

Introduction

Coloured Bodies and the ‘New’ South Africa: The Old Struggle For New Identities

In this thesis I aim to interrogate the notion of ‘Colouredness’ and its cultural representation on the Witwatersrand Reef. This study seems all the more relevant in post-apartheid South Africa where the collective ‘Coloured’ discontent seems to be echoed in the adage – “In the past we were not white enough, now in the ‘new’ South Africa we seem to be not black enough”.

Central to the Coloured discontent is the notion of a ‘rainbow nation’, which reflects a neo-political desire to collapse undesirable historical identities into a democratic collective. In the South African social consciousness, ‘rainbow-ism’ represents a specific turbulent epoch in South African politics. This consciousness inevitably calls to memory the sole architect of the ‘rainbow nation’ prophecy, Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Commenting on the Archbishop in a BBC documentary, Brigalia Bham, former general secretary of the South African Council of Churches and chairperson of the Independent Electoral Commission Commenting on the democratic government’s decision to let Archbishop Tutu spearhead the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Brigalia Bham said that Archbishop Tutu was the only one with the moral stature to perform the task¹.

¹ Brigalia Bham in a BBC documentary on the life of Archbishop Desmond Tutu titled *Everyman VIII*, screened on SABC 3 at 8h00am on 17th June 2007

This moral stature was demonstrated when the Archbishop boldly challenged the chief representatives of the apartheid political system.

“We are inviting you, Mr. de Klerk, we invite you Mr. Vlok, we invite all the cabinet. We say, come, come here, and can you see the people of this country? Come and see what this country is going to become. This country is a rainbow country! This country is Technicolor. You can come and see the new South Africa! ...I want us to stand... black white, whatever and hold hands... They tried to make us one colour: purple. We say we are the rainbow people! We are the new people of the new South Africa!” (Tutu, D. 1994: 187-8)

The general appeal of the ‘Rainbow Nation’ axiom lies not only in its ability to capture and herald the end of a stormy political past, but also, like all metaphors, to reflect a long held desire for equality, freedom, and justice among the disenfranchised. ‘Rainbow-ism’ therefore, is both an appellation of challenge to the apartheid status quo as well as a definitive sum of metaphors, images and icons that privilege national unity.

Although a political ideal, ‘rainbow-ism’ was first performed as a moral imperative. Archbishop Tutu, a religious figure, was central in the legitimating of ‘rainbow-ism’ in the social consciousness. As a result, the ‘rainbow nation’ appellation seems to occupy a complex milieu whose duality embodies both the religious and the political.

However, I wish to argue that if ‘rainbow-ism’ is appropriated within a political rhetoric to symbolize the future political ideal, it also embodies, upon closer scrutiny, an aversion to history and memory. The ‘rainbow nation’ semantic, essentially functions as a national hyperbolic affect which functions to silence agitation for distinct and meaningful individual identity.

The Archbishop’s moral ‘rainbow nation’ prophecy is also a post 1994 political rhetoric whose desire is the erasure of the undesirable historic black and white dialectic. Various modes of cultural representation in South Africa have involuntarily appropriated the ‘rainbow nation’ sentiment. Theatre is not without this affect. A number of stage plays, in varying degrees, consciously and/or unconsciously have reproduced the ‘rainbow’ rhetoric, while others decry ‘rainbow-ism’ as the hyperbolic performance of a political desire, whose euphoric appeal functions to conceal memory and history.

Chief among the critical voices has been the fairly collective voice of the ‘Coloured’ community – ‘In the past we were not white enough, now in the ‘new’ South Africa we are not black enough’. This attitude has informed stage plays by ‘Coloured’ subjects as well as those that deal with the representation of ‘Coloured’ identities.

This thesis locates its primary concern within the liminal spaces occupied by ‘Coloured’ subject in the ‘new’ South Africa and the notion of ‘Colouredness’ beyond the racial imperative. My argument is that Coloured identity discourses based on the corporeal are limited. I will demonstrate that Colouredness, beyond misappropriated discourses of racial identity, is an inevitable contemporary transgressive notion that

pervades all forms of identity. My contention is that in its 'Coloured' postmodernist state, the body transcends traditional references and serves as a site of transgression.

