, to interrogate



xenophobia, but rather it is an attempt to show what is happening in the here and now, without proselytising.

*Cards* (2002) has various themes that run concurrently in the play. Perhaps the most disturbing theme that is explored is that of child prostitution. Mubara, the corrupt, money-hungry, desperate pimp will do anything to ensure that he does not end up in prison, where, according to Jones, he may spend fifty years “getting more fucks to your [Mubara's] ass” (Grootboom 2002: 5). Mubara devises a plan to bribe the new judge, Molemela. Mubara manipulates the young Nono by threatening her and her aunt Joyce with destitution, if she does not have sex with Molemela.

MUBARA: If you don't do this, I will have no choice but to let both you and your aunt go. It's up to you, do it for JOYCE – and yourself. I need an answer now, will you chase your aunt to the streets or will you do this?... Huh?... (Grootboom 2002: 62)

Nono, after believing that Mubara and her aunt have discussed this and have agreed for her to prostitute herself (which is not true, as Joyce does not know about this plan), agrees to go with Molemela. Thereafter follows the scene where Molemela takes Nono and proceeds to instruct her to give him a lap dance and a strip show – with the obvious intention to have sex with her after that. When Joyce barges in and stops Nono from continuing, Mubara is infuriated. However, he does not have much time to retaliate as he walks Modise.

Modise, the young man who had unprotected sex with the sex-mad Eva has returned to the brothel. In Township Theatre, there is usually the stock character of the priest who parts with self-evident truisms. However, this usual stock character has evolved in *Cards* (2002) into a desperate, religious fanatic who spouts verses from the Bible in order to justify his reasons for coming back and wanting to murder both Eva (for giving him HIV/AIDS) and Mubara. According to several reviewers, this character was the one that garnered most of the laughter from the audience. According to Greig (2004: 10), “the audiences treat him as a figure of fun, as Elizabethan audiences treated Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*”. Perhaps, in this fanatical religious figure, audiences recognise the evangelical preachers or missionaries who they do not take seriously, or see as wanting to enforce a particular viewpoint on them. The obvious reason is that Modise says one thing and does another, that he (like Piper) is led by his penis.

Perhaps the melodrama that is employed after Modise's rampage in the club is what audiences find amusing. Perhaps they do not see him as a believable character because he did not do what he set out to do. He collapses in a heap and says:

MODISE:                “What a wretched man I am... who will save me from this death?”...

As stated earlier, perhaps South African audiences are not given the credit they deserve. Perhaps they laugh at this character because he has brought this upon himself. By not insisting on using a condom, by having unprotected sex with a prostitute, his naïveté/ stupidity has put him in this situation where he blames everyone else for what has happened to him. Perhaps the audience laughs at this character because they themselves know what those risks are. Thus the power of the *gaze* returns to the audience members who see Modise as weak and as a figure to be laughed at. The melodrama of Modise spouting Bible verses as he dies, after being shot accidentally by Bruno, is humourous.

However, the play takes a dark turn when, after Modise dies, some of the prostitutes decide that they are going to leave. Mimi wants to leave because of the child she is carrying, Eva decides she wants to go and live out the rest of her life “positively” (2002: 78), Joyce and Nono also want to leave. But before any of them can, Mubara explodes: he complains about the label “kwerekwere” (2002: 79). He describes his rise out of the “card boxes” (2002: 79). He tells them of his rags-to-riches story; however, it is obvious that Mubara remains a stranger in a strange land. The eternal outsider. And just when you may start to sympathise with him, his vile and violent ways are brought to the fore again.

He tells Bruno to take Nono to his office and give her a shot of 'tsunami':

MUBARA:                I want her incapacitated for a whole week!... But make sure you don't kill her, I want to fuck her non-stop for the whole week. I am going to tear her virgin cunt to pieces!!...  
(Grootboom 2002: 80)

However, Bruno refuses to do so and takes Mubara's gun from him and points it at him. Bruno then tells everyone to go. And then, Bruno also leaves. Leaving Mubara alone with a gun and the sex-crazed Piper:

PIPER:                    I understand what you're going through... It's a damn shame – all that vagina gone to waste... It's a damn shame I tell you!...

And I'm so fucking horny... Now I have to go back home and wank... The hand is not the same as the vagina though... Especially EVA's vagina – that's why I even fucked it flesh to flesh... It's one hell of a vagina you just lost there... One hell of a vagina...  
(BEAT)  
It's a damn shame.

MUBARA:                   What the fuck are you still doing here?...

The lights slowly go off... Gun shot...

(Grootboom 2002: 82)

At the end of the play, the audience's standing ovations, cheering and foot-stomping reactions definitely send through a clear message. The bravery of the work and the subject matter addressed is appreciated. Even though many may believe that all the audience will leave with are minds filled with explicit sex, I do believe that, in spite of the hyper-reality not allowing any form of voyeuristic criticism, audiences do leave with more. Even if the audiences know that there is not much they can do about prostitution, evil pimps, child prostitution and murder, they must still be aware that it is wrong. As Adrienne Sichel (2004: 6) notes:

This is sex in the city – an African city with its own spin on the oldest profession. *Cards* carries an adults only warning, but no age restriction as such. That's as it should be because the ultimate message of this raw urban tale, which needs to be seen around the country, only reflects what is happening outside of the theatre walls – to children.

