



CHAPTER THREE – POLITICAL IDENTITIES

3.1 POST ANTI-APARTHEID THEATRE⁵⁷

[A]fter April 27, 1994, "the enemy" was all of a sudden gone....Apartheid and violence made for powerful images, poignant stories, stirring poems, heart-stopping film...can we learn to create again without "the enemy"?
(Metz 1996: 57)

While anti-apartheid theatre was known worldwide for dramatizing the struggle against apartheid, theatre in South Africa today is hampered by the loss of a focused movement for change... (Kruger 2002: 231).

The observations above by Gordon Metz and Loren Kruger typify the reactions of a number of commentators on post-apartheid theatre. When the behemoth of the nationalist regime was replaced by a democracy, the impetus behind the revolutionary protest theatre created during apartheid quietly fizzled away. The creativity which had been exercised on behalf of agit-prop and protest theatre lost its urgency. As Ian Johns lamented after a South African festival in London: "The plays' hearts may still beat with passion but the playwriting joints have grown stiff" (2002: 20). Perhaps it is no wonder that some writers are still turning to the old themes for inspiration. And yet, eighteen years after the unbanning of the ANC, theatre which indicts the apartheid system hardly seems as much of a necessity as it may once have been.

Post-anti-apartheid theatre (to use Loren Kruger's definition [2002: 233]) is work which takes place in a completely different context to revolutionary work created during the heyday of the nationalist government. As Gael Neke maintains, there is a distinct difference between a revolutionary art which fought against a system at great

⁵⁷ I would like to use the word "political" in the title of this chapter in a very specific sense. I realise that the word has been opened up by writers such as Michel Foucault to refer to a vast range of human endeavours, but I would here like to use it in a very narrow sense as being related to the system of state governance, and, in particular, to expressions either endorsing or critiquing governmental policies.

personal risk, and art which retrospectively attacks apartheid from the safety of the post-apartheid era. She states that this work

carries less potential of censure and requires less courage in that it does not contest an existing situation. Its themes are generally now accepted as having moral validity thus no longer holding the risk of alienation for the artist. These factors change the very notion of the 'political' in this art (1999: 5).

In other words, the sense of the 'political' in current anti-apartheid art seems to be more a kind of reification of ideology, rather than an appeal for transformation, since the transformation has now ostensibly already occurred. Where apartheid is still today used as a theme, it may perhaps seem more appropriate to celebrate the freedom from oppression, rather than dwelling on accusations of injustice. And then there is also the development of a new form of protest theatre, which challenges the present status quo.

Every society requires performances which recall defining moments of its history, particularly times of transition and transformation. As an analogy, two of the most important moments in the historical trajectory of families (which could be seen as smaller, more private examples of societies⁵⁸) also constitute the most widespread and familiar performance events – namely, marriages and funerals. In South Africa today, possibly in the world, the most common form of performance event is likely to be the wedding ceremony, which provides the staple fare for many musicians, singers, photographers, interior designers, chefs and dressmakers. Marriages also sustain a good many churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and religious officials. Funerals may require less preparation, and yet, they are also very significant. The ending of apartheid has been presented both as a marriage between the different races of the

⁵⁸ It is difficult to decide whether the family is a metaphor for society or whether it is society which is a metaphor for the family.

country⁵⁹, as well as the end of an era (albeit a rather more joyful putting to rest than is associated with most funerals). And yet, the question remains whether one ought to put the past behind one once and for all; or whether one should, like the Malagasy, continue to exhume and rebury the dead.

If one is concerned with the transformation of identity, one might ask whether texts which continue to rebury the apartheid past might be hampering processes of change by reinforcing the memory of identity structures created in terms of opposition. In recalling the oppressive apartheid system one is also recalling the construction of an oppositional subject position, and this may reinforce the very polarisation which apartheid created. Ironically, many writers during apartheid who resisted the confines of the labels created for them by the state, still unwittingly reinforced a no less fundamentalistic subject position for themselves in terms of their opposition to the identities imposed on them by the Department of Home Affairs. Even though redefinitions in terms of subject positions advocated the loosening of bonds, the way in which revolutionaries against the state described, defined and classified their subject position was often no less essentialist than the state-sanctioned classifications. To put it more simply: both sides were participating in the same grand narrative. And as David Medalie says, with reference to an argument by Njabulo Ndebele, "the narrowness of apartheid finds its counterpart, not its antidote, in an anti-apartheid polemic which does nothing more than combat the offending ideology on its own terms" (2008: 3).

⁵⁹ This is particularly true of racial relations in popular soap operas such as *Egoli*, *Generations*, and *Isidingo*.

It seems that this grand narrative of apartheid and its counterpart have not necessarily been put to rest. In his essay "Unspeaking the Centre" (2001), Mark Fleischman notes that since the coming of democracy

there have been those productions which continue to focus on the grand narratives: apartheid and colonialism....These represent attempts to re-write the colonial/apartheid narrative from the post-colonial/post-apartheid perspective. However, despite being productions of great note, like all such attempts they remain anchored to the grand narrative, one foot in the past, struggling to move on (98).

Fleishman's intent here is clearly not to disparage the claims and concerns of such narratives, nor to cast doubt on their legitimacy. Instead, his point is that totalising grand narratives are in danger of smothering and subsuming a myriad alternative histories and experiences into a single story, which can limit one's frame of reference. Since Jean-Francois Lyotard's description of grand narratives as confining visions in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984), it may seem preferable to seek out multiple descriptions of history, instead of stories which feature a single track at the exclusion of all others. Lyotard states that he senses a growing "incredulity towards metanarratives" (xxiv). The Lebanese novelist Elias Khoury has also warned of the dangers of becoming a people who are "prisoners of one story". He refers particularly to the Israelis and Palestinians, and according to Jeremy Harding in the *London Review of Books* (2006), Khoury warns that these peoples "have begun to tell a single, fatal story and must look to themselves and the world for other stories or they are finished" (10). This is not, then, a question of whose story is the right story, nor of who has the right to tell a story, but it seems rather to be an indication that many stories are preferable to any single story. Deleuze's model of a rhizomatic structure which deals in multiplicities (1993: 29-30), is particularly apt here.

On the other hand, one should also be clear as to which segment of the population is most opposed to stories dealing with the apartheid narrative. For example, there seems to be a particular resistance among the white community to stories which rehash the apartheid past, casting all whites into the role of perpetrators and seeing all blacks as victims. There seems to be a feeling that, since power was, to an extent, willingly relinquished⁶⁰ and since a clear public apology was made, the white population does not want to keep on being reminded of the past. Similarly, in post-World War Two Germany, a new generation turned vehemently, and with disgust, against the ideologies maintained by their parents; and since they were not complicit with their views, the new generation also, eventually, felt that they should have no share in their shame⁶¹. In the same way, those who were born in South Africa in 1989 – when the tumultuous processes of change first began – will turn twenty next year, and the new white adults feel that they do not share in the guilt of their forefathers. Mike van Graan reported the following feedback on his play *Some Mothers' Sons* (2006) at a public lecture to the University of Cape Town Drama Department:

Now we often hear that audiences – still overwhelmingly white and middle class – don't want to be reminded of those times. It's been suggested to me that perhaps some of what the black character Vusi says about his experiences at the hands of the brutal apartheid regime in my own play, *Some Mothers' Sons*, be toned down for white audiences, no matter that these experiences are central to the choices that he makes. "We've done the guilt thing. So let's move on, dammit!"

<<http://www.drama.uct.ac.za/newsevents/general>> 4 February 2007

Some Mother's Sons is an interesting example of a work which deals with the violence of apartheid, since it draws a parallel between the injustices of apartheid and

⁶⁰ After all, according to R.W. Johnson, *Umkhonto we Sizwe* were "one of the world's least effective guerilla forces" (2006: 32).

⁶¹ On the other hand, it might also be argued that in Germany a new meta-narrative has simply replaced an old one.

the violent crime endemic to contemporary South Africa. The play tries to reach behind acts of injustice to reveal the humanity of both victims and perpetrators while approaching issues of forgiveness and reconciliation. Although Van Graan is an antagonistic opponent of the present government and its policies, he certainly does not feel that it is too soon to stop speaking about apartheid. The fact that he is himself coloured allows him to be a lot more forceful in his denunciations of both the past and the present than if he were white.

Mike van Graan was elected the General Secretary of PANSA (Performing Arts Network South Africa) at its inception in 2002, and he held the position up to 2006. During his tenure as General Secretary, Van Graan conducted a nationwide survey of theatres and audiences. In the above quoted speech to the drama students of UCT, he summarises an important finding from his research, namely that theatre audiences are (still) "overwhelmingly white and middle class". Despite government's best efforts to support theatre which is considered to be "relevant", and of "cultural significance", theatres cannot keep their doors open without an audience. In this sense then, the work which audiences choose to see will play a role in what is being produced. From this point of view, it is clearly impossible to force audiences to support plays about apartheid.

One of the problems with arts sponsorship in South Africa today is that much theatre which is being paid for by the National Arts Council is drawing neither audiences nor critical engagement, since it is overly didactic. This form of theatre might best be described as educational theatre, in that it hopes to teach lessons about history, and to confront ignorance about issues such as Aids, xenophobia, domestic violence, drug addiction and so on. But one of the difficulties with art which is based on a strong

moral conviction is that it can so easily slide into a form of propaganda⁶². Perhaps at least part of the trouble stems from the fact that texts which elucidate a strong moral standpoint stand in danger of presenting only a single point of view, and that they do not adequately reflect their own processes of narration. For example, Ian Steadman (1999) points out that "because apartheid provided such an easy moral target" (26), many people supported anti-apartheid theatre regardless of the quality of its presentation. Consequently, many critics hesitated to offer any kind of critique of this sort of theatre on other levels, since it held the moral high ground. These constraints were, in some measure, carried over into at least the first decade of the post-apartheid era when it seemed inappropriate to attack the ANC or to criticise the new government, since it had now become a legitimate authority which superseded one founded on injustice. But, as Steadman points out, it is precisely now that our "critical vigilance" must be sharpened, since, "if we abandon critical vigilance at this crucial moment, we lose the war against fundamentalism, against essentialism, and against nationalism and racism" (26).