Through an analysis of two recent stage plays that deal with questions of the 'Coloured', I will demonstrate 'Colouredness' as a signature of historical body politic (where the 'Coloured' identity is constituted and limited within colonial/apartheid notions of race) and Colouredness as an inevitable condition of contemporary subjects whose identities reflect the complex, and often contradictory politics of living in a post-modern body.

These will be the key themes constituting my investigation of the representation of the 'Coloured' in *No Room For Squares* (2000) conceived by Coco Merckel and Robert Coleman, and *Umm...Somebody say Something* (2000), work-shopped by the cast and directed by Keitumetse Masike and Yolandi Michaels.

No Room For Squares:

Introduction

No Room For Squares was conceived in 2000, six years into South Africa's 'new' democratic dispensation. Set to live jazz music, the play is sparked off by the disappearance of Pubs, a homeless drunk who lived under a willow tree in the 'Coloured' neighbourhood of Newclare, Johannesburg. 'That someone could be here one day and then gone the next' (Coleman, R. & Merckel, C. (unpublished). 2000: 3) gets Coco, the protagonist, wondering about Pubs' historical background. This leads Coco to an enquiry about his own family tree.

Resolving to embark on a journey in search of his own family history, Coco takes the audience along. This journey begins in the historical 1950's Sophiatown and culminates in Newclare, Westbury, Coronationville and others. Sophiatown was a cosmopolitan suburb of sorts, where Coloureds, Blacks and Asians lived together. When the Apartheid government came into power in 1948, it exercised a policy of racial segregation. Through a painful process of the historic removals of the 1950's, Blacks were moved to Soweto, and Coloureds to Newclare, Westbury, Coronationville and others.

In the political memory of the dispossessed, Sophiatown represents the definite instance of that dispossession through a systematic geographical segregation. *No Room For Squares* is essentially a socio-historical play that sets itself up as a 'Coloured' play. Thematically, the play reclaims the subjective voice in the articulation of a collective memory with regard to a history of subjugation. During one of the painful moments in the play, Coco performs this memory.

"I asked my father what it felt like to be kicked out of a house you grew up all your life. In the same house you knew where you were, your friends, the shops. And then suddenly you must move. No idea where you going to or what was waiting for you there. No choice. No. 59 was a big house, you're going to a 4 roomed flat, you have to give half your furniture away.

Just yesterday you see your neighbour, dragged out like an animal. Everything thrown onto the back of a truck, just as it was, washing from the bath...the toaster still with the toast in it. I asked my father what it felt like" (p7)

Memory is therefore central to the notion of a Coloured identity. Orality serves as a means to interpolate official historical accounts. Coco does not rely on literary accounts by others, he asks his father. The notion of this memory also takes a patriarchal tone – “I asked my father”. The act of remembering seems to be closely linked to gender. This notion will be closely investigated in the body of this thesis.

In the play, Coco’s quest is to reclaim his family history from a problematic ‘official’ South African history and a collective of ‘Coloured’ narratives. The play’s narrative can be interpreted in the context of the historical narratives of ‘Colouredness’ and their resultant tropes. In the following section I investigate the play’s dialogical relations to historical representations of the ‘Coloured’ subject. This dialogue necessitates a discursive overview of the treatment of the Coloured subject in modes of cultural representation, especially on The Witwatersrand Reef.

CHAPTER 1

Historical Representations of the Coloured:

“Good evening ladies and gentlemen... I’m your tour guide, Coco Merckel...on the tour with us today is my dad Bobby Merckel...and my uncle Henry Merckel. Tonight we’ll be taking a trip back to Sophiatown that Bobby and Henry remember growing up in” (Coleman, R & Merckel, C. (unpublished). 2000: 1)

The play locates the 1950’s Sophiatown era as its cultural genesis and political exodus. In the world of the play, Sophiatown is a starting point in the search for the Merckel family tree. The play is therefore in dialogue with historical representations of the 1950’s Sophiatown.

The Coloured subject in Junction Avenue Theatre’s Sophiatown

Sophiatown, a Junction Avenue Theatre Company production (Orkin, M (ed). 2001), was also a non-official socio- historical account of the removals in the 1950’s Sophiatown. The play incorporated in its narrative the peripheral status of the Coloured subject on The Reef. Sophiatown was a huge yard bought by one Tobiansky and developed into a residential neighborhood where Coloureds, the Chinese and African natives lived together.