The theme of the play becomes its vision: it is a play about a “world of people living in or trapped at the edge of desire and necessity. Some want out, but aren't able to move. Others burn with a hard gem-like flame. The characters in *Cards* are different. But, and this is the achievement, they are no less human for that” (Greig 2005: 11).

In a postcolonial, post-apartheid 'new' South Africa scenarios, such as those in *Cards*, are played out on a daily basis. We cannot hide from the fact that there is prostitution, child prostitution, murder, rape, bribery, and corruption. What we seem to do, as a society, is sweep these issues aside. However, Grootboom has done the exact opposite. He has presented, on stage, and to many full theatres, the reality of this life in South Africa today. The colonial *gaze* may look upon the Black bodies on stage

performing these sexual, carnal, violent roles and may be prejudiced against them. But, it is pertinent to argue that this goes on all over the world. Not only Black people do it. The audiences recognise what is presented on stage is a form of truth. The only thing left to question is what does the audience do after they have left the theatre? Do they immediately go to a brothel or is the comedic horror story of *Cards* (2002) enough to make them think twice? Grootboom is a talented storyteller who lets all the ugliness of South African society hang out, if you will, on the stage, for South Africans and foreign audiences to see.

**The marked body is not only a physical “site”, a place, but also a visualised “sight”, a space – a space of the discursive reenactment of violence. (Bester 2002: 168)**

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## RELATIVITY: TOWNSHIP STORIES

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Greg Homann (2006: 13) writes that Grootboom “opts for overt representations of violence within the performance space”. Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom has been the focus of much controversy as a result of his provocative constructions of sex, rape, torture, abuse and murder and because *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) has, at its core, deeply disturbing depictions of violent acts. Grootboom (in Homann 2006) says “I’m not afraid to show things people are afraid to show”, and Brian Logan (ibid) notes that Grootboom likes to provoke a reaction. Grootboom says that “in South Africa, they tend to do issue-oriented plays. And if they deal with violence, they’ll make a play that talks about it and doesn’t show it” (ibid). The play is based on the theory of relativity, whereby everyone’s viewpoint is the right one. The story revolves around post-apartheid South African black township life and is examined and presented with brutal authenticity and insight.

My first impression on the first reading of *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) was of an all-out, over-the-top, lengthy experiment in the most extreme themes that could be explored in a two-act play. I can remember being in a foul mood after reading *Relativity*. The last time that a text had so badly affected me was when I read *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis. The reasons for this play affecting me so negatively was that it is a reminder of the harsh world in which we live. The reality of the situations that the characters find themselves in are not far-fetched. When we switch on the television and watch the news, these stories are what we are exposed to. Serial killers on the rampage, child molestation, police brutality and gangsterism. It makes me feel that if this is the reality that is being presented to us on stage because it is what is happening in our society, then South Africa is in trouble. We are heading into a depravity that will be nearly impossible to pull ourselves out of.

*Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) is a brutal exposure of township life. The story revolves around a serial killer, the “G-String Strangler”. The play traverses the bleaker, more desperate side of human nature. As described by Robert Greig (2006), *Relativity* is a panorama of extreme emotions and

violence. “It is a harsh, unillusioned vision of lives in a township fissured by violence and sex that is used as an instrument of violence”. Rosie Milliard (2006) writes that “*Township Stories* is wholly engrossing, shocking and dire. Should you catch it, and I hope you do, you will have an evening that picks you up and carts you off to the *dangerous centre of the brutal, ugly and frantic black South African urban experience...*”

*Relativity: Township Stories* is a play in two acts. In relation to the topic, the prologue immediately shows that violence is the central theme of this play as it begins with a violent rape and murder by strangulation. There are other themes that run concurrently with the theme of violence, such as: paedophilia, rape, molestation, domestic violence, xenophobia, torture and murder. “The play debunks the myth that people living in poverty and anguish inevitably find refuge in singing and dancing: they can also find it in religious fanaticism and, more damaging, in alcohol, sex, violence and murder,” explains the press release.

Grootboom gives an official description of the plot to Matthew Krouse (2003); “Kicked out of home by her mother, a daughter falls for an abusive thug. Her father hires a hit man, while in another home a father sodomises his son who is bedding both a woman and her daughter. A serial killer circles in the shadows of this mayhem.”

J.L. Walter (cited in McKendrick & Hoffmann) defines violence as “destructive harm... including not only physical assaults that damage the body, but also... the many techniques of inflicting harm by mental or emotional means” (1999: 3). Homann (2006) writes that Walter is “certainly drawing on his definition from an understanding that one man's violence could be another man's social practice, and – although I [Homann] make this statement tentatively – current accepted custom demands a flexibility to view alternative cultural practice as condonable” (2006: 10). However, perhaps in redressing the past injustices where only 'white' social practices were acceptable, we have unintentionally condoned the unacceptable in the name of redress, justice and tolerance.

However, does this perpetuation of the Black as *violent* in this play or attaching these signifiers of *extreme violence* challenge the colonial imposition of identity through the performing body. Seeing the Black body performing these acts of extreme violence begs to ask the question: does this subvert the colonial *gaze* or does it feed into a colonial stereotype of the *violent, savage* Black? This research will argue that Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom's *Relativity: Township Stories* does not show the Black

performing body as a site of resistance and does not fracture the colonial *gaze*. But rather it may cater basely to colonial and racist prejudices and stereotypes, depending on which lens the audience looks through while watching *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006).