Mike van Graan's *Green Man Flashing* (2004) has been a prominent example of a new era of protest theatre in South Africa. Although the play does not refer explicitly to actual incidents, it is contemptuous of attempts by the ANC government to protect its cadres from scandal, and reflects on the way in which a government can resort to corruption when self-important, high-minded ideals are placed above transparency and accountability. The programme which accompanied the play showed newspaper clippings from various stories which exposed corruption in government, leaving

⁶² On the other hand, is there something inherently wrong with propaganda *per se*? It is only recently that the term has become pejorative. If one considers the various Ministries of Propaganda which different countries maintained during World War II, it seems to have been understood as a means of disseminating information, not necessarily manipulating and brainwashing people. Today's governmental Media Officers are surely involved in the same enterprise. Why not call them what they are?

audiences in no doubt as to the target of the play's attack. Van Graan followed this up with *Hostile Takeover* (2005), a dark comedy which satirises Affirmative Action and Black Economic Empowerment.

In contrast then to plays which still attack apartheid, there has gradually been a shift towards plays which attack the present government. It seems then, that, as the media have been so fond of saying, "the honeymoon is over", and it is now possible to appraise all manner of governance, regardless of its ideological perspective. New forms of protest are growing out of political theatre and it seems that since the coming of democracy there has been an opening up of identities structured in terms of purely oppositional political concerns. The segments into which political interests have previously been divided are no longer as clear as they may once have been.

In some ways there has been a revival of "ethnic" identities, instead of the identification with (or in opposition to) a state sanctioned identity. In the following chapter, I will be exploring some of these definitions of national identity, and consider the question of whether or not South Africans can be found to share a sense of national belonging. This view will examine ways in which ethnic identities reinforce separate "nations", and create ruptures in the "national identity". But before moving on to a more detailed discussion of definitions of nationality in terms of ethnicity, and questions of whether or not a national theatre is possible in a multi-cultural society, I would like to stay with the political focus introduced here and consider a number of plays which have elaborated the processes of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, before focusing on one particularly prominent example.

The TRC was an attempt to try to consolidate some of the stories about the past into a narrative which could be accepted by, if not all, then hopefully most of the citizens of

South Africa. It serves as a kind of epilogue to anti-apartheid theatre and was the largest and longest continuous performance of nation building ever seen in the country. Although the results of the commission have not been unanimously praised, the process itself was seen as a watershed. In a way, this was the grand national funeral referred to earlier; an attempt to put the past to rest by exposing the murky secrets of the apartheid regime once and for all. The process was also a vital part in the search for a national identity, a search which has become a crucial part of much post-apartheid literature. As David Attwell and Barbara Harlow point out in their introduction to the Special Issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* (2000):

The pressure is on to find the resources, policies and vision to 'bind the nation together' and to take its people decisively from its traumatized past to a reconstructed future (2).

The TRC – and the proliferation of media, literature and drama which it germinated – was one such attempt.

3.2 PERFORMING THE TRC – *UBU AND THE TRUTH COMMISSION* (JANE TAYLOR / WILLIAM KENTRIDGE)

Perhaps no country in history has so directly and thoroughly confronted its past in an effort to shape its future as South Africa has. Working from the explicit assumption that understanding the past will contribute to a more peaceful and democratic future, South Africa has attempted to come to grips with its apartheid history through its truth and reconciliation process. (Gibson 2004: 129).

The aims of the TRC, as defined by the 1993 constitution, were the promoting of "national unity and reconciliation in a spirit of understanding which transcends the divisions of the past." ("Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report" in Verdoolaege 2005: 184). This was an event which had far-reaching consequences for the country's media and arts. The weekly broadcast of *Special Report*, which detailed the preceding week's hearings, had the largest audience of any television show in the country's history (191). According to Laura Moss, the TRC "wholly permeated South African culture for over three years [from 1996-1999]" (2006: 89).

What made this commission different from similar proceedings elsewhere was that the hearings were held in public, unlike the *in camera* commissions of Chile. Also, if acts were deemed to be motivated by "political objectives"⁶³, amnesty was considered, and in most cases granted. It was, in other words, a purely narrative construction of a nation. Njabulo Ndebele referred to the proceedings as a "restoration of narrative" and went on to say that in "few countries in the contemporary world do we have a living example of people reinventing themselves through narrative" (in Graham 2003: 12). The explicit project of the commission was to heal national wounds not through vengeance but through understanding; it was a symbolic procedure. The final clause

⁶³ The final clause of the Interim Constitution states that "amnesty shall be granted in respect of acts, omissions and offences associated with political objectives and committed in the course of the conflicts of the past" (in Krog 1998: vi).

of the Interim Constitution, which stipulated the necessity for the hearings to commence, states that "there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* [the African philosophy of humanism] but not for victimization" (in Krog 1998: vi).

If a nation is an "imagined community" as Benedict Anderson (1991) maintains, it would make sense to effect the restoration and healing process on an imaginary level⁶⁴. Similarly, André Brink claims to favour "an imagined rewriting of history or, more precisely, of the role of the imagination in the dialectic between past and present, individual and society" (in Graham 2003: 13). Not everybody, however, has agreed with this interpretation of events. By acquitting perpetrators on condition of a full disclosure, the TRC was perhaps also sending out a message that confession equals justice. There was a sense that in having perpetrators come face to face with their victims, they would be made to understand the heinous nature of their crimes and that this perception of their guilt would be sufficient punishment. Since only the perpetrators were questioned and cross-examined, however, some felt that the stories of the perpetrators, ironically, gained precedence over the stories of their victims. Shane Graham for one, contends that the stories of perpetrators were sanctioned over those of victims, and that "the victims' accounts of the past" were thrown "into conflict with the accounts given by the perpetrators themselves" (2003: 12). It troubles Graham that the perpetrators took centre stage in the drama:

The "I" who tells the story never entirely equals the "I" to whom terrible things were done, for to tell a story requires *agency*, and the trauma victim is one who has experienced a loss of agency (2003: 18).

⁶⁴ Here I am using the word not as dismissive of validity and factual authenticity, but claiming the immense power of the imagination in not only mediating, but actually forging notions of reality.

In her account of the media representations of the event, Annelies Verdoolaege states that the TRC coverage bore the problematic characteristics "inherent to the media as an institution", namely "sensationalism, partiality and simplification" (2005: 188). She also feels that, as a result of the media emphasis on sensationalism, they "tended to pay more attention to the perpetrators than to the victims" (188). This brings to light another very important aspect of the proceedings, which is that the event was, as Antjie Krog has pointed out, very clearly "mediated" rather than an example of "direct" expression (in Kruger 1999: 290). By this I take Krog to mean that the event was continually interpreted for a mass audience by the media, which selected and packaged the proceedings for public consumption. Verdoolaege goes so far as to say that the TRC "has been one of the most mediatised phenomena of the 1990s. It has probably been the most mediatised event ever taking place in Africa" (2005: 181).

Whereas Krog is specifically referring to the way in which the Truth Commission was packaged, I take Verdoolaege to be referring to the massive coverage the proceedings garnered, and the enormous national, pan-African and international interest in the TRC. This was probably due to the international interest in the story of apartheid, particularly by countries who had supported the anti-apartheid struggle and who, consequently, felt that they had had a hand in effecting change in the country. This interest was also, no doubt, partially due to what Mark Gevisser has described as the "inherent theatricality" (1997: 4) of the event since the performances of both perpetrators and their victims lent themselves to dramatic stagings.

Besides the deluge of media coverage, the proceedings also generated a number of theatrical productions. These include Mike van Graan's *Dinner Talk* (1996)⁶⁵; Pieter Dirk-Uys' *Truth Omissions* (1996); Paul Herzberg's *The Dead Wait* (1997); Walter

⁶⁵ Many of the names on this list were first sourced in a similar list in Marlin-Curiel (2002: 286).

Chakela's *Isithukuthuku* (1997); Nan Hamilton's *no. 4* (1997); Jane Taylor's *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997); *That Spirit* (1996) by Mina Nawe Theatre Group; *The Story I am about to Tell* (1997) by the Khulumani Support Group; Thembi Mtshali's *A Woman in Waiting* (1999); Antjie Krog's *Waarom is Die Wat Voor Toyi-Toyi Altyd So Vet?* (Why are Those who Toyi-Toyi in Front Always so Fat? [2000]); and most recently *Truth in Translation* (2006) created by Paavo Tom Tammi in collaboration with Michael Lessac.

According to Stephanie Marlin-Curiel (2002), *The Story I am About to Tell* and *That Spirit* both focus on "the deep emotional trauma that remains with survivors as the TRC goes about 'healing the nation'" (275). In marked contrast to the media focus on the stories of the perpetrators as protagonists, these plays were more specifically concerned with "healing the nation", as opposed to "exploring the socio-political aspects of the TRC". So there is a tension here between trying to analyse and discuss the work of the TRC and its ramifications, and the attempt simply to exhibit the raw emotional data which came out of the project. For example, in *The Story I am about to Tell*, three people who had presented their testimony at the hearings appear onstage to retell what had previously been spontaneous speeches they had made in front of the commission. This unaltered testimony is then interpreted by three actors and, in this way, the unprompted, emotional recalling of memory is placed alongside its interpretation in terms of aesthetic considerations. The drama draws on both the veracity of the actual language of victims and the emotional interpretation of this narrative by trained professionals. In this way, the performance of evidence as a staged event is examined as part of the construction of history. What is significant about these two plays is that they deal exclusively with the stories from the point of view of the victims themselves.