Because the apartheid government viewed this neighborhood’s close proximity to the exclusively white city as a potential threat to its security, Sophiatown had to be

demolished. The play captures the dramatic moments leading to the demolition of the houses and the residents' mobilization for political resistance.

Charlie, the only Coloured character in the play, is silent for the better part of the play. Only in scene six of Act two, the last scene of the play, does Charlie speak out. The scene opens with Mingus summoning Charlie to load all the things on the G.G.'s truck. Charlie exits and enters later, carrying 'a small tattered suitcase' (Orkin, M (ed). 2001: 200). Upon being asked by Mingus where he is going, Charlie says "I'm going to get a house". His preoccupation is with polishing Mingus' shoes, a fashionable black gangster who regularly sends Charlie on errands.

Charlie's silence demonstrates a critical lack of political consciousness and agency. While the world of the play exhibits high levels of political agitation, Charlie shows no allegiance to the collective resistance nor does he consent with government removals. The construction of Charlie renders him redundant, especially given the demands of his immediate social environment.

In *Charlie*, the play presents the Coloured body, but fails to articulate its subjective state. The play seems caught between the irrefutable truth of Coloured presence, but fails to posit a meaningful interrogation of what it means for the Coloured subject to be part of this milieu, his/her place in its politics and social hierarchy.

Identity construction is never an exclusively private matter. Although imagined in private, it is hewn and performed in public. As a public space, theatre is implicated in the discourse of identity construction. Unlike other public spaces, theatre spaces are

not readily ‘free’ spaces. They are contested spaces and are controlled mainly by ‘positions of *enunciation*’.

“The practice of representation always implicates the positions from which we speak or write – the position of *enunciation*” (Hall, S. 199?: 68)

The treatment of the Coloured subject in *Sophiatown* could be seen to reflect apartheid strategies of social engineering. The play’s narrative strategies, in its creation of meaning, reflect its dependence on the apartheid ideology. While the play seems to articulate alternative working class politics of resistance against the apartheid state’s removals, inscribed in its narrative is the enunciation of the marginal Coloured subject. The play therefore functions as a myth of resistance, which fails to deal meaningfully with the role, agency and position of the Coloured subject in its milieu of representation.

At best, the play fails to transcend the colonial/apartheid racial stratification. Instead, it reconstitutes Coloured subjectivity within the apartheid racial imaginary. This imaginary significantly centers on the black and white racial binaries as respective victim and oppressor. For this reason, the stage is a critical site of identity construction and its representation. In its narrative strategies, *Sophiatown* borrows significantly from a dominant political ideology which imagines the Coloured subject in periphery of the socio-political centre. Theatre therefore, is an impressionable medium. It depends significantly on who is making theatre, for whom, and for what reasons.

Hall suggests a critical apprehension of authorship in representation. Like all modes of representation, theatre cannot escape the pervasive dominant political ideologies whose aim is to fashion social identities within hegemonic strategies. In its seemingly objective and sometimes revolutionary stance, theatre can and does re-enact dominant political ideologies, proving that theatre is not an organic flow of events and characters in time, but a conscious creation of a systematic process of omissions, inclusions and selections.

The Greek word for drama, *Dran*, means ‘Something which is done’. Aristotle in his *Poetics* notes that theatre imitates an action in the form of action and not, as literature does, in the form of narration. However, the distinction is not that clear cut in theatrical modes of performance, since action does inevitably imply narrative . (Aristotle, trs. Benardete, S & Davis, M. 2002).

In dramatic art, the human body and its strategic agency in acting out ‘positions of enunciation’ are implicated. While there are different schools of acting as specialized theatrical phenomena, generally, on stage, human bodies incarnate the play’s syntax, and invest the otherwise ethereal world of the play with immediacy and credibility. The familiarity of the body’s corporeality, transmuted directly from social life, mediates the false reality that all representation is dependent upon. That the ‘actor’ can simultaneously assume a character while maintaining its role as social reference comments on the paradox that attends the nature of the human body and its malleability.

This paradox comments on the body's ability to reposition itself, by transcending its familiar social identity in order to become the idea it embodies in representational schema. While audiences consciously suspend disbelief in theatre, they also consume the spectacle of the body as social 'truth' at the same time as we open ourselves to the allure of the body to transport us to the mysticism of realms of representation.

