
**EXPERIMENTS IN FREEDOM:
REPRESENTATIONS OF IDENTITY IN NEW SOUTH AFRICAN DRAMA**

*An investigation into identity formations in some post-apartheid play-texts
published in English by South African writers, from 1994 – 2007.*

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Dedicated to all of those
who keep dedicating their lives
to this strange ancient ritual.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines ways in which identities have been represented in new South African play texts. It begins by exploring various ways in which identity has been described from various philosophical, psychological and anthropological perspectives. In particular, the thesis describes its methodology in terms of Gilles Deleuze's definition of "rhizomatic" structures. The introduction also elaborates ways in which drama is uniquely suited to represent – as well as to effect – transformations of identity.

The thesis then moves on to an examination of specific texts in terms of four broad areas of investigation – gender, political affiliation, ethnicity and syncretism. In these chapters a number of play texts are investigated from different points of view. Firstly, in a chapter on gender, the thesis focuses specifically on issues of masculinity and exile in plays by Athol Fugard, Anthony Akerman and Zakes Mda. This chapter explores orientations of the masculine which have become embedded within notions of nationalism and patriotism.

In terms of political affiliations, the thesis looks at what Loren Kruger has called "post-anti-apartheid theatre" (2002: 233) and considers the trend away from protest theatre. With reference to the plays of Mike van Graan it also examines new forms of protest theatre. This chapter also explores plays which were inspired by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and looks in more detail at *Ubu and the Truth Commission* by Jane Taylor.

When considering ethnicities, the thesis reflects on how identity in terms of an ethnic collective is most often premised on laws of exclusion, and on the construction of what Benedict Anderson refers to as an "imagined community" (1991: 15). Representations of ethnic identities are then analysed in *Happy Natives* by Greig Coetzee.

Syncretism seems to present a preferable description of how South African identities can be constructed and the thesis then elaborates attempts to forge a new identity in terms of amalgamation and a creative fusion of cultural resources, with particular reference to the plays of Brett Bailey and Reza de Wet.

In the conclusion of this thesis, the thorny issue of racial identities is considered, and in particular the trope of the "rainbow nation", which many writers regard as a problematic blanketing description which cancels out difference. Instead, Ashraf Jamal's "radical syncretism", which does not seek to subsume heterogeneous identities, is suggested as a viable means of approaching definitions of identity.

The final chapter also briefly touches on the development of physical theatre in South Africa and describes how the body can be used as a tool for transformation, relying principally on the writings of Mark Fleishman and Eugenio Barba in this regard. Finally, again resorting to a Deleuzian vocabulary which describes identity as constructed in terms of lines operating on particular planes, the thesis considers whether it may not be more beneficial in the post-apartheid context to favour paradoxical processes which relinquish identities, instead of those which attempt to consolidate them.

KEYWORDS:

identity, post-apartheid literature, drama, theatre, South African literature, Charles Taylor, Athol Fugard, Zakes Mda, Greig Coetzee, Mike van Graan, William Kentridge, Jane Taylor, Anthony Akerman, Brett Bailey, Reza de Wet, Gilles Deleuze, Ashraf Jamal, physical theatre, ethnicity, race, rainbow nation, freedom, paradox, gender, syncretism, heterogeneity, transformation.

Experiments in Freedom: Representations of Identity in New South African Drama

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE – EXPLORING IDENTITY

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| 1.1 | Identifying South Africans | 10 |
| 1.1.1 | Self as Body | 10 |
| 1.1.2 | Self as Symbol | 12 |
| 1.1.3 | Transforming Identities | 15 |
| 1.1.4 | A Deleuzian Vocabulary | 18 |
| 1.1.5 | Aims | 22 |
| 1.2 | Drama and Transformation | 24 |
| 1.2.1 | The Importance of Play | 24 |
| 1.2.2 | Text and Performance | 33 |
| 1.3 | Identity as Performance | 37 |
| 1.3.1 | Psychological Descriptions of Identity | 37 |
| 1.3.2 | A Jungian Analysis of Drama | 40 |
| 1.4 | Sourcing the Self in the Desire for Freedom | 46 |
| 1.4.1 | Frames | 46 |
| 1.4.2 | Freedom | 49 |
| 1.5 | Society and Self | 55 |
| 1.5.1 | Defining Society | 55 |
| 1.5.2 | The Fragmentation of Collective Identities | 59 |
| 1.5.3 | Conclusion – Postmodern Paradigms | 66 |