On the other hand, Jane Taylor's *Ubu and the Truth Commission* – one of the most publicised plays about the hearings, which has also enjoyed numerous international stagings as well as some success as a published text – focuses particularly on the role of the perpetrator as central protagonist, deferring or displacing the context of the victims. As Graham says, "Whereas *The Story I Am about to Tell* attempts to circumvent the danger of producing a 'horror pornography' by having the victims tell their own stories on stage, *Ubu* takes a very different tack, for it is essentially a theatre of *displacement*" (2003: 18).

Using the backdrop of Alfred Jarry's seminal text (*Ubu Roi*, 1896), the character of Ubu is used to portray a quintessential white South African male who worked for the apartheid state. In referencing a work from the Western canon, it consciously situates itself within a specific literary tradition. In displacing the direct engagement with its subject matter by means of historicisation⁶⁶, the mixing of genres, and the use of multi-media; as well as in employing metaphorical, allegorical and mythical components in its narration, *Ubu* becomes more of an intellectual exercise than *This Story*.

Jarry's original Ubu is described by Jane Taylor as "grandiose and rapacious... notorious for his infantile engagement with his world" (1998: iii), and it is these features of the character (including his burlesque display of irresponsibility which cannot conceive of the consequences of his actions) which inform her adaptation. Ubu does not stand for any particular person in South Africa, but for "an aspect, a tendency, an excuse" (iv). The character took shape as a result of her observations during the TRC proceedings that many of the perpetrators seemed genuinely

⁶⁶ I am referring to Brecht's concept of "historicisation" as a theoretical exercise which approaches the setting of a play as an object of historical investigation.

astonished to discover the terrible consequences of their actions. The central protagonist is "an agent of evil" (v), and it is "the story of an individual pathology". And yet, the play extends to a range of other concerns, being, according to Taylor "an exemplary account of the relationships between capitalist ideology, imperialism, race, class, and gender, religion and modernisation in the southern African sub-region" (vi).

Ridiculing an agent of the apartheid state and turning him into a farcical character is a way of stripping this sinister creature of his capacity to engender fear in much the same way as Charlie Chaplin's film *The Great Dictator* (1940) served to undermine Adolf Hitler by deriding him; and yet there is also the danger that this portrayal might trivialise actions and their consequences. For example, Loren Kruger finds that

The cruel burlesque of Jarry's plot has the potential to highlight the capricious and often arbitrary violence of state operatives, but the adolescent excesses of Jarry's text also runs [sic] the risk of trivializing the suffering of those testifying against such acts of cruelty (2000: 558).

Pa Ubu and Ma Ubu are exaggerated caricatures, lampooning the frivolous cruelty of children. The violence which explodes out of Pa Ubu's actions begins "at home" in his interactions with Ma Ubu, as for example when he says "I will bash your head in and never say sorry" (3) in a sing-song, child-like manner. They also talk about themselves in the third person as "mother" and "father" and in a sense this shows the degree to which identity has split off from being the subject of responsibility. Pa Ubu also makes use of the "royal we" when he says, for example, "we were busy with our business". Besides possibly serving as an indication of his feelings of superiority, this also creates a sense of acting out of a collective imperative, and not from a personal motivation, implying that the blame for his actions can be shifted to his superiors. As an agent of the state, Pa Ubu denies personal culpability for his actions, saying, "Once I was an agent of the state, and had agency and stature" (5). Here we see two

paradoxical meanings of agency: to be an agent, after all, is to represent a greater power, and is exactly the opposite of "having agency", that is, to have power. The irony is that his stature is now inversely proportional to what it was, since the authority of the state came crashing down.

What is perhaps the most noteworthy thing about the interactions between Pa and Ma Ubu is the mundane domesticity of their situation, underscoring (to use Hannah Arendt's famous term), the "banality of evil"⁶⁷. Pa Ubu comes across as a blustering husband, very determined and perhaps somewhat dim, but certainly not demonic, or even demonstrably wicked. Eventually, as the evidence mounts against him, Pa Ubu's monstrous deeds begin to infiltrate his familial surroundings and his paranoia creates danger out of even the most ordinary items:

MA UBU: I see that prices are still rising.

PA UBU: What uprising?

MA UBU: Today, everything costs an arm and a leg.

PA UBU: I had nothing to do with it!

MA UBU: Pass me the salt.

PA UBU: Who said it was assault? (29)

William Kentridge, who designed and directed the production, should perhaps share in the role of author/creator with Jane Taylor⁶⁸, since his input led to many of the elements which make up the show, including the use of puppets and digital imagery. Kentridge is aware of their accountability towards the victims of apartheid and he asks in his introduction, "what is our responsibility to the people whose stories we are using as raw fodder for our play?" (xi). In facing the impossibility of truly representing

⁶⁷ Arendt, Hannah. 1994 [1963]. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: a Report on the Banality of Evil*. Penguin: UK.

⁶⁸ This is an instance of a play in which the performance was far more powerful than the text on its own. One might say that every play is like this, that the performance is the actual event, rather than reading, and yet this case supersedes ordinary examples, since the puppetry, music and animation move the production well beyond a work of literature.

them, Kentridge opted for the use of puppets. These were chosen as the witnesses to atrocity, since they provided metaphorical rather than literal representations of the victims. It also highlighted the fact that they were speaking for a community, that they were, as it were, being "spoken through" (vii), and "[t]hey thus very poignantly and compellingly capture complex relations of testimony, translation and documentation apparent in the processes of the Commission itself" (vii).

Graham describes the use of puppets as dramatizing "the ruptures and displacements" of the testimonies (2003: 16). He also, however, finds that the transference of the victim's speech to puppets robs them of a measure of agency:

The use of puppets makes possible the group's unique theatre of displaced testimony, but it also reduces the victims to interchangeable parts. If their stories are all alike, because they lack agency, then the survivors themselves appear equally devoid of substance (20).

Besides the puppets of victims giving testimony, a number of other puppets represent aspects of the apartheid state. In some way, then, it appears that Pa Ubu is caught between the machinations of these two groups of puppets: between the monstrous creatures which represent the state, and the victims. On the other hand, these monsters might also allude to darker aspects of the human psyche. For example, a vulture puppet on stage stays visible for much of the action, serving as a reminder of the persistence of death, and a three-headed dog (described as "Pa Ubu's dogs-of-war" [9]) calls up mythical resonances of Cerberus, the guardian of Hades. By transporting the primal impulses of the unconscious onto these terrible creatures, Kentridge creates an astonishing and vivid representation, and yet, these symbolic figures could also be seen as detracting from issues of personal culpability in that they are seen to dictate the actions of the individuals who performed the dirty work of the apartheid government. It is perhaps unsurprising how, in terms of attribution theory, many of

the perpetrators changed their view of the attribution from an internal attribution while the atrocities were being committed (such as bravery, courage, conviction, and loyalty) to an external attribution when their deeds were reviewed as evil (coercion, manipulation, governmental pressure, authority.) In contrast, victims of apartheid were likely to see external factors as a cause of their suffering, while describing their liberation as arising from internal causes.

The clash between the visceral reality of the violence perpetuated and the intellectual justification of those actions is vividly portrayed when, for example, Pa Ubu reacts to a graphic description of butchery (13) in a farcical scene where he attempts to shield himself in scientific mumbo jumbo (15). Much of the talk of killing is similarly smothered by absurdity. For example, Niles, a puppet crocodile, says "A little killing here and there never hurt anyone" (19). The backdrop text which appears with this is "More killers than saints have dined with princes" (19), a wry commentary on the nature of power in all societies, and the corruption and killing which so often goes along with maintaining it. So talk of killing is parodied (perhaps as a defence mechanism to the enormity of the perpetrations) and yet there are also quieter, more tragic moments in the piece, such as when a witness takes the stand and describes how her son was burnt to death (23).

The testimony heard is told in Zulu, Xhosa, Sepedi and Tswana and translated, as it was during the hearings. As in *The Story I am About to Tell*, all of the testimony in the piece was taken directly from the TRC hearings, with the assistance of Antjie Krog, whose enormously influential account of the Commission, *Country of My Skull* (1998), has since become one of the most important description of the proceedings. These testimonies gradually begin to take over the action, which becomes less and less frivolous as the play progresses. Pa Ubu's escapades begin to take on a more

sinister (and a less comic) tone, as more and more murders pile up; until he shouts in desperation "It wasn't personal. It was war!" (55).

Finally, Ubu is put on the stand. In his defence, all he can say is "I too have been betrayed! I knew nothing" (67). Still, language defeats him and the true meaning of his words slips and slides out from under him, betraying his attempts to gloss it with his own interpretation, as for example, when he says "I served in bloody...I served in bloody...I served in bloody good units" (69).

In this way, one of the paradoxes of the apartheid era comes to the fore, namely the fact that it was not maintained, for the most part, by "evil" men, but that people often operated in ignorance out of a sense of duty, out of a sense that what they were doing was for the greater good, not only for the white citizens of South Africa, but for all. Arguments such as this might seem trite in our own era, and yet I do think there were sincere believers who were not "wicked" people. What this reveals is how an episteme is able to infiltrate and manipulate the collective consciousness of a society, and that evil resides not in some transcendental realm, but somewhere far more subtle: in the ordinary, everyday actions taken by ordinary, everyday people.