Submitted by Lusanda Zokufa of The Market Theatre to [www.artslink.co.za](http://www.artslink.co.za) in 2006, is a detailed description of the play:

*Relativity* is a contemporary, epic tale exploring the underbelly of South African township life. At the centre of the drama is a serial killer, the “G-String Strangler”, who is hunting down young women at night. Surrounding this elusive figure is a wide cast of colourful characters, including a runaway daughter who finds solace in the arms of a hoodlum; a drunkard father whose wife leaves him for a man called “Lovemore”, and who hires an assassin to kill his daughter’s abusive boyfriend; a police sergeant who tortures his suspects and sexually abuses his son; a tavern owner who shares the same lover as her daughter; as well as the ghost of the serial killer’s mother, who returns to haunt him during moments of great anguish! (2006)

This plot synopsis speaks to the contemporary, postcolonial, post-apartheid South Africa which is becoming, more and more, an amoral society. In our contemporary society, there is confusion and fragmentation, a bewilderment that is overwhelming. This is definitely not a polite form of realism that is employed in this play. Grootboom perhaps is doing for South African theatre now what Sarah Kane did for British Theatre in the 1990's. The hyper-realism of Grootboom's *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) shatters any kind of voyeuristic distancing/ criticism and immediately involves the audience.

Robert Greig (2005) makes important points regarding the style and precedents of this play. He notes that *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) is an expansive exercise in horror, romance, violence, pathos. “It's Hogarth in motion, Peter Greenaway on stage, Brett Bailey without the distancing ritual” (2005: 1). The fact that Greig immediately intimates that there are no distancing aspects to this play, reveals that in the hyper-realism used there is no fourth wall – the audience are a part of the morally bankrupt society that they are *gazing* at on stage. This hyper-realism is hard at work even as the audience files into the theatre which erases the divide or fourth wall between the actors and the spectators. J Brooks Spector (2005: 11) describes how the stage noise blends with the conversations of audience members and in one corner of the stage, there are men talking loudly and drinking in a *shebeen* (tavern or informal bar), in another area of the stage, the women are having their hair done, and on a bed, placed centre-stage, two teenagers are in the preliminary stages of having sex.

In this netherworld of the South African township, stylised hyper-realism is sporadically fused with fantasy. The serial killer, Thabo, becomes a tragic metaphor for a community consumed by the monster it created. It becomes impossible to remain a spectator as the audience bears witness to men and women's primal urges and cardinal sins. The play becomes an epitaph for a morally bankrupt society, which ultimately could be any society. Not just a South African one (Sichel 2005).

Greig also notes that the play has two main influences: “dreadful, violent American films – spaghetti westerns rather than Peckinpah – and township theatre. Today the latter tends to be romanticised, ignoring its cut-out characters, treachery moralism and quixotic use of time” (2005:1). As noted at the beginning of this chapter, Grootboom does not enjoy being compared to Quentin Tarantino and that his theatre is “always classified as “township theatre”, which is a title I hate. I write about my own experiences and I try to make them artistic” (in de Vries 2008). However even though this play is based in the township and it is a story of township life in South Africa, the story is universal – according to Dawn Kennedy(2005: 6) - “a frightening portrayal of how the abused becomes the abuser”.

The amoral society and the people it contains are immediately obvious in the amoral/ morally corrupt detective, Rocks, when the following stage direction reads:

*ROCKS picks up the G-string on her neck and moves off, smelling it...*  
(Grootboom 2006: 9)

This image of a policeman/ detective, the supposed protector of the people, smelling worn female underwear, is revolting to me. It immediately intimates that this man is perverted. The fact that his fellow detective Molomo does not react in any way to this action indicates that this has become normal practice; de-sensitisation has taken place for these two characters, which must happen to all police involved in trying to solve horrific murders. Being faced with these images of death and destruction day after day surely must lead to de-sensitisation.

This leads into their direct address to the audience and how they describe the female who was murdered and raped. They describe her as “one of those loose girls,” she is described as a “weekend special” by her neighbours, she is “no stranger of the night” as she visited the roughest shebeens in the township, “*Sphaphi* in vernacular” (Grootboom & Chwenyagae 2006: 10, Act 1: Beat One). The two detectives show no regard for her, as she lies there in front of them dead, raped, with “semen all over her pubic area” (Grootboom & Chwenyagae 2006: 9, Act 1: Beat One).



The society that the play depicts and dissects shows that there is a definite lack of respect for women in South African society. It is shown in the language used, the way in which female characters are depicted, interrupted, spoken to, used, raped, murdered, beaten. An early example which sets up an awareness of this lack of respect is when the psychologist, Mantola Nkhato, directly addresses the audience as she clarifies the profile of the G-String strangler serial killer. She is interrupted by the two detectives a total of five times during what should be her monologue. They criticise her directly and say that they “have real work to do after you theorise” (Grootboom 2006: 11). The attitude of the male detectives towards the female psychologist is clearly one of disdain. This clearly demonstrates a social point that many men in South Africa have issues with women who are in authority. Perhaps in this scene Grootboom is critiquing this very male/ patriarchal society that we live in. In *The Sunday Independent* (2005), Dawn Kennedy questions Grootboom about the claims that he is a misogynist. He replies:

Even though I show violent scenes, I always look for a point in them. I'm on women's side. I want to have a mother. *What offends me is when women allow themselves to be in such situations without doing anything about it.*” (2005: 11)

What Grootboom is saying here is that he cannot understand why some women would want to stay in abusive situations. However, it must be noted that even though it offends Grootboom that women don't do anything about their situation, very often the women cannot do anything about it because of a paralysis for financial or economic reasons or mortal fear.