CHAPTER TWO – GENDERED IDENTITIES

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| 2.1 | White Men in Exile: Masculine Subject Positions | 73 |
| 2.1.1 | Introduction | 73 |
| 2.1.2 | Biological Essentialism | 76 |
| 2.1.3 | Alternative Definitions of Gender | 81 |
| 2.1.4 | Pejorative Definitions of Masculinity | 83 |
| 2.1.5 | Doing Instead of Being | 86 |
| 2.2 | Separation and Sexual Maturity in <i>The Captain's Tiger</i> | 88 |
| 2.3 | Language and Land in <i>Sorrows and Rejoicings</i> | 99 |
| 2.4 | Outright Male Chauvinism in <i>A Man Out of the Country</i> | 108 |
| 2.5 | Sexuality as Healing in <i>The Bells of Amersfoort</i> | 115 |
| 2.6 | Concluding Remarks on Gender | 119 |

CHAPTER THREE – POLITICAL IDENTITIES

| | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| 3.1 | Post Anti-Apartheid Theatre | 122 |
| 3.2 | Performing the TRC – <i>Ubu and the Truth Commission</i> | 131 |

CHAPTER FOUR – ETHNIC IDENTITIES

| | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 4.1 | Defining Nationalisms | 147 |
| 4.2 | Ethnic Identities in <i>Happy Natives</i> | 157 |
| 4.3 | Concluding Remarks on Ethnicity | 161 |

CHAPTER FIVE – SYNCRETIC IDENTITIES

| | | |
|------|---|-----|
| 5.1 | Defining Syncretism | 175 |
| 5.2 | Syncretic Theatre in South Africa | 180 |
| 5.3 | Brett Bailey – Black Mask on a White Face? | 186 |
| | 5.3.1 Introduction | 186 |
| | 5.3.2 Three Xhosa Plays | 189 |
| | 5.3.3 Later Works | 202 |
| 5.4. | The Heterogeneous Indigene in the Plays of Reza de Wet | 204 |
| | 5.4.1 Introduction | 204 |
| | 5.4.2 Three Translations: <i>African Gothic; Good Heavens; Crossing</i> | 207 |
| | 5.4.3 Two English Texts: <i>Breathing In</i> and <i>Concealment</i> | 211 |
| | 5.4.4 Conclusion | 218 |
| 5.5 | Situating Syncretism within the Postmodern | 221 |
| 5.6 | Reacting to the Syncretic | 227 |

CHAPTER SIX – CONCLUSIONS

| | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------|-----|
| 6.1 | Race and the Rainbow | 234 |
| | 6.1.1 Racial Constituencies | 234 |
| | 6.1.2 Over the Rainbow? | 240 |
| | 6.1.3 Choosing to Identify | 244 |
| | 6.1.4 Bastard Identities | 246 |
| 6.2 | Changing the Body | 250 |
| | 6.2.1 Transformation, Again | 250 |
| | 6.2.2 Physical Theatre | 253 |

| | | |
|-------|--|-----|
| 6.3 | Experiments in Freedom | 261 |
| 6.3.1 | Theatres of Freedom | 261 |
| 6.3.2 | Gilles Deleuze on Identity – Segmentarity and the Minoritarian | 263 |
| 6.3.3 | Accepting Paradox – Learning to Let Go | 265 |
| | PRIMARY TEXTS | 270 |
| | BIBLIOGRAPHY | 271 |