At the end of the play, Pa and Ma Ubu sail off on a boat; after all the horrors relayed, they float peacefully towards the giant eye with which the piece began, and which now transforms into a setting sun. It is as though Pa and Ma Ubu are gliding into the eye of the observer, into the eye of a silent spectator. After all the ranting and raving, nothing happens to Pa Ubu, just as nothing happened to most of the perpetrators who took the stand at the TRC. No apartheid generals even appeared at the hearings and when former president P. W. Botha ignored his subpoena, nothing came of it and he was permitted to retire in peace until he died peacefully in his sleep in 2006. The TRC

was an experiment in narration. It seemed to underscore a belief that both justice and judgement occur in terms of a perspective formed within the act of witnessing; that to be aware is enough, that consciousness is an action.

Whereas *The Story I am about to Tell* focused on the stories of victims, and *Ubu and the Truth Commission* centred on a protagonist who was a perpetrator of some of the atrocities, another, more recent production chose to focus on the people who mediated between these two groups, namely the translators. The Market Theatre's production of *Truth in Translation* (2006) tried to bring to light the trauma experienced by those who had to interpret the words of the victims into one of the languages of the oppressor. The idea of focusing on the translators provides an interesting perspective and created many opportunities for elaborations on the ways in which mediators of events become complicit in the events themselves, how translating another's story forces an identification with the person. It emphasises that there is no frictionless medium of expression. In the press release for the play, this notion is elaborated as follows:

The interpreters stand for us, imperfect witnesses caught in a conflict between watching and participating, but different from us in that they had no place to hide...no place to turn away. They absorbed all sides of every story, every lie and every truth. By a supposed simple act of translation, these young people found themselves in a quest for their own identities. They became interpreters not only of their nation's story but also of their own humanity and untapped source of grace, humour and courage.

And yet, the fact that the show was written by a Finn and a Hollywood sitcom director (Paavo Tom Tammi in collaboration with Michael Lessac) did detract somewhat from the style and tone of the production, fashioning it into something which seemed to be more of a product geared for a global audience than an indigenous performance piece. Although it was cleverly directed, it came across as

somewhat cold. The superficial postmodern California gloss sat rather awkwardly next to the more meaty deliveries one has come to expect of South African performers and there was for me an uneasy balance between parody and sincerity⁶⁹. *Ubu* also dealt with its subject in contrasting and often conflicting ways, but for me it managed to provide a more authentic representation of both the agony of the victims and the naive arrogance of the perpetrators.

Ultimately, one wonders whether any of these plays about the TRC could really do justice to the process. Shane Graham feels that "the psychological truth of the event cannot be captured by the conventions of narrative, which reduce the traumatic events to language and present them in a linear sequence" (2003: 16). I am not quite sure that I agree with this contention, since Graham seems to be saying that it is impossible ever completely to tell anybody's story. Perhaps he is right, but this does not detract from the necessity of nevertheless attempting to connect. Of course all communication is imperfect, and yet it remains one of the deepest human desires. To try to understand another person's point of view, particularly in a country such as South Africa in which the plethora of languages and traditions makes all understanding fraught from the outset, is surely an important endeavour⁷⁰.

According to Ivor Chipkin, "the challenge of the TRC was to overcome the worry that the South African people did not actually exist" (2007: 174). In trying to find a common ground in the absence of a collective cultural belief system, this was an

⁶⁹ When I spoke to the producer of the piece, Yvette Hardie in May 2007, she did mention that the production had changed considerably after its run at The Market Theatre, and that the humane element, particularly in terms of the human relations between characters, had been further developed in preparation for its tour to Rwanda, Sweden, Germany and the U.S.A.

⁷⁰ There may also be a different way of understanding narrative, not necessarily as temporal in the Aristotelian sense of having a beginning a middle and an end (which necessitates a satisfactory conclusion), but rather in terms of a Deleuzian map (as opposed to a trace) with multiple entry points and pathways.

opportunity in which to define "the people" as those who were previously oppressed. And yet, the fact that the ANC were also accused of abuses, and whites were also in some cases cast as victims problematised this perspective. It would have been simpler if all blacks could have been classified as victims and all whites as perpetrators, even if this was only understood symbolically. When the ANC desperately tried to intervene on the eve of the publication of the findings to prevent their party from being described as inhumane, this showed the extent to which an investment had been made into the classification of "the people" as those who were black and oppressed. If the ANC were also occasional oppressors, then the story of reconciliation was no longer between groups but between individual perpetrators and victims, which would make the story of the TRC not specifically about South Africa, but about "humanity as a whole" (182). As Chipkin says "the TRC did not generate the South African people *per se*: it produced a world people" (185) and in this way, for all the good it did, the process failed to provide a clear framework for a national identity. (Seen from a different perspective, however, this may have been its greatest strength).

According to Dave Steward (2006: 17), the TRC did not fulfil its expectations and was fundamentally flawed, since the National Party and the Inkatha Freedom Party were not adequately represented. Enormous divisions still exist between the versions presented of what happened in the past by people of different races. Steward says that "[w]e still need a reconciliation process in which genuine representatives of all our communities must hammer out a version of our history with which we can all agree" (17). The question remains whether such an over-arching meta-narrative is possible, or even desirable. It will surely never again be possible to re-enact the momentous events of the three year Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and there is no doubt that it was an extraordinary achievement; a grand experiment with enormously profitable results.

The Commission stands as an exemplary test of what South Africans have been willing to do in order to create the context for a peaceful co-existence with each other. As elaborated in the first section of this thesis with reference to Victor Turner, these rites of passage are crucial to the creation of a *communitas*. So the TRC may have been an imperfect project, and yet it was nothing less than an attempt to forge a nation; an attempt to explore narratives from both sides of a conflict and to bring them together into a story shared by a country, even if that story happens to be fragmentary, incomplete and continuously in the process of changing. The fragmentary nature of *Ubu* alludes to the fragmentary experience of the TRC. Michael Carlin says that both Kentridge's earlier work *Faustus in Africa* (1995) and *Ubu and the Truth Commission*

invite us, the audience, to participate more fully in the process of making meaning, of making sense of the past. They offer us narratives made up of fragments, clues, intertextual references, and juxtaposed images, and it is thus the very nature of the theatre experience itself that offers us particular kinds of engagement with aspects of our past(s) (2002: 23-24).

This sounds like the kind of creatively mapped experience proposed by Gilles Deleuze, as opposed to a literal tracing of attempted verisimilitude. Deleuze says that

[c]ulture endows consciousness with a new faculty which is apparently opposed to the faculty of forgetting: memory. But the memory with which we are here concerned is not the memory of traces. This original memory is no longer a function of the past, but a function of the future. It is not the memory of sensibility but of the will (1993: 226).

The reconstruction of memory thus has as much to do with the future as it does with the past. In this sense, the TRC can be seen as an attempt to will a country into existence, rather than to restore a country which was lost in the past. In the next

chapter, I would like to consider other attempts at nation building, and particularly how attempts have been made to reconcile the configurations of a national identity with appeals towards ethnicity. A sub-text to the chapter incorporates the question of whether there are necessarily advantages to attaining a national identity, and from where our ardent desire to strive for one arises.



CHAPTER FOUR – ETHNIC IDENTITIES

4.1 DEFINING NATIONALISMS

The search for identity is a search for completion, the grasping after an illusory image of totality, an imaginary unity of self. As Homi Bhaba reminds us: "identity is never an *a priori*, never a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality" (1994a: 51). In this chapter, I propose that if South African theatre hopes to reflect a national consciousness, it would do better to embrace unstable, uncertain and insubstantial identifications, instead of seeking to represent identity as either a completed totality in terms of a particular national ethos, or in terms fortified by a specific ethnic identification.

Part of the problem with resorting to ethnicity is that the word "ethnic" is originally a term of exclusion, as Werner Sollers has pointed out:

an ethnic, etymologically speaking is a goy. The Greek word *ethnikos*, from which the English 'ethnic' and 'ethnicity' are derived, meant 'gentile', 'heathen'. Going back to the noun *ethnos*, the word was used to refer not just to people in general but also to 'others' (1995: 219).

If the "ethnic" is the other, then the term "nation" might provide a more useful alternative in describing, for example, the Zulu nation, the Afrikaans nation and so on⁷¹, as a term of inclusion instead of exclusion. And yet, perhaps South Africa is a nation composed of "others", a nation of many nationalities. Still, I will be arguing that reverting to these ethnic nationalities hinders processes of transformation. For there are those, like Maishe Maponya, who insist that identity must be tied to ethnicity, which he equates with race. Particularly when he says:

⁷¹ This also highlights the problematic nature of attempting to create a national theatre for South Africa, if such a thing can even begin to be imagined.

I don't believe in the sense or notion of multiculturalism and non-racialism in the arts in theatre; I definitely think that is just a myth that is being imposed upon us to be able to keep control over us or to make us lose ourselves in terms of our own identity (1996: 187).

Perhaps Maponya is reacting to what he sees as a superficial fusion of identities. This is the sort of syncretism which Ashraf Jamal has described as "reactive syncretism", consisting of "an arbitrary and facile fusion of differences" (2005: 61-62). Maponya appears to feel that multi-culturalism is inauthentic when contrasted with an essential ethnic identity and in this sense he is promoting the view that ethnicity should be discovered and restored, instead of being compromised by rival ethnicities. On the other hand, there are theatre makers like Marthinus Basson who hope to avoid this particular method of identification. For example, Basson is highly critical of festivals which attempt to promote "Afrikanerness", saying, with reference to the *Klein Karoo Kunstefees*, that "[i]t should be an *arts* festival, first and foremost, and not an *Afrikaans* arts festival" (in Solberg 2003: 134). And Reza de Wet has also said that she refuses to be a "figurehead" for Afrikaans, claiming that she does not wish "to be taken up as a symbol of nationalism or some such thing" (*ibid*, 181). This may be one of the reasons why De Wet has increasingly been writing in English, which is not her mother tongue.