Through his hyper-real theatre, Grootboom does not claim to be preaching any solutions, nor does he presume to have found any. His theatre is reflecting/ mirroring South African society. His theatre thus does not seem to be pandering to a colonial *gaze*. But rather, the story on stage is showing South African life in the townships, in the here and now. No matter what lens is looked through, *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) is showing the dark underbelly of South African township societies. The truth. And if 'the truth' reinforces colonial ideologies and stereotypes about Black people in South Africa, Grootboom is not apologetic. He is telling stories. Township stories that are relative.

It is important to note that Grootboom (2006: 1) says “where the serial killer comes from is so important to the play. If he were operating in a different backdrop, such as the city, it would be a different kettle of fish.” Perhaps what Grootboom is attempting to say is that the characters in this play choose to do the things they do because this is the world they live in. According to Homann (2006: 29),

“their actions are defined by the environment they inhabit and the memory that is located in that house, that street, that town, that township...” By employing the realist mode, Grootboom is making a study of a particular set of characters in a very particular environmental setting.

Torture becomes an obvious theme in this play. This becomes very clear in Beat Two of *Relativity: Township Stories*, when the two corrupt detectives begin to interrogate Dario, a gangster, otherwise known as a *tsotsi* (in township slang).

A handcuffed Dario is hauled into the scene, where Bongi’s dead, raped, strangled body has not been cleared away but has been kept on stage for reference in the interrogation room. This is a very disturbing scene where clear themes of police brutality and torture are played out between Rocks, Molomo and Dario. The detectives have brought in Dario in order to interrogate him about the rape and murder of Bongi.

**ROCKS:** Don’t come and tell me about a profile, written by some woman who knows bugger all about police work. I’ve been a cop for over twenty years. And anyway, if he didn’t do it, we’ll see after I burn his balls... This always works, he won’t lie when his balls are being roasted like chicken, he’ll tell the truth. Now come on, cuff him and let’s take off his trousers.

*Music. They manhandle him.*

*They cuff him and take off his pants. They burn his balls. he screams and screams...*

(Grootboom & Chwenyagae 2006: 17-18, Act 1: Beat Two)

Rocks presents himself here as a seasoned veteran – one who knows how to get results. They take the low road, perhaps in the assumption that one malefactor is just as good as another. This is a similar mentality to many of the policemen who were in the service during the apartheid era. He has become de-sensitised and immune to the violence that has been perpetuated by others and by himself.

Greg Homann notes that this point in the play is a reminder of/ mirror of the Apartheid brutalities frequently told of during the period of the TRC hearings (2006: 20-21).

An example of the similarity between this scene and a torture description is as follows:

...they tied my genitals parts with that wire, and my hands were tied to the back, and they shocked me on my parts... When they came back they started kicking me –  
‘Are you still resisting?’  
(Mahlasela Paul Mhlonga in Krog 1998: 144)

However, as one finds out quite soon in the play, Dario is not exactly a “nice guy”, but does that condone police brutality and more so, torture? But as Robert Greig states, Grootboom dispenses with 'treacly moralism' and thus depicts what he feels is the truth. Perhaps when Grootboom dispenses with 'treacly moralism', he admits that the world that he depicts is ultimately amoral.

As mentioned above, Dario is a misogynistic, violent character. For example in Beat 4, Dario talks about how he went to go and find Sibongile after she refused to have sex with him. The scene continues and Dario talks about how he found her at Mamikies with another man, whom Dario calls a “coconut” (a term that means Black on the outside, but White on the inside and is obviously meant to be derogatory), and whom he beats up. He continues on:

**DARIO**

Now, as I was turning to deal with the bitch, I found out she's gone! I went after her! When I caught her, *ek het hom haar ma ge chee. Hierso, o di hand. Ha kao chaela, ke mo trapile dik, ka mo tliša, ka mo nyoba dik!* [When I caught her, I beat her up. I'm telling you, I beat her up like crazy, and then I brought her here, and I fucked her like crazy!]

*MAVARARA laughs at that.*

**PELO**

*Haa, mare Ma-D, nke sela wa mo gana! Bullet-out binne bo daai koek!* [But Dario, you should've shot her! Bullet-out, right inside her cunt!]

(Grootboom & Chwenyagae 2006: 23-24, Act 1: Beat Four)

This scene highlights the misogynistic attitudes of these characters and also reinforces the violence that these characters (being played by Black men) are capable of carrying out. The scene is not only shocking in the way that the characters talk about beating Sibongile but the last sentence said by Pelo made my blood run cold:

**PELO**

*Haa, mare Ma-D, nke sela wa mo gana! Bullet-out binne bo daai koek!* [But Dario, you should've shot her! Bullet-out, right inside her cunt!]

(Grootboom & Chwenyagae 2006: 23-24, Act 1: Beat Four)

The shock tactics used by Grootboom in the use of the violent language by the characters definitely averts any sort of voyeurism as it directly hooks us into the story. The shocking violence, sexual perversion and language in this play are a part of Grootboom's theatrical tactics to make audience members sit up and take notice. Perhaps it has got to the point, in South African society, that we are so de-sensitised to violence that it has to be amplified on the stage for it to shock us in any way. As Patricia Mosel (2006: 11) asks “Do these plays reflect the new South Africa? I hope not.” Grootboom is showing the 'new' postcolonial, post-apartheid South Africa in all its rottenness, decay and filth. Grootboom perhaps is then accepting that our notion of a society is embodied in the stories we choose to tell. And if that caters to the colonial *gaze* seeing the Black bodies performing on stage as *violent*, then maybe that is the truth. Although, I do not think that Grootboom is intentionally pandering to the colonial *gaze*. I believe that it comes down to audience members and whichever particular *lens* they are looking through.