The body on stage therefore, cannot escape its double meaning – as 'imitator' which simultaneously also 'becomes' what it 'imitates', mediated as it is through its special aspect as 'social truth'. In *Sophtown*, Charlie reflects this duality of meaning construction. While Charlie is a character acting out the role of a Coloured, he is the Coloured body that has its 'real' reference in the 'real' social world outside the confines of theatrical representation. The relational connection between Charlie the character and the identifiable Coloured body in the person of Charlie invests the play with an inevitable Coloured narrative.

Herein lies the critical power of theatrical representation; that as a phenomenon, theatre is marked, as it also marks its subjects, with a special fantastic ambiguous duality. Theatre reorganizes its elements to collude into a force that creates a special charm, which simultaneously reveals and conceals its narrative strategies. This duality invests theatrical representation with its public voice and its private silences.

Consequently, *Sophtown* foregrounds the black working class protest against the removals as its public spectacle, while it conceals its silences on the agency of the Coloured subject.

This silence, by extension is also a silence of the Coloured community. This duality, the ability to simultaneously proclaim and conceal is what makes theatrical representation paranormal. It is this special allure that beguiles theatre audience with what amounts to magic. This reflects the enduring power of theatre as a mode of representation. This reflects also its danger. By taking away Charlie's voice, the play shuts the potential revelations the audience might gain if the Coloured spoke.

The play also serves to police the Coloured body through its narrative choice of silence. The Coloured subject is constructed as a silent 'other'. Through Charlie's stereotypical character, the play inevitably constructs all Coloured people as subjects of political apathy.

"It (theatre) has the power to make us see and experience ourselves as 'Other'. Every regime of representation is a regime of power formed, as Foucault reminds us, by the fatal couplet, 'power/knowledge'. And this kind of knowledge is internal, not external. It is one thing to place some person or set of persons as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that knowledge". (Ibid, 71) (Emphasis mine).

Like all regimes of representation, theatre has the power to subject its audiences to forms of knowledge as reflected in its positions of enunciation. Consequently, in varying degrees, audiences can collude, if subliminally, in theatre's creation of meaning by virtue of being witnesses to its action. While theatre does not impose meaning (because audiences attend voluntarily), it applies its special magic to appeal

to the ‘power of inner compulsion and subjective con-formation to the norm, *its desired meaning*’. (Ibid, 71) (Emphasis mine).

In *Sophiatown*, Charlie is part of a world agitated by mass political discontent, he lacks political agency. The resultant suggestion that Coloureds are without political agency is sharply refuted, in the real social world at least, by the advocacy of Coloured personalities like Don Mattera.

Almost synonymous with Sophiatown, Mattera is the very incarnation of the eclectic racial identity that defined Sophiatown. His father was an Italian who married an African woman. He was a reputable gangster who later became a prolific poet and writer of note. One of his enduring works *Memory is the Weapon* (1987. Ravan Press) is a personal testimony of the infamous Sophiatown removals. Charlie’s character was based on the life of Mattera. Mattera was present during the play’s workshops.

Given Mattera’s towering cultural history and personal stature, Charlie’s character is a far cry from the real thing. The play seems shy of acknowledging in Charlie, Mattera’s protest literature, and fails to represent his political agency.

At best, the play fails to symbolize Mattera as an icon who rewrote the narrative of Coloured male subjectivity. The disparity between the actual Coloured personality in Mattera and its representation in Charlie reveals the politics of enunciation, which are fraught with omissions and silences. The ambiguous treatment of the Coloured male subject in the play resonates with the historical colonial/apartheid treatment of the Coloured persona, which conceived and constructed Coloured male subjectivity in

apathetic terms. The play therefore, seems caught within the ambit of political hegemonic strategies that reinforce Coloured stereotypes and their attendant tropes.

In *Charlie*, the inherent complexities in Coloured identities are collapsed and simplified into the play's male reductionist narrative strategies. In the individuation of Charlie is the deployment of the play's deeper logic, which functions to construct Colouredness into a passive collectivity. What the play seems to reveal in an individual Coloured character, it also utilizes to conceal its deeper structure and bias to the Coloured collective. The paradox of revelation and concealment in art is also central to representational modalities of 'Othering'.