Perhaps there is something to be said for the attempt to consolidate and represent history from a particular ethnic vantage point. This approach, however, also often results in entrenching communities into fixed positions, which isolates them from other communities. This is something which Shaun Irlam has pointed out as a feature of much post-apartheid literature, when he writes that it has become "refracted into separate communities" and that it has "grown more insular":

Increasingly, a new literature of separate development is emerging, in which communities...explore their own histories and assert their own agendas (2004: 698).

Although there is a certain freedom in being able to explore unique cultural identities, there is also the danger, as Ashraf Jamal has suggested, of remaining "trapped in the multiple ghettos of the apartheid imagination" (2000: 197). Chris Weare also feels that "we do not have an artistic and cultural vision – only individuals and/or groups of people with very personal and /or community agendas." Weare agrees with Jamal that "South Africa seems very 'ghettoized'" (in Jamal: 198).

This refraction into separate units is a far cry from the rubric under which the performance of Nelson Mandela's historic inauguration ceremony took place, which was "many cultures, one nation" (Kruger 1999: 2). On the one hand, the many disparate cultures of South Africa seem to be threatening the possibility of a united nationhood; but on the other hand, trying to subsume all identities into a common "Simunye" rainbow dream⁷² is not necessarily a desirable alternative and I am not suggesting here that we should attempt to bury the vast range of South African identities into one all-encompassing state-sanctioned formula. This is perhaps the opposite extreme of the cloistered paradigm referred to by Jamal and Weare, but, ironically, it is no less essentialist in that it attempts to fuse all identities into one purportedly universal description. Leon de Kock, for one, sees the attempt at an overall unity of identity as not only objectionable, but impossible. This is because he sees identity as being a site of "unresolved difference", and because he sees the South

⁷² The logo and catch phrase of the South African Broadcasting Corporation's flagship channel (SABC 1) is "Simunye – We Are One". Simunye is a Zulu word meaning "we are one", or "we are united". Ironically, it is likely that the term first originated as a call to unite the Zulus, and not as an appeal to multi-racial unity.

African subject "as fractured" (2004: 3)⁷³. Instead of trying to subsume all of the many heterogeneous identities of South Africa into one blanket description, he would rather that we appreciate "the country's brimming residual fund of identities" (8). But what of the possibility of creating a South African theatre out of these fractured selves, a theatre which enacts the embattled state and liminal zones created by multiculturalism? Would it not be possible to forge a sense of belonging which does not rely on ethnicity, yet which also avoids attempting to dissolve all differences⁷⁴?

I would suggest that part of the "ghettoization" Jamal and Weare refer to arises when writers attempt to restore what they perceive to be an essential, lost identification. This is an attempt at what Eric Hobsbawm has referred to as an "invented tradition", which seeks "to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (1983: 1). Certainly, a concrete idea of the past may provide one with a sense of stability, and yet, the problem with this is that it also implies a mythical past in which identity was once unified and whole; resulting in a permanent dissatisfaction with the present, which can also spill over into a degree of resentment.

Homi Bhabha says in "Narrating the Nation" that: "[n]ations, like narratives, lose their origin in the myths of time and only fully realise their horizons in the mind's eye" (1994b: 306). Similarly, Benedict Anderson, in coining his famous term of the nation as an "Imagined Community", claims that nations "loom out of an immemorial past and...glide into a limitless future" (1991: 12). In focusing on the ethnicity of separate nationalisms, this fiction is strengthened; but I believe that the vigour of South

⁷³ Temple Hauptfleisch also refers to the fractured nature of South African society in the sub-title of his book *Theatre and Society in South Africa: Some Reflections in a Fractured Mirror* (1997).

⁷⁴ I will be going into greater detail about this in my concluding chapter when I examine attempts to subsume the many heterogeneous identities of South Africans under the sign of the "rainbow people".

African literature in general (and theatre in particular) lies in persistently forging new conceptions of identity, not in trying to reclaim an invented, mythic identity.

One of the problems with plays which focus on particular ethnic groups is that they often end up as a kind of tableau about a specific culture; which is of interest, perhaps, in reinforcing the solidarity of an implied community, but which is also limiting, because it is so exclusive. These sorts of plays are, consequently, often only of tourist value to those outside of the community portrayed. Keith Bain points out that Darryl Accone, for one, is concerned about a theatre which caters first and foremost for a tourist market (2003: 154-5). He also cites Hauptfleisch, who laments that original indigenous performance styles have become "artificially preserved, resurrected, or even exploited" for commercial or tourism purposes (197)⁷⁵.

There are a number of plays geared towards the promotion of a certain cultural identity that have been produced since 1994, which, I believe, fit this model. For example, there are the plays of Mbongeni Ngema: *The Zulu* (1999) and *House of Shaka* (2005); pieces which focus on a very specific representation of a collective ethnic identity. In these plays, ethnicity is celebrated and fortified; it is uncritically read as an unambiguous, normative construction. A number of other plays also fall into this category of defining a specific ethnic identity, such as Deon Opperman's epic *Donkerland* (2005). And yet, *Donkerland* also serves as a critical examination of the Afrikaner identity, whereas Ngema's post-apartheid plays do not seem to reflect anything but complete adulation for the cultural identities they present. Opperman's more recent work *Kaburu* (2007) is a more flagrant attempt at reinforcing a populist Afrikaner identity and it compares contemporary struggles against crime to past

⁷⁵ One might wonder whether there is such a thing as "natural" preservation. After all, how are cultures preserved? Is not all preservation somehow unnatural in the face of changes compelled by time, decay and loss?

conflicts in the history of the Afrikaner people. Abduragman Adams' *Angels Everywhere* (2005) also tries to portray a collective identity shared by those living in the Cape Flats, but here this identity is constructed in terms of a mishmash of languages, religions and practices. The identification of a culture at the intersection of these matrixes is thus a different process from the consolidation of an identity in terms of the reification of particular, exclusive practices.

Another example is the long running and favourably reviewed production *Born Thru the Nose* (2005), created by Greig Coetzee and Bheki Mkhwane. In my view, this is a play which, again, seems almost *overly* respectful of all Zulu customs and traditions. It is a one man show about a character called Caiphus Majozi who (according to the press release) has to deal with a clash between the "rich traditional world of his cultural heritage and the modern world of science". Ultimately, it seems that the play suggests that it would be preferable to follow the voices of the ancestors, rather than subscribing to the advice of a medical doctor who insists on a caesarean section when Majozi's wife's pregnancy develops complications. According to this ethos, it seems more important that the ancestors be respected, even if this endangers the life of both the mother and her unborn child. To me, this seems like a good example of the type of insular "nationalistic" thinking which can lead to closed-minded, uncritical acceptance of cultural values simply on the basis of their being "traditional". After all, are these not similar arguments to those Cardinal Bellarmine levelled at Galileo Galilei? The "traditional" becomes preferable merely because that is how the culture has always operated; because that is what was previously known.

In contrast to this type of theatre, which hopes to reinforce one particular ethnic identity, there are many other playwrights who have been striving for a fusion of different ethnic communities, and whose interest lies in exploring and critiquing

ways in which cultural identities are created. One of the ways in which this can be done is by showing how the clash between traditions leads to the possibility of creating new forms of culture. This is a style which has variously been called "cross-over" (Hauptfleisch 1997: 66), "syncretic" (Balme 1999), and "hybrid" (Graver 1999: 7). It is an approach which favours a notion of identity as composite, fragmented and undecided. Instead of reaching into a mythic past for certainty, this identification revels in the hesitations and ambiguities presented by performances which forge new ways of description. These are plays which produce identity, rather than attempting to rediscover it. This, I believe, is the sort of theatre which can be transformational.

Perhaps when there are multiple claims on the interpretation of identifying markers, this weakens the possibility of an essentialist mode; when no mode of discourse dominates all others. This is the strength which Loren Kruger, for example, identifies in the inauguration of the first democratically elected president of South Africa:

What emerges from this event and other instances of South African theatrical nationhood is not an authoritative *teleology* of performance that might lead to a single national identity, but rather multiple *genealogies* of performance, the analysis of which might clarify the place of the past in the present (1999:9).

If genealogy is favoured over teleology, it implies that the past is still important, and yet, if representations of the past are deemed to be multiple, this prevents one single over-riding version dominating the description of the direction which the country is inevitably and "naturally" seen to be heading towards. It seems important always to keep in mind the idea that enactments of nationhood are constructed and that they, therefore, remain flexible. For example, Kruger goes on to say that:

Calling the inauguration and its surrounding performances 'theatre' highlights simultaneously the effective enactment of the nation *and* the subjunctive, perhaps fictive, even illusory dimension of theatrical nationhood (1999: 11).

Here she describes the various performance events which formed part of the inaugural ceremonies as underlining theatre's fundamentally subjunctive role. The performances maintained

a relatively fictional, autonomous, and, in this sense, aesthetic distance from indicative action....Although most obviously applied to the utopian dimension of anti-apartheid theatre's evocation (in performing defiantly under duress rather than by depicting future conditions) of post-apartheid South Africa, subjunctive action can also apply to what some might call the 'bad fictionality' of enactments of and in the ersatz public sphere of settler culture or the segregated public sphere of *volkseie* [ethnic identity]. Despite their very different meanings, these enactments have in common the representation of fictions that attempt, in the restoration – or contestation – of scripts, conventions, and behaviours in dramatic conflict, to realize a new South Africa onstage (1999: 18).

The fact that these performances – from *izimbongi* (Zulu praise-singers) to renditions of the Afrikaner *tiekie-draai* (a traditional dance) – stood side by side in the same festive display during the inauguration ceremony, created a new forum for the performance of national identity. If any one of these events had occurred in isolation in different parts of the country on the day, the gesture might have been interpreted as defensive, but alongside each other, the possibility for the transcendence of a singular ethnic identity was permitted.