It becomes vital to note that according to Homann (2006: 20), *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) is devoid of any heroes. “Grootboom establishes each character as both a victim and a perpetrator” (2006: 20). The argument that Kennedy (2005: 6) makes, that the play is “a frightening portrayal of how the abused becomes the abuser” is clearly the argument that Grootboom wishes to foreground. It is shown in the abuse of Thabo by his father:

*He [Rocks] slowly gets under the blankets with THABO, trying not to wake him. He then slowly fondles him. ROCKS is crying, as if feeling guilty for what he finds himself doing.*

*THABO wakes up.*

THABO: *Papa he-e. Papa ntlogele!* [Papa no! Please leave me alone!]

*THABO cries again.*

THABO: *O rila oka se tlhole o ntshwara gape... ntlogele papa* [You said you wouldn't touch me again... leave me alone papa.]

*He rapes the boy, saying:*

ROCKS: *(spiritually tortured)* Sorry, Bigboy... Sorry, my boy...*Skalla sani... Papa wa o rata, was utlwa chana?* [Don't cry my son... Papa loves you, you hear chana?]

(Grootboom & Chwenyagae 2006: 43-44, Act 1: Beat Six)

This scene acts as a prefiguring that motivates why Thabo craves raping and killing women. Because Thabo was abused by his father, he goes out and abuses others. A bold generalisation maybe to say that the “play makes the point that most serial killers are victims of sexual abuse” (Bambalele 2006: 8). But this is the statement that the play is making. *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) has set up a society where the result of any action can be traced back to a traumatic event, such as child abuse (in the form of Thabo who becomes the G-String Strangler), poverty (in the form of Dario and his *tsots's*), domestic violence (in the form of Matlakala) and unemployment that plagues every township in South Africa.

The graphic abortion performed by Matlakala again asserts Homann's theory that there are no heroes in this play, only victims and perpetrators. Matlakala is a victim of abuse from Dario and she decided to take it out on their unborn child inside of her. In a direct address to the audience Matlakala explains that:

...After beating me up like that, strangely the baby survived... I resented that fact. I felt he had no right in beating me up that way and still having his baby survive it.

(Grootboom & Chwenyagae 2006: 50, Act 2: Beat One)

Matlakala then squats over a plastic basin and inserts a wire coat hanger up her vagina. It streams with blood. She has aborted her baby in an act of revenge. And again, the cyclical violence begins. The once victim becomes the perpetrator (Homann 2006: 23).

The universe depicted in *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) is an amoral one where sex and violence govern the social interaction. The play has been criticised for being gratuitously violent, as it has 10 murders, a graphic abortion and several rapes that occur on stage. However, the violence is intrinsic to the work. The work itself is bleak and confrontational as it captures the texture of a generalised (and perhaps, stereotyped form of) township living. In terms of the theory of relativity, the narrative structure is depicted on stage by a washing line. On this washing line hang tokens of those murdered throughout the play, for example: panties, a shoe and the bloody amorphous aborted fetus. As Greig (2006: 10) notes: “The play is structured as events strung on a line – private lives rendered public by bloodshed”.

By attaching the signifier of *extreme violence* to the Black bodies performing on the stage, Grootboom has succeeded in making the audience sit up and take note. However, there is an incident that reiterates the point made in the discussion of *Cards* – that perhaps the colonial, racist *gaze* is being cast over the audience rather than those black bodies on stage. Clare Cassidy reviewed *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) at the Market Theatre in 2006 and she notes that “when the audience started to whistle and encourage the rapist as he hunted down and raped his final victim I felt they may have missed the point somewhere along the line”. She continues on to say that she left the theatre “more disturbed by the audience than challenged by the subject matter”. Clare Cassidy makes the comment, “What is the point of live theatre if not to comment on contemporary reality?” That is exactly what *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) does. Even the disturbing reactions of the audience are tantamount to commentary on the contemporary reality in the troubled postcolonial, post-apartheid 'new' South Africa. This is just how it is.

Through this analysis, I have realised that perhaps I also missed the point somewhere along the line. I realise now that the extreme violence is paramount to depicting a harsh reality, a harsh violent reality that could be happening anywhere in the world, not just with black people in South Africa. And by using the hyper-real form, Grootboom has managed to make me a part of that reality by not allowing me to critically distance myself, but to reach a catharsis through realising that this does happen in societies and that I just have to deal with it as a part of life and not attach my racist ideologies or prejudices to the life that is led in the townships that are part of my country and awkward heritage.