One cannot overlook Junction Avenue Theatre Company's gesture of representing the Coloured subject on stage, considering the absence of Coloured subjects in Black Consciousness theatre, in the political era preceding the making of *Sophiatown*. Before Black Consciousness theatre, agitprop and protest forms of theatre defined the dramatic cultural milieu, especially on the Witwatersrand Reef. Mda has noted that protest theatre only appealed to the conscience of the oppressor without effecting any change in the status quo².

² Mda's essay on *Theatre and Reconciliation in South Africa* was published in a Theatre Journal, Vol. 25, No. 3 (1995)

Black Consciousness Theatre: Representations of the Coloured subject

Manaka and Maponya's theatrical works, which epitomize the political ideals of Steve Biko's Black Consciousness movement, broke with former traditions of cultural representation by agitating their audiences for political resistance and revolutionary change of the status quo.³ This epoch also advocated black pride through systematic dissemination of political consciousness to apartheid's ideological schemes.

The two plays that epitomize this political era are *eGoli* by Matsemela Manaka, and *The Hungry Earth* by Maishe Maponya. In these plays Maponya and Manaka address overt political themes. They do not only explore the historical events but also concern themselves with exploring the experiences of the black lower class, speaking effectively from that world.

Thematically, *The Hungry Earth* deals with the plight of migrant laborers in the mines, child labor, and the retribution of the white oppressor. In *EGoli*, two prisoners, John and Hamilton escape from prison, thereby challenging the myth of apartheid as a prison for the black subjugated masses. Both plays reflect the subject matter and socio/political milieu of their creators. The plays do not reflect the Coloured subject precisely because s/he is not part of this milieu.

Apartheid labor practices did not encourage skilled black labour and as a result, black men were forced to work on the mines as cheap labour. In contrast, Coloured men became electricians and carpenters due to their access to skills training and

³ Mda's commentary in *Theatre*, Vol. 25. No. 3 on South African protest theatre; locating it as a liberal cultural form of representation, whose aim was to appeal to the conscience of the oppressor, without disturbing the overall hegemonic structure.

institutions of higher learning. Consequently, doors to educational institutes were policed and regulated according to the Coloured/Black dichotomy. Coloured subjects could traverse intimate living spaces of the white world as students, carpenters and/or electricians, while the unskilled Blacks were kept out.

The policing of Coloured and Black bodies invested their Coloured and Black identities with a devious difference which commented on their dichotomized proximity to a white centre. This dichotomy also informed Coloured and Black townships. In Johannesburg, Coloured townships are mostly relegated to the West, almost forming an intermediary geographical split between Black townships and the city centre.

Most Coloureds enjoyed relatively bigger houses with electricity, running water taps in the yard, recreational facilities etc., while Black townships had uniform matchbox houses without electricity, shared communal taps, and had an all purpose communal hall as the only marker of recreational facility. These incentives inevitably antagonized the Black and Coloured communities.

The spatial reorganization of Coloured and Black townships also served as a means to translate apartheid race policies into concrete spaces. This translation, subliminally subverted the inherent transience of apartheid policies, marking them with a semblance of fixed reality. Thus land and architecture became signifiers of an ideology of racial difference. Silences on Coloured subjects in Black Consciousness theatre reflect the subliminal antipathy that informed Black/Coloured relations.

However, racialised geographical spaces resonate with multiple readings. The Coloured/Black spatial organization also factored transgression as an aspect of Coloured identity. The Coloured identity regulated itself by internalizing a silent code of transgression, such that crossing the Coloured boundary, or oscillating between the black and white binaries would become an act of transgression. In the logic of the politicization of spatial configuration, the Coloured body is therefore not only a carrier of transgression but it is also perceived as capable of contaminating 'other' bodies of assumed pedigree.

Consequently, the social imaginary is also about apprehensions of Colouredness as a transgressive identity. The Coloured identity threatens those identities which are perceived to be 'fixed' or of a 'pure' breed precisely because of its fluidity, its ability to simultaneously embody, negate and negotiate difference, as a means of constructing its meaning in flux. In his/her perceived instability, the Coloured finds a special kind of mobility, which gives him/her license to traverse private spaces of the white master and the black proletariat.

This sense of mobility has allowed Coloured subjects to intimately experience a proximity to a world better than the one bequeathed him/her by historical stratagem. The unstable place of the Coloured subject in the South African social imaginary is also a third space, where desire and promise collude into suspense. Coloured politics and identity are not without the trauma of occupying this third space.