Perhaps the insistence on the recovery of essentialist ethnic modes, which I described earlier, sits uneasily in a national framework, since it reiterates the calcification which was so abhorrent in the apartheid system, the malignant "good

neighbourliness" of Hendrik Verwoerd which threatened to imprison different sections of society into immutable camps. As Loren Kruger has it:

insisting on authenticity or an absolute difference between European and African, imported and indigenous, literary and oral, threatens to repeat the neo-colonial essentialism that it purports to critique. Because the discourse of ethnic essentialism has historically been associated with segregation, even Africanist advocates for authentic or, more precisely, *autochthonous*⁷⁶ language or modes of performance have found only a limited, usually ethnically exclusive following (1999: 19).

Part of the problem is that South Africa is a country without any *autochthons* except the San (whose uniquely theatrical form of hunting I have previously described as a form of early theatre [2003: 65-78]). These are the most displaced of peoples, having been variously relocated by virtually all the tribes to have come into contact with them. Today, not one lives in the traditional way of his or her forefathers. So the days of the original inhabitants are over and it is impossible to recover this way of life. Loren Kruger points out that since there is no *autochthonous* mode of discourse any more, South African theatre has, of necessity, become syncretic, or, more precisely, it has of necessity used "*syncretizing* practices" (1999: 20). This is a form of theatre which "marks an ongoing negotiation with forms and practises, variously and not always consistently identified as modern or traditional, imported or indigenous, European or African" (21). Syncretic theatre, then, far from being a new direction for the South African stage, has always been one of the defining features of indigenous performance practices. The lines between different cultures, where they meet, often

⁷⁶ "Autochthon (*n*) 1. one of the earliest known inhabitants of any country; aboriginal. [c17: from Greek *autokhthōn* from the earth itself...]" *Collins English Dictionary*. Contrast with "indigenous (*adj*) originating...(in a country, region etc)". *Collins English Dictionary*. In this sense it is possible to talk of indigenous practices and indigenous people who originate in South Africa, even though they might not be autochthons.

provides the juncture where crisis occurs, and much dramatic conflict lies in what De Kock has referred to as the "seam" (2001: 284) between different groups.

In the next chapter, I will be looking at radical forms of syncretism, which I will define also in terms of the fusion of different forms of media, narration and genre. I would first, however, like to turn to *Happy Natives* (2003) by Greig Coetzee, an example of a play in which different ethnic nationalisms are brought into conflict with each other in what I consider to be a creative and productive manner.

4.2 ETHNIC IDENTITIES IN *HAPPY NATIVES* (GREIG COETZEE)

Happy Natives (2003) is a play about two actors, one white (Kenneth) and one black (Mto) who create a corporate theatre piece about the New South Africa. Greig Coetzee provides perspectives from three different language groups – Zulu, English and Gujarati – in a piece in which eight characters confront each other, presenting effective contrasts in terms of a wide matrix of identity structures, including young/old; rich/poor; educated/illiterate. Only two actors take on all of these roles and in having the same actor play out a number of diverse parts, Coetzee is able to pitch a wide range of cultural and economic identities against each other while also showing how these cultural identities consist largely of a series of habits and acquired patterns of behaviour⁷⁷. In the various clashes between characters from different ethnic identities, each character is also permitted a moment of justification, a space in which to present the version of the world which supports her or his convictions. Ultimately, it seems that the characters who resist adaptation and remain inflexible inevitably suffer as a result of this inability to adapt to changing circumstances.

However, it is not only adaptation itself which is important, but also the motivation behind the desire to adapt. For example, the play offers an acerbic view of some of the new money in the country by mercilessly ridiculing both the new black elite (in the form of Xaba), as well as the white opportunists hoping to profit from Africanisation (in the form of Chenaye). Chenaye and Xaba portray the extremities of ruthless

⁷⁷ A number of recent South African plays also show an actor visibly changing roles during the performance of a piece. This is a style which also borrows elements from mime and clowning. It indicates the manner in which a person might adopt different roles in the course of his or her lifetime, or in terms of the context of their circumstances. Some of the more noteworthy productions in which a performer visibly changes role include Andrew Buckland's *The Water Juggler* (1998), *The Well Being* (with Lionel Newton, 2000) Rob van Vuuren and Jose Domingos' *Bangalore Torpedo* (2001), Rob van Vuuren's *Electric Juju* (2006), Craig Morris' *Hero* (2005) and *Blood Orange* (2006) and Magnet Theatre's *Every Year, Every Day, I am Walking* (2007).

capitalism and Chenaye's identity is constructed in terms of various marketing opportunities. Her garish insincerity and *faux* camaraderie represent a breed of opportunist eager to participate in the rhetoric of the new South Africa for personal profit. Although she says that "[i]f we are going to be part of Africa, we must all speak an African language" (31), and although she tries to practise her Zulu whenever she speaks to Mto (24, 31), the phrase which best represents her attitude turns out to be "[i]zandla ziyagesana" (55) which translates as "[o]ne hand washes the other" (56). In other words, all that she is hoping for from her inter-cultural exchanges is more business. The cultural heritage and history of South Africa are, to her, tradable commodities valued only in terms of their exchange value. What is true for her is determined entirely by what the client wants, and she says, for example, that "[i]f the client wants a lion in a tree, we don't laugh, we nod our heads" (46). In this way, Coetzee parodies the raw greed which has also accompanied the transition in South Africa from a protected nationalised economy to an ostensibly open market.

Whereas Chenaye effects an "African" idiom, Xaba (the government representative who is her client) adopts a florid, colonial register, repeatedly mimicking stock phrases such as "at this particular point in time...so to speak...by and large" (44). He occasionally bursts out with a string of empty platitudes, such as "I am not categorically sure in fact whether actually" (43), and "I am wondering at this particular point in time whether the African Renaissance is something that the people at large can see" (44).

It is ironic that both of the two superficial business racketeers are pretending to adjust to the culture of the other. Chenaye pretends to be interested in Zulu, and Xaba affects an imperial high society idiom; and yet these gestures are empty, since there is no true interest in understanding the other. The focus remains on self interest, and

not in another person or a different culture. Neither of these characters has any semblance of authenticity and they have, in a sense, abdicated their potential for freedom, an action which is similar to Jean-Paul Sartre's famous example of the waiter operating in "bad faith"⁷⁸. Xaba and Chenaye seem to see the identification of self and other as constituted by their exchange value; as mere commodities. Chenaye not only humiliates Kenneth, but in the process she also makes herself ridiculous, since she has unwittingly turned herself into an object of exchange. Her relationships are all directed towards the goal of selling herself and in this way she has turned herself into a commodity.

Leaving aside the question here of whether this behaviour is morally justifiable or not, I am here simply noting the way in which these characters are structured and the sort of ends they appear to be serving. It is certainly possible to see in their rootless behaviour a depiction of the postmodern turn which favours surface over substance (or, at any rate, makes negligible the distinction between these two) and sees meaning arising from function. Ironically, this self-same ethos also celebrates difference, whereas this move towards the tenets of global capitalism is a shift towards a cancelling out of variation. Neil Lazarus, for example, refers to global capitalism as "the most totalizing system the world has ever known" (2004: 619).

In contrast to these two who are willing to do anything for an opportunity to make money, Jimmy is stuck in the past. He is "on border patrol, for the rest of his life" (56), as Mto describes him, and he cannot cope with the many changes which have taken place in the country's political structure. He reminds one of the characters in

⁷⁸ In this example, Sartre describes a waiter's obsequious manner and willing depiction of himself as a subservient automaton as a conscious deception of his identity as a free agent (1993: 167-169). Perhaps there is nothing wrong with this per se, in that I have, after all, previously described all identity as being a type of role; but what makes this particular role less than admirable, perhaps, is that it is effected purely for financial exchange, as a commodity.

Coetzee's earlier play *White Men With Weapons* (2001) which dealt with the effect of the radical changes of 1989 on the military conscripts and the permanent forces of the (then) South African Defence Force. These were men who experienced the changing landscape of power from inside the system which provided its defence, and Coetzee's play depicts how many of them broke down psychologically in the process. Jimmy tries his best to present a veneer of transformation, and yet, his schizoid identity structure is brittle and cracks when he lashes out at Prudence towards the end of the play, saying "One good kaffir deserves another" (53). He feels betrayed by the system and shut out from contact with his neighbouring community.

The perception of Prudence's identity changes, not as a result of a transformation in herself, but due to the way in which the audience learns about the construction of her identity. Her perceived identity changes from the role of servant to that of a leader of her community. When we first meet her she calls Kenneth "master" and describes herself as "the cleaning girl for Master Jimmy" (20). Her diffidence creates a passive, slightly pathetic character who is trying to ingratiate herself with a potential employer. Later, after Jimmy's attack, however, Prudence drops the mask of servility she has effected and presents a view of herself as she is perceived by her community:

Me, I am oldest woman for Sibisi family from Maphumulo. I am holy woman in Zionist church. I am president of the Hallelujah Jehovah Funeral and Saving Society. I am not kaffir (54).

This revelation alters one's perception of Prudence and she changes from being a subservient, passive identity into a character commanding respect, who wields a considerable amount of influence. As noted, however, this is not a transformation which has come about due to a change or development in her character, but rather via the revelation of new information. In a way then, none of these background

characters – Chenaye, Xaba, Jimmy, Prudence – can be said to develop in the course of the action. Instead, they present different faces of identities caught within a changing landscape. The main focus of the piece lies with its two central characters – Mto and Kenneth. Both of them undergo a substantial transformation wrought not only by a shift in terms of the audience's perspective of them, but also through a crucial shift in each character.