## CONCLUSION

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Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom and Brett Bailey may fall under the term postcolonial but is that just because their theatre is being produced post-1994, post-democracy? There are specific markers of postcolonial drama that need to be fulfilled for theatre to be termed as postcolonial theatre and in some cases Bailey and Grootboom have those markers and in some cases they do not. Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins define postcolonial performance as including the following features:

- acts that respond directly to the experience of imperialism;
- acts performed for the continuation and/ or regeneration of the colonised (and sometimes pre-contact) communities;
- acts performed with the awareness of, and sometimes the incorporation of, post-contact forms; and
- acts that interrogate the hegemony that underlies imperial representation (1996: 11)

Bailey's theatre, in the cases of *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) and *Big Dada: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* (2002), seems to respond to an experience of oppression. However it may not be directly responding the experience of imperialism but rather indirectly to that of colonialism. *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) and Bailey's other ritual-based plays (*Ipi Zombie* and *The Prophet*) are definitely being performed for the continuation and regeneration of the colonised communities they portray. It is clear through Bailey's Intercultural theatre and his hybridising of forms that he has amalgamated some pre-colonial theatre forms with the post-contact forms. The post-contact forms or influences that are the most obvious are the technological advancements, the fact that they can be performed in a theatre and out in the open and that syncretic theatre is being employed.

Grootboom's theatre, specifically *Cards* (2002) and *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006), responds indirectly to the experience of colonialism and, in particular, the after-effects of apartheid. These two pieces of theatre do not directly rail against the West, Whites or colonialism, but rather are portrayals of life today in South Africa. They are honest versions of the aftermath of apartheid – what its legacy has left behind, specifically for Black people. However, I do not think that it could be performed for the

regeneration or continuation of the colonised communities that are represented. This theatre is a commentary on the degradation of the society he presents us. These theatrical offerings may offer a representation of the truth and that this truth of the situation in which the characters find themselves should not be perpetuated. So, perhaps in that way, these acts are being performed for the regeneration of the communities represented.

This study began with an overview on South African theatre history from the introduction of ‘formal theatre’ to Africans by the missionaries to Black Consciousness Theatre to the Protest and polemic theatre of the ‘worker’s plays’ and finally to the unstable ground of post-democracy, post-1994 South African theatre. This section also examines the effects of colonialism with regards to the implication that “the Black” was (and perhaps still is) evaluated in cultural and moral terms that are defined by the hegemonic society (the colonial societal structures), and the commercial application of colonialism and what its effects were. Postcolonialism and drama/ performance is discussed in terms of what makes a piece of theatre ‘postcolonial.’

My findings are that Bailey’s theatre does contain features of postcolonial performance and that his theatre does respond to the experience of colonialism by re-inventing and re-interpreting historical African stories. His theatre does include the post-contact forms which are integrated with pre-contact or, rather, indigenous forms, for example: the reintegration of real and performative rituals in *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) could be considered as an attempt to regenerate the colonised mind of the amaXhosa culture and the symbolic healing of the nation through Gcaleka’s journey.

However, I found that Grootboom’s theatre becomes slightly more difficult to pin down under the term ‘postcolonial’. His theatre can be seen as responding to the experience of colonialism by showing what has happened to communities that were oppressed by colonial ideologies and in particular, apartheid. For example, townships are depicted as places of violence and lawlessness is the law. Grootboom’s theatre, specifically *Cards* (2002) and *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006), responds indirectly to the experience of colonialism and, in particular, the after-effects of apartheid.

These two pieces of theatre, *Cards* (2002) and *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006), do not directly rail against the West, Whites or colonialism, but rather are portrayals of life today in South Africa. They are honest versions of the aftermath of apartheid – what its legacy has left behind, specifically for Black people. These acts could be seen as performed for the regeneration or continuation of the



colonised communities that are represented – they are a commentary on the degradation of the society he is showing. These theatrical offerings may offer a representation of the truth and that this truth of the situation in which the characters find themselves should not be perpetuated. These acts are being performed for the communities represented but not necessarily for regeneration. His cinematic directorial style which is hybridized with the Township Theatre form is an indication that he does incorporate post-contact forms in his theatre.

Moreover the study examines the *gaze*, identity and the Black performing body. This chapter discusses identity and how the body becomes the medium through which our particular identity is conveyed, and how the fixed colonial *gaze* on identity could be subverted. The *gaze* is discussed by Lacan and the finding is that the consciousness of the Black self is shaped by a mirror which holds up the image of a White construct of Blackness. The *gaze* is further discussed in terms of power relationships and who has the power: the spectator or the actor on stage. Black identity and stereotypical imagery of “the Black” is further discussed by Ben Carrington (2002) who looks at the representation of the Black body through the ages. This is a precursor to the discussion of the signifiers that Bailey attaches to his Black performers and their bodies on the stage.

My first impression was that Bailey may be catering to a colonial prejudice by exploiting African exoticism in his reintroduction of the notion of the *savage* and attaching it to the Black bodies performing in his theatre. However, upon my further analyses in Chapter 3, I realised that Bailey subverts the colonial *gaze* in *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) by parodying colonial archetypes. However, in *Big Dada: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* (2002), Bailey does cater to the colonial *gaze* – even though the colonial *gaze* may not be the entire issue. But rather, Bailey shows a satirizing representation of a brutal dictator that makes the message hit home even harder.

An in depth analysis of both *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) and *Big Dada: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* (2002) written and directed by Brett Bailey attempted to locate disruptions of the colonial *gaze* with regards to the Black body performing and disruptions were located in *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) and partially in *Big Dada: The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* (2002). As mentioned above, I found through my analyses that Bailey does subvert the colonial *gaze* in *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) by parodying colonial archetypes.