This space has to do with the explosion that takes place between a desire to fit into a Caucasian frame of identity, and the schemes involved in the procrastination of this

desire, essentially a proximity to the promise that is never granted. The privileges afforded the Coloured subject, have successfully silenced the Coloured voice from reclaiming promises aborted long before their fruition. It is, perhaps, this silence that is reflected in Black Consciousness theatre, which seems to portray a general lack of Coloured political agency. The desire to silence the Coloured voice also translates into a desire to erase Coloured identities.

If hegemonic cultural representation aims to reflect and maintain the status quo, revolutionary representation (of which Black Consciousness was one) aims, through its transgressive narrative strategies to topple and transcend the 'political actuality' as a way of heralding a different 'actuality'. If the complexities of living in a Coloured body are collapsed and erased through silencing schemes of white promise, the reflection of this silence in Black Consciousness theatre inevitably seems to collude with strategies of erasure.

The representation of the Coloured subject as a 'silent other' in Maponya and Manaka's plays seem to reflect colonial/apartheid anxieties of contamination. Both plays seem informed by the binaries that define identity in political terms, where the white man was the enemy and black people were victims. This political dichotomy, which underscored identity construction, has a reductive imperative, which precludes any critical assessment and representation of identities outside the binary paradigm.

The perceptible centrality of binaries in both plays could be seen to demonstrate the internalization of apartheid strategies. These strategies aim to physically separate human bodies as a means of policing them. The predilection to erase the Coloured

subject from frames of cultural representation still persists, as evidenced in contemporary representations of 1950's Sophiatown.

Drum: A Contemporary Representation of Sophiatown:

Drum, a recent feature film by Zola Maseko [2005] is an impressive narrative of Henry Nxumalo's Sophiatown that saw the advent of the popular *Drum* magazine. The gangster world, which gave Sophiatown its peculiar sinister density, is a significant part of this film. Sof'town⁴ gangsters cannot be understood outside the signatures of their lingua franca known as Tsotsi taal, a Coloured patois that symbolized a *hip* gang identity. Coloured agency is intricately inscribed in the construction and propagation of this patois.

However, Zola's film has no Coloured subjects, and thus robs its milieu of the richness of a patois that is synonymous with Sophiatown. Although beautifully shot with spell binding cinematography and sequences, the film suffers from a lack of a credible 50's ambience that resides chiefly in gangster *lingo*. Once more, the Coloured is erased from the frames of cultural reference.

Apartheid has generated a number of myths, one that significantly affects cultural representations of the Sophiatown era is that black people were victims of white power which controlled access to economic and political expression. This myth also functions to conceal the truth that Black people held a significant amount of cultural power. Myths in society serve as carriers of truth precisely because they are

⁴ Sof'town is a slang for Sophiatown

constructed such that they embody an aspect of truth mixed with misconception in order to hide the truth.

The myth that black people had no power during the apartheid dispensation functions to hide the truth that it was black people who defined the cultural milieu. White people employed their economic and political power to erase black people from frames of economic and political activity; black people equally appropriated and used their cultural power to de-centre Coloured subjects from cultural frames of reference.

The pattern reflected in Black Consciousness Theatre and Zola's contemporary film, shows Coloured subjectivity in vacant frames. Instead of transcending the strategies to antagonize people of Colour, Black Consciousness theatre, and the film *Drum*, display a less critical appropriation of the Coloured subject. Furthermore, they exhibit a separatist apartheid ideology.

In general terms, there is a perceptible tradition of Coloured representations by non-Coloured cultural activists which exhibits processes of 'Othering'. The Coloured subject is represented as a silent 'other' in *Sophiatown* and an absent 'other' in *The Hungry Earth*, *Egoli*, and *Drum*. It is my contention that the narrative strategies employed to erase Coloured subjectivity comment on the politics of access to spaces of representation by Coloured subjects.

However, the representation of the Coloured as *silent* and *absent* 'other' could also reflect a deliberate indifference to processes of mainstream representation. The Coloured's defiance of formal representation is also a defiance of racializing

narratives. It is not a laissez faire attitude to their own narratives, but a collective consciousness of rebellion in a racially neurotic society.