For example, at the beginning of the piece, Mto identifies himself with his father, who was ostensibly a freedom fighter entrenched in the struggle against the old regime. This is initially Mto's formative identity in the play within the play which concludes with grandiloquent phrases such as "My father, a son of Africa...a man who fought for a dream. A dream of freedom" (2). But despite basing his identity on a mythological father figure as freedom fighter, Mto's move to the white suburb of Woodlands sees him trying to erase marks of distinction between himself and his white neighbours. For example, he is more than happy to be accepted as "part of the scenery" (16) by a white boy soliciting money for raffle tickets. Mto wants to fit in, and is content to conform to notions of what is considered appropriate behaviour. He tells Kenneth that "[i]f the people here like keeping their grass short, well then, I'm going to keep mine short as well" (17), to which Kenneth replies, "Fuck it broer. Your grass roots are showing. What's this now, you mowing for freedom?" (17).

Towards the end of the play, however, the image of Mto's father as heroic freedom fighter is revised when we discover that Mto never knew his father at all. Mto confronts the truth about his father, namely that "he didn't kill anyone, except himself. He got it wrong" (55). Ironically, this truthful acceptance of his father as flawed, and not a legendary hero, also allows him to accept his cultural identity. And

it is then that he welcomes the spirit of his father with *umhlwehlwe*⁷⁹, slaughters a goat to propitiate his spirit and allows his grass to grow, as is his traditional custom.

Kenneth, in contrast, comes across as the most rootless of all the characters. He admires the potential which Mto's culture presents for the creation of a solid ethnic grounding, and compares this to the predicament faced by those seeking a post-apartheid white identity, saying, "South African whitey's had a useless publicity department...you wearing fur and feathers looks (sic) like a Zulu warrior and me sitting in an ox-wagon with a rifle in my hand would just look like a (sic) old racist what used to shoot blacks" (12-13). When Mto protests he goes on:

you're all the culture we've got. What is my culture? I come from a French murderer, Scottish cattle thieves, in-bred Dutch farmers and fuck knows what other European 'gommie' leftovers...you're the Samurai of Africa. The perfect African Renaissance image: a Zulu warrior with the Spear of Knowledge in his hand and the Shield of Truth by his side....If I was Zulu I'd do the whole thing: get married with cows, goats' blood on the walls, ox blood on the floor, read my bones, speak to my ancestors, the whole trip broer. Shit, it's even better than being Jewish or Catholic – you have all this stuff you can do that says, 'I'm Zulu'. Roots, Mto (13).

Kenneth is clearly longing for a stable sense of identity. One of the markers he refers to is a style of dress ("fur and feathers"), which he regards as an indicator of cultural identity. It is often in terms of appearance (and in the acceptance of that appearance) that people are placed within an ethnic context. In *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1911), Henri Bergson describes how humour can be created when one challenges displays of cultural affiliation in terms of fashion. This can be achieved specifically by means of incongruity and a defamiliarisation of context. For example, an item of clothing which is out of context strikes an audience as amusing;

⁷⁹ This is dried offal from a slaughtered goat which is burnt with incense.

but Bergson goes on to say that an audience is in itself unaware of the illusory nature of its own sense of style, and how this is also entirely bound by context:

It might almost be said that every fashion is laughable in some respect. Only, when we are dealing with the fashion of the day, we are so accustomed to it that the garment seems, in our mind, to form one with the individual wearing it.... Suppose, however, some eccentric individual dresses himself in the fashion of former times: our attention is immediately drawn to the clothes themselves, we absolutely distinguish them from the individual, we say that the latter IS DISGUIISING HIMSELF, – as though every article of clothing were not a disguise! – and the laughable aspect of fashion comes out of the shadow into the light (V.1).

The reason why an item of clothing which is inappropriate is funny is because the audience does not realise how carefully they are attached to what they consider to be appropriate, and how completely they have associated propriety with what is natural. Bergson then draws an analogy between a sense of fashion and a sense of ceremony:

It might be said that ceremonies are to the social body what clothing is to the individual body: they owe their seriousness to the fact that they are identified, in our minds, with the serious object with which custom associates them, and when we isolate them in imagination, they forthwith lose their seriousness. (V.1)

According to Bergson, people laugh at exaggerated incongruities when these are perceived within the context of what is familiar, and hence considered to be "normal". Perhaps times of great disruption and change provide rare opportunities to be reminded that nothing can be assumed to be "normal". A large proportion of the comedy in *Happy Natives* arises from the incongruence created by clashes in terms of what is considered to be appropriate role-playing behaviour, as has already been described in the ways in which Chenaye and Xaba present themselves in their

attempt to "dress up" an image of South Africa in order to sell the country to potential investors.

As already mentioned, Mto and Jimmy are the only characters who undergo some form of internal transformation in the play and the other characters are largely foils used to chart the progression of these central roles. There is, however, another character, an Indian shopkeeper called Patel, who perhaps best represents the notion of the flexibility required of identity structures in order to survive changing landscapes. Whereas Kenneth feels that his mixed ancestry puts him at a disadvantage and whereas he longs for "roots", Patel has accepted his situation and manages to adapt to each change in his environment.

The name Patel is the second most common Indian surname world-wide (following "Singh"). It represents a caste title meaning "farmer" or "village head" used by many different groups, and can thus not be traced to any particular ethnicity within the Indian community. In some way, this small detail of naming allows an insight into the character of this boisterous shopkeeper who started working for the Greek owner of the original café as a boy. He keeps the name of his café as "The Olympic Café" out of respect for the former owner and he also speaks a mixture of Zulu and Funagalo to the black boys playing video games in his shop. Although Patel complains about rising crime, he seems to have accepted the changing roles of the country with good grace, coming across as neither bitter about the past, nor cynical about the future. In some ways Patel reminds one of the old Italian in Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* (1994), who talks to Natally about how losing wars makes far more sense than winning

them⁸⁰. The old man in Heller's novel consequently adapts himself to whichever nationality happens to be governing his country. He asks Nately:

What is a country? A country is a piece of land surrounded on all sides by boundaries, usually unnatural. Englishmen are dying for England, Americans are dying for America, Germans are dying for Germany, Russians are dying for Russia. There are fifty or sixty countries fighting in this war. Surely so many countries can't *all* be worth dying for (257).

The old man finally tells him that "It is better to *live* on one's feet than die on one's knees" (257). And perhaps in the minor character of this old man rests a clue: unless one has a more supple identity, one which is not tied to ideals of patriotism and nationalism, one will, like Jimmy, break. Perhaps an authentic identity needs to be comprised of a certain balance between being aware of the traditions and rituals of ethnic origins, while remaining open to the possibilities of change and transformation.

In *Happy Natives* a number of potential sources for identity are depicted: tradition (Mto's roots, which are re-interpreted and adapted to changing times); function (exemplified in the opportunism of Xaba and Chenaye); or indoctrination (Jimmy). Each of these characters has clothed him- or herself in some form of illusion. Some – like Mto, Prudence and Patel – see through the illusory veils of the ceremonial; others – like Jimmy – never do. As an actor, Kenneth seems aware of the ways in which identity can shift, and yet he faces the disillusionment of discovering that there is no role for him to play in the new South Africa. He shuffles between London and

⁸⁰ The old man says: "I was a fascist when Mussolini was on top, and...I am an anti-fascist now that he has been deposed. I was fanatically pro-German when the Germans were here to protect us against the Americans, and now that the Americans are here to protect us against the Germans I am fanatically pro-American...you and your country will have no more loyal partisan in Italy than me – but only as long as you *remain* in Italy" (255).

Durban and ends up returning to England at the end of the play when he is fired from the project because, as Chenaye explains to Mto, "there are too many white faces involved" (34).

The effect of two actors playing all of the roles is not only an indication of their skill and versatility as actors, but also reveals the transferability of roles, and the ways in which one can take on different tasks of role construction – how patterns of posture, gesture and tone can transform the presentation of identity. And yet, the fact that the black actor plays all the black roles (Mto, Xaba, Prudence, policeman) while the white actor plays the white roles (Kenneth, Chenaye, Jimmy) and Patel, perhaps shows that skin colour is still very much tied to perceptions of identity. Still, the play tries to deal with the multifaceted identity constructions in South Africa, playing off different generations of ethnic nations against each other and in doing so it contrasts a range of ethnic groups. It uses humour both to emphasise and alleviate the divide between cultures.

Greig Coetzee's comic satire on the new South Africa concerns a white theatre practitioner who is eventually rejected by the corporate market and seems to indicate the author's own disillusionment with the opportunities available for white South African writers and performers. The fact that the play was first produced in collaboration with the Soho Theatre in London seems to indicate that Kenneth's concerns about the difficulty of making a living from drama in South Africa are also shared by Coetzee. It might be considered ironic, then, that since the success of this production, Coetzee has performed all over South Africa and continues to present his audiences with a wide array of characters and caricatures which provide a microcosm of a new South African society.

4.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS ON ETHNICITY

Perhaps the most distinguishing mark of post-apartheid literature is its uncertainty and instability. As David Attwell and Barbara Harlow put it, the fields of post-apartheid fiction are

the experiential, ethical, and the political ambiguities of transition; the tension between memory and amnesia. [Post-apartheid fiction] emphasizes the imperative of breaking silences necessitated by long years of struggle, the refashioning of identities caught between stasis and change, and the long role of culture – or representation – in limiting or enabling new forms of understanding (2000: 3).

Key amongst these new forms is the opportunity for self-criticism, for parody, and for the enumeration of uncertainties which were inadmissible under a system which tended to polarise points of view. As Attwell and Harlow maintain:

Whereas under apartheid, to separate the political and the aesthetic – to insist that the aesthetic had its own priorities and demands – was to risk political censure, that separation is now widely endorsed. The liberalism of the new order is more accommodating than a revolutionary culture could ever be, to the reinventions of tradition, to irony, to play (4).