An in depth analysis of both *Cards* (2002) and *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) by Mpumelelo Paul

Grootboom also attempted to locate disruptions of the colonial *gaze* with regards to the Black body performing. However, what was discovered is that the colonial *gaze* was now being employed by the audience members to *gaze* upon other audience members. The hyper-realism of the theatre pieces broke down any version of the fourth wall and averted any type of voyeurism, thus averting the colonial *gaze* away from the Black performing bodies. The truth in the profundity in the characters' situations made audience members part of the action, even if they did not want to be. Through the analyses of the two plays by Grootboom I realised that the extreme violence in the plays is necessary for depicting a harsh reality that could be occurring anywhere in the world, not only in South Africa and not only happening to Black people.

In this dissertation, I have realised that my own colonial, racist *gaze* has been fractured. In deciding on this topic, I immediately went on a rampage discussing race and looking at "the Black" from my own, jaundiced prejudiced viewpoint. An academic error on my part. Instead of being impartial and clinical in my analyses of the plays discussed, I allowed my own prejudices to cloud my preliminary readings of the plays. On closer readings and analyses, I now know that both Brett Bailey and Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom are creating theatre that is pertinent to the society in which I live - even if I don't like some of the work that they are producing. And even if in some parts, I have a colonial racist lens through which I *gaze* at the work, it is all part of being a person in a country where I am unsure of my own identity. As a White, half-Irish, half-Jewish female having lived half my life in the apartheid era and half in the post-democratic 'new' South Africa, I have clearly been influenced by the colonial, racist ideologies perpetuated by familial and societal structures.

This dissertation was an attempt to interrogate the controversial signifiers of extreme violence, the savage and exoticism of the Black performing body in the particular works/ case studies of: *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997) and *Big Dada* (2002) by Brett Bailey, and *Cards* (2002) and *Relativity: Township Stories* (2006) by Mpumelelo Paul Grootboom. It was also an attempt to examine whether Grootboom and Bailey are showing the Black performing body as a site of resistance, or whether they are pandering to colonial prejudices and exploiting African exoticism. It is obvious now that neither playwright-director is directly pandering to colonial prejudices. Why would they? They are making theatre that they feel needs to be seen.

Theatre is highly subjective and can be an emotionally charged site, invoking heated debate and discussion about what should be on stage and for what reasons. But first and foremost, theatre is a

representation. Theatre is a representation of either a microcosm of a particular society/ societal group or, a macrocosm. It is intended to replicate life and in that, make some sort of commentary (however obscure) on any subject matter chosen by the playwright or the director. Theatre can be intimate and it can be vast. Theatre can be one person on stage, or it can have hundreds of people on stage. The options within a theatrical environment are endless. So why am I judging what Bailey or Grootboom choose to put on the stage? Who starts defining rules about theatre? How would it be policed? The thought of that harkens back to the control of the apartheid era in this country. This makes me realise how narrow-minded I am even though I claim not to be. With a steadfast set of rules now thoroughly shattered, I feel rather adrift. With my colonial and racist ideologies foregrounded, challenged and shattered, who am I?

Perhaps a part of me was angry with Bailey for exploiting Black performers for his own personal gain. Perhaps within Bailey I recognised the manipulative, controlling ‘figure’ of colonialism. But was it for personal gain? Or does he truly believe that he was indeed visited by the African Spirit and that he should be communicating African history and ritual through a theatrical medium; “to fuse ritual and theatre in some way, to make drama that would transport performers and spectators the way I myself had been transported by the ceremonies...” (2003: 15). I think the only person who knows the answer to those questions is Bailey himself.

In the case of *iMumbo Jumbo* (1997), “colonial mimicry” (Schechner 2003: 233) is used to subvert the colonial *gaze*. However, with the atrocities that were committed by Idi Amin and the fact that they are still topical today (with reference to the movie *The Last King of Scotland* 2007), the fear of the deranged dictator is still a very real fact. The wounds of the past, pertaining to that time in recent history, are still open. Although Bailey’s theatrical representation of the rise and the fall of Idi Amin is a very clever, biting satirical political cabaret and is a marvelous piece of theatre, perhaps with Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe and the genocide happening in the Democratic Republic of Congo at this time, the representation of Amin now is a little bit too close to home for me to be critical and non-prejudicial of the Black mad, megalomaniacal African dictator.

Of course, with theatre practitioners in South Africa not having the complex enemy of apartheid to focus on, theatre makers were in crisis. As Greg Homann (2006: 1) explains:

The long standing routine of creating protest work was no longer necessary. Questions

of “What now?”, “What are our stories?”, “What is theatre's function in this new society?” emerged...

This crisis of representation is the context from which Bailey and Grootboom's theatre emerged. My issue, from the outset, was more to do with Bailey than with Grootboom. My main issue with Bailey was that how, as a white man, can he possibly have any idea how to represent Black cultural rituals in a manner that would not offend the Black culture he was representing? But what I lost sight of was that *this is theatre*, where conventional cultural rules should not apply. It should not have been a problem with me, as I am constantly spouting the words ‘I am a South African’ – but do I really believe it? And do I believe that Bailey is? Is it because I am White that I feel I have no culture and that then no other White people and in particular, theatre practitioners, are allowed a South African identity? Perhaps I am just angry that I have not allowed myself to accept truly that I am an African. I have been resisting it for so long because of my prejudicial notions of what it means to be African.

Grootboom, on the other hand, unapologetically portrays South African life as he sees it. That for me held more truth. And although Bailey is also unapologetic, I felt that he should be. I now realise that both Bailey and Grootboom are ultimately brave in their choice of subject matter and in their choices of how South African history and the South Africa at present can be presented on the stage.