The problematic representation of Coloured subjects in racializing narratives is an ideological appropriation, which corroborates the statement that “What seems to take place outside ideology, in reality takes place in ideology” (Althusser, 1971, 49).

However, the problem of representation where the Coloured subject is concerned bespeaks the difficulty of abandoning dominant ideologies even in the most radical of cultural revolutions. Ideology is therefore ultimately the nucleus of cultural representation. Especially in how it colludes with, or challenges the status quo.

Ideology as subterfuge

Dominant ideologies are implicated in the construction of peoples’ identities. These identities in turn inform modes of cultural representation. Individuals are interpolated as social subjects by the systematic schemes of the dominant ideology at the same time that they construct their cultural identities.⁵ The resultant tension between a desired cultural identity and the imposition of hegemonic ideologies reconfigures the body as a contested site.

⁵ In his essays published in 1976, Louis Althusser wrote extensively on ideology and ideological state apparatuses that ultimately serve dominant hegemony.

Ideology and Hair Politics – A Counter Narrative

In Africa, processes of colonization relied extensively on hair politics. Similarly, the construction of the slave subject in the Diaspora was informed by the body's politics, chief among them being the texture of hair. Hair texture as a signifier of identity has played a crucial role in the history of Black bodies in Africa and the Diaspora. Instead of combing their hair, Africans in the Diaspora would lock it, thereby publicly declaring themselves as trees uprooted from their natural habitat, the African motherland.

Consequently, the history of slaves forcefully taken from Africa would be narrated through the pattern of their hair. This consciousness can be seen in the global Rastafarian strategies of narrating slave tales through the hieroglyphics in hair politics. The transformation of hair as a narrative of slavery in the Diaspora also marks the body as a protest text against repressed memories and erased geographical references. Consequently, the material body of the African in the Diaspora is also an embodiment of protest, an ever present response to a disrupted subjective, and counter narrative to 'official' historical accounts.

For example, in Jamaica, the music of the Rastafarians - a movement given a popular voice by Bob Marley and the Wailers - became a social historical invocation of repressed histories – “Buffalo soldier in the heart of America/ taken from Africa/ taken to the Caribbeans/ fighting on arrival/fighting for survival”; and “Do you remember ol’ Marcus Garvey...”⁶ Such instances demonstrate the critical usage of

⁶ Bob Marley and the Wailers – Greatest Hits

language, together with the display of the body's hair as a narrative of dissent against the status quo.

Hair – A signature of Desire

Individual desire is also an intricate phenomenon that at times disregards mobilizations of political agenda. In *No Room For Squares* Coco Merckel comments on the damaging repercussions of Coloured performances of a white racial desire in his family:

“...the final insult came when my granny could not attend her own brothers’ funeral because it would upset the kids to find out they were Coloured” (p3)

The Coloured desire to be white, despite the historical repression suffered at the hands of white colonial/apartheid governments, bespeaks the levels to which the oppressed can internalize consciously or otherwise, the identity of the oppressor. In such an instance, the performance of identity serves a dual purpose of transcending one's ‘actual’ identity condition and acquiring a desired identity codification.

The materiality of the body serves as a vehicle for the articulation of such fantasy. But the question is – “is it fantasy?” People change, for better or worse by allowing the body to answer to the deep yearnings of fantasy. Similarly, the pressure brought to bear upon the Coloured's hair texture can be seen as a response to the economic and political allure, a desire to transcend one's economic impasse.

In *Umm...Somebody Say Something*, SPECIMEN 2 comments on how her mother used a hot rod to straighten her hair, scorching her scalp in the process. This comment is also made in *A Coloured Place*⁷, a play performed by Coloured women in 2000 at the Market Theatre. The straightening of hair in little girls became a cultural symbol. It also demonstrated how the subjective desire by parents to be seen to be white manifested physically on the children.

The historical agency of Coloured parents in an attempt to straighten the hair of their offspring can also be seen as an attempt to erase the import of Black racial narratives in the person of Coloured subjectivities. Inevitably, it becomes an attempt to erase Coloured subjectivity from African frames of historical reference. It is also bespeaks a desire to reconstruct Coloured identity alongside an imaginary white identity.