In this sense, the plays which I have described in the first section of this chapter as attempting to consolidate a particular tradition of ethnic nationalism may seem out of place in a post-apartheid South Africa which is experimenting with new forms of identity construction. As I have also tried to show, it is ironic that the recovery of the revolutionary traditions of the past can also lead to the enfranchisement and consolidation of the various groups of the country into warring camps, since this notion is at odds with the ethos of the revolution which sought to create an

egalitarian state. Without the opposition created by apartheid rhetoric, revolutionary traditions can seem, at best, insincere, and at worst, inflammatory.

In Ivor Chipkin's *Do South Africans Exist? Nationalism, Democracy and the Identity of "The People"* (2007), he shows that "the people" in the context of African nationalism are constructed in a very different way to what they are in many other nations in the world. Whereas the ideals of nationhood are often premised on shared cultural values, languages, or religions (among other possible factors); African independence has most often been formulated in terms of its resistance to colonialism. In other words "the people" are defined as those who resist oppression.

Chipkin develops a theory of NDR (National Democratic Revolution) as a key marker for nationalist aspirations in African states. Instead of creating or preserving a culture, the interest here is in producing democratic institutions and preserving them. Chipkin illustrates his point with an analysis of an advertisement which appeared in *The Sunday Times* in 2001, which alleged the existence of a media plot against President Thabo Mbeki. Carefully unravelling the logic behind the phrasing of the advertisement, Chipkin finds it to be premised on assumptions such as that criticism of Mbeki would be tantamount to wanting to preserve "the legacy of apartheid" and would, therefore, be unpatriotic. Looking further, he finds that being black is defined as "by definition, reversing the apartheid inheritance" (6), which, therefore, implies a more authentic claim towards a national identity than, for example, being white. Chipkin's vigilant eye picks up other slippages. For example, in Mbeki's "I am an African" speech, Chipkin questions why, in his landmark discourse, Mbeki conflates being "South Africa" with being "African" (100). Chipkin wonders whether Mbeki is implying a hierarchy of Africanness, and whether the president is endorsing the idea

that migrants will never be as authentically South African as those who have been indigenous to the continent for longer.

It seems, then, that there is a sturdy, and potentially dangerous, strain of essentialism in some current constructions of national identity. And Steven M. Burgess points out: "The notion of group identity remains a sensitive idea in South Africa because of the imposed racial group identities of apartheid. To this day, many people remain very conscious of apartheid group identity" (2002: 12). He makes an interesting case in his book *South African Tribes* (2002) for dividing up people into groups identified by their value systems, rather than their ethnicity. He notes, however, that although there has been a decrease since 1994, "racial and ethnic loyalties are still the most prevalent sources for identity in South Africa" (85). There are also "extremely high levels of national identity" (89).

According to J.P. Wade (1996), there are two competing models of nationalism in South Africa:

First, there is the sort of nationalism found most notably in Afrikaner nationalism, the Pan Africanist Congress, and Inkatha. It is here that the discourse of 'essentialism' is most constitutive, whether it be that of eternal Afrikaner, Zulu, or African.... [an] essential nation – often pre-colonial – as an opposition to the destructive impositions of imperialism.

The second available national model, which is in the process of becoming hegemonic in South Africa, is a progressive one modelled not on occident fascism but on European modernity: to develop an economically advanced (Reconstruction and Development) and democratic society which can become a proud member of – and share the fruits of – 'world civilization'....Instead of being exclusionary, regressive and inward-looking, this form of nationalism is inclusive, modernising and internationalist (241-242).

The second type of nationalism mooted here seems to be more useful in a country such as South Africa since the country is unlikely ever to have an homogenous population. Ironically, an appeal for this second type of nationalistic identification often results in the dissolution of a strongly nationalistic identity in favour of one which is either more personal, or more global. So there appears to be a trend in many countries away from an overt insistence on nationalism. For example, Horsman and Marshall point out how increasingly less importance is being apportioned to nationalistic identities across the world:

Individuals are increasingly encouraged to view themselves as members of groups – not national citizens exclusively, not members of a social class, but as blacks, as Slovaks, as Muslims, as French-Canadians, as born-again Christians, as gays, as environmentalists, and so on (1994: 20).

While nations survive, it may be impossible to relinquish being identified with one or other of them. Perhaps the same could be said of languages and ethnicities; and yet, it is impossible to avoid what appears to be a loosening of bonds, as personal identities take precedence. In her article "Building a National Culture in South Africa", written on the eve of the tumultuous changes which were about to shake South Africa, Karen Press states that a unified national culture must be "anti-ethnic" (1990: 26). Interestingly she does not say non-ethnic, but actively *anti*-. Although she says that a "politically acceptable" (30) culture should never be "imposed upon people" she does point out that "if these various cultural traditions are reified and celebrated as the most significant markers of the identity of the communities who practise them, it becomes impossible to develop a genuinely national cultural identity amongst the people as a whole" (31-32). The dark side of a too stringent adherence to ethnicity is

that it can result in "ethnomania", which is a destructive force, which considers all other ethnic groups as less important than one's own⁸¹.

In this chapter, I have tried to touch on a play which demonstrates a clash between different ethnic nationalities. I have suggested that plays which focus too "seriously" (that is, without an adequate degree of self-reflexivity; without the opportunity for irony and the possibility of parody), on their own ethnic origins and rituals, pose a problem for the building of a united national identity⁸². For this reason, multi-cultural productions are more appealing in this regard than more insular work. Since it is impossible for South Africans to find a shared past, it may be preferable to locate a national ethos within a shared attempt to create a better future. An idea of nationalism might, as Duncan Brown (2001) has suggested, be better premised on a "shared problematic", rather than a shared past or a "metaphysical essence" (763). In this way, a national identity might be more profitably premised on a synchronic, rather than a diachronic reading (767).

I am struck by an uneasy consideration. In this chapter I have questioned the value of writing purely from a single ethnic or nationalistic perspective, and besides English plays, I have also mentioned productions in Zulu, Afrikaans and Xhosa. However, if we consider these three language groups (which are also the three largest mother tongue language groups in South Africa) as identifying particular nations within the state, where does this leave the English mother tongue speakers? They do not seem to share a particular affinity with the set of traditions and customs of others in the same linguistic community in quite the same way that the speakers of Afrikaans, Zulu and

⁸¹ As Marvin Harris says: "ethnomania kills people, neighbourhoods, communities and whole societies" (1999: 129).

⁸² As Henry James said of America in the twentieth century, "If each of the incoming foreign identities claims universality, how can a single, true national identity survive and dominate?" (In Higgins and Leps 1999: 127).

Xhosa do. More and more, I have been wondering whether or not my indictment of ethnic theatre might not, in fact, be a defensive reaction in realising that English speakers have no coherent national/ethnic identity to speak of, something which Greig Coetzee's play also points out in Kenneth's outburst (2003: 13). Although English has won out as the most important communal language, it has been able to adopt this envied position only because it lacks the specificity of the indigenous tongues and because it continues to be influenced – and quite possibly dominated – by the massive global Anglo block.

These reservations aside, the view which I have been advocating here is a sense of identities which are open to adaptation and arise from the realisation that there is no essential identity to which one might hope to return. It is thus characterised by a sense of suppleness and improvisation. Natasha Distiller and Melissa Steyn introduce *Under Construction: 'Race' and Identity in South Africa Today* (2004) by stating that "every act of description is an act of creation" (11). Creating new identities, which are temporary, which are fleeting, seems to me to be a far more worthwhile project than trying to maintain and concretise our many diverse senses of self into particular ethnic constructions. So I feel that we should make room for the strange, for the new, for the uncanny, for representations of selves we have never before imagined as possible. According to this view, it would be preferable to break out of the model of identifications determined by exclusion, and rather open up new definitions and new ways in which South Africans can speak about themselves and their encounters in a multi-national society.

The only national theatre which might be possible for South Africa would be one in which multiculturalism plays a key role, and in which no single ethnic identity is endorsed as natural or permanent. At present I would hazard a guess that the closest

we have to a national stage might be The Market Theatre of Johannesburg, or perhaps The Baxter in Cape Town, or even the annual National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. And yet, none of these institutions is free from controversy. For one thing, they hardly ever host or produce productions in languages other than English.

Another question is whether or not theatre practitioners feel any sense of responsibility towards a "national stage". Do theatre makers feel themselves accountable towards a nation, or towards the traditions of performance itself? Perhaps the theatre has a responsibility towards the history and representation of all its practitioners, which would include both creators and spectators as being part of a community, instead of to a "rainbow nation". In a letter to Richard Schechner, Eugenio Barba expresses a belief in a community of theatre practitioners, rather than a national community⁸³:

I don't want a country made up of a nation or a town. I don't believe in it. Yet I do need a country. That is why, in simple terms, I do theatre....I have been lucky: my country has expanded. It does not consist of land or geography. It is made up of history, of people (1995: 147).

The syncretic ideal is the focus of the next chapter of this thesis, and I will undertake a more detailed discussion of ethnicity as race in my further discussion of the "rainbow nation" metaphor in the concluding chapter. First, however, I wish to examine two writers of syncretic works which, I believe, break clear of identifications with "nation" and "ethnicity" and which move into the realms of experimentation with senses of self beyond the considerations of gendered, politicised or nationalistic identities.

⁸³ Arthur Miller expresses a similar sentiment when he says that "the playwright is nothing without his audience. He is one of the audience who happens to know how to speak. We are a kind of church." More worryingly, he adds that "if the parishioners are no longer interested in that church, you know what happens. It becomes a garage or a grocery store" (1996: 524).