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## APPENDIX A

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THIRD WORLD BUNFIGHT (TWB) is a non-profit South African performance company which has maintained its position at the cutting edge of performance throughout its 10 year history. The company is resident on the Spier Estate near Cape Town, and is directed by multi-award winning playwright, Brett Bailey.

TWB is committed to making provocative, uniquely African theatre works of high quality that challenge stereotypes of Africa. Working with a diverse range of African performers TWB tells the stories of Africa, uses and fuses the performance forms, music and design modes of Africa, and presents these works both locally and abroad.

TWB's award winning theatrical, musical and ritualistic productions have toured throughout South Africa (in English as well as isiXhosa versions), in other African countries, as well as extensively in Europe and in Australia. These productions include BIG DADA, iMUMBO JUMBO, IPI ZOMBI? and THE HOUSE OF THE HOLY AFRO.

During the past 10 years TWB has trained and worked with several hundred black performers including children in the Western and Eastern Cape Provinces, in Gauteng, as well as in Zimbabwe and Uganda. Specialists have been brought from Holland, Cote d'Ivoire, the USA and Zimbabwe to work with these performers. Development, training and employment of performing artists and gifted learners from South Africa's previously disadvantaged communities are central to the ethos of the company.

- 1996            ZOMBIE, with 60 residents of Rini Township (Grahamstown), plays on the National Arts Festival Fringe Program.
- 1997            ZOMBIE, with 30 performers from the townships of Cape Town, plays Nico Arena, Cape Town;  
iMUMBO JUMBO, with 60 residents of Rini Township (Grahamstown), plays the main program of the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown;  
iMUMBO JUMBO, with cast from Cape Town, Johannesburg and Eastern Cape, plays for eight weeks on the main stage of The Market Theatre, Johannesburg.
- 1998            HQ, community drama training initiative is set up in Rini Township, Grahamstown;  
IPI ZOMBI? plays the main program at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown; 'heartstopping' plays on the Fringe program;

- IPI ZOMBI? and 'heartstopping' tour the rural villages of the Eastern Cape in Xhosa translation, and play at the Hilton Arts Festival in KwaZulu-Natal;
- 1999 IPI ZOMBI? plays a two week season at Spier Amphitheatre, Cape Town, and tours Zimbabwe;  
TWB (Third World Bunfight) HQ moves to Port St Johns, Transkei;  
THE PROPHET plays the main program at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown;
- 2000 BIG DADA, with funding from the National Arts Council is workshopped in Umtata in the Eastern Cape with 5 TWB members and 5 actors from the Umtata Community Arts Project and plays in several venues in and around Umtata;
- 2001 TWB moves to Cape Town, rehearsing for BIG DADA;  
BIG DADA premieres at the Roots Festival, Amsterdam in June and also plays the main program of the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown, at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town and at the Barbican Pit Theatre in London as part of the BITE'01 season;
- 2002 SAFARI commissioned by the World Music Theatre Festival from the Netherlands, is made in Kampala, Uganda with the Ndere Troupe and tours thirteen Dutch cities in March;
- 2003 iMUMBO JUMBO reworked and commissioned by the Barbican Theatre in London for a two-week run and also plays at the National Arts Festival and at the Baxter Theatre (Cape Town);
- 2004 TWB takes up residence at Spier Estate, Stellenbosch;  
TWB is contacted as the entertainment group at Moyo Restaurant on the Spier Estate;  
HOUSE OF THE HOLY AFRO commissioned for the Sharp Sharp Festival, Bern, Switzerland;
- 2005 BIG DADA plays at the Spier Summer Arts Season, Stellenbosch;  
Oscar von Woensel's 'medEia' performed by TWB on an abandoned film set on the Spier Estate;  
BIG DADA and HOUSE OF THE HOLY AFRO tour Brussels, Vienna and Berlin;  
BIG DADA plays a three-week season at The Market Theatre in Johannesburg;  
TWB provides year-long African entertainment at Moyo Restaurant, Spier Estate;  
HOUSE OF THE HOLY AFRO plays at the Eye of the Cyclone festival on Reunion Island;
- 2006 Brett Bailey's site-specific play ORFEUS plays for two weeks at the Spier Summer Arts Season;  
TWB stages two productions at the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne Australia: HOUSE OF THE HOLY AFRO and 'heartstopping', an outdoor performance installation;  
TWB's 'Cabaret Moyo' in collaboration with the Congolese band, Akuna Matata, runs at Moyo Restaurant, Spier Estate;

2007

Brett Bailey redirects the Bailey/ van Dijk adaption of Verdi's MACBETH for Spier Summer Arts Season, March;  
Comprehensive Australian tour of the HOUSE OF THE HOLY AFRO being planned;  
The Pan African Performance Academy and Creating the Future to be established.

## APPENDIX B

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### MPUMELELO PAUL GROOTBOOM

- 1975 Born in Soweto
- 1993 Begins his studies at the University of the Witwatersrand
- 1994 Moves in with John Rogers
- 1997 Writes his first play *Enigma*
- 1997 Becomes the resident writer at the North West Arts Council, where he also trains young actors
- 2002 Becomes development officer at the State Theatre in Pretoria
- 2002 Directs *Cards*
- 2003 Writes *Relativity: Township Stories*
- 2003 Directs *Hamlet*
- 2005 Wins the National Standard Bank Young Artist Award
- 2006 Tours the UK
- 2007 Resident Director at the State Theatre
- 2008 Tours Switzerland and the Netherlands