On the other hand, Coco comments on how some Black people manifested a desire to be Coloured as a means to mount the social ladder:

“Many Africans got themselves re-classified as Coloured in order to enjoy the so called privileges of being so called Coloured”. We had the Ndlovus who became Olifants, the Shlahlakhula who became Grootboom...(p2)

These subjective racial desires to locate ones genesis in white and Coloured ancestries bespeak the complex confluence of imagined and ‘real’ identities, thus problematizing the realm of what we consider to be the ‘real’. The phenomenon of desire also suggests the dialogical relations between what is fantasy and what we consider the

⁷ *A Coloured Place* was written by Malika Leuun Ndlovu, and during its run at the Market Theatre in November 2001, it featured Crystall Tyron and Esmeralda Bihl. In her writer’s note Ndlovu commented that the play was written to honor those “mixed-therefore-historically-invisible”.

‘real’; further suggesting that the ‘real’ might actually be significantly informed by fantasy in degrees that we are not willing to admit.

This complexity, however, reflects the intricate mechanisms of ideology. How, especially in South Africa, ideology exploited the dialogical relations between imagined and actual identities, and systematically appropriated them into the colonial/apartheid’s social engineering strategies to construct socially and politically divergent identities.

These strategies, policed through pencil tests, eyelids tests and language accent tests, became synonymous with demarcated geographical landscapes. Consequently, the emphasis placed upon superficial bodily composition and the politicization of racial difference had an enduring impact on the political as well as individual imaginary among the White, Coloured, and Black subjects. Consequently, the Coloured subject is inevitably a carrier of trauma, a result of an ideology of taboo.

Coloured subjectivity and Trauma

Within a seemingly amenable cultural milieu, the individual seems to seek a distinct identity. The socio-political landscape on the other hand, seems to interpret and construct the individual as a social subject, through hegemonic ideology. There is evident tension between individual agency - the search for his/her subjective identity, and ideology’s insistence on the individual as a social subject. This tension is at the heart of all forms of resistance, both at a national and personal level.

The individual, at least as a social subject, is almost always contesting the strategies of hegemonic ideology which seem bent on objectifying his/her subjectivity. When individual freedom is threatened, critical levels of discontent can lead to a negatively affected sense of self. At its highest manifestation, this paradox can lead to collective, and personal rupture. This rupture underlies manifestations of what can be termed trauma.

Unresolved trauma is understood in psychological terms to reside dormant in the subconscious mind. It marks the victim with a potentially disruptive affect.

Consequently, the victim of such trauma becomes a potential perpetrator. Unresolved trauma therefore, has the aggressive potential to transform its victims into agencies of its transgressive stratagem. Trauma therefore can be understood to be repressed anxieties that return to haunt their victim when least expected.

It therefore follows that in the process of containing trauma, the body is also contaminated by it. Such a condition inevitably marks the body as a contested site of paradoxical pathos; but more than that, it highlights the inherent difficulty involved in discursive processes, to create meaning out of historically traumatized subjectivities. Primarily, this difficulty is characterized by the reliance of identity on the duality of the body as object and subject 'truths'. To this end, the Coloured subject serves as both symbolic and incarnate traumatized object/subject truths.

The production of social identity is inevitably mediated in, and through the biological imperative. Arguably, identities in society are constructed through social institutions, whose agenda is to politicize individuals for hegemonic purposes. The historical construction of South African identities interpreted complex subjectivities to the limiting biological aspect.

This conceptualization of identity generated a peculiar paradigm where the physical determined the acknowledgement and expression of the subjective voice. The consequence of this paradigm was that at the level of meaning construction, the physical body preceded subjectivity. Consequently, the limitations imposed by social identification, through ideology, determined the latitude of subjective choices and their execution.

This limitation exposes the subliminal processes that are encoded in identity construction and its representation. But more than that, it demonstrates how the superficial differences in human bodies were appropriated and exploited as indices to the distribution of political and economic power. A cultural struggle is also a struggle to transcend politics of representation.

In varying degrees, representational strategies and narrative choices reflect on the status of the individual in relation to dominant ideologies and their hegemonic agenda. The ideals of ideology are echoed and corroborated in social institutions that concretize ideology as objective tangible truth. When the dominant South African political ideology interpreted the Coloured subject in a hybridist appellation - *Coloured*, it concretized this ideological vice through official social institutions.

The legal institution created pass books that bore the image of the face of the bearer, and next to it the label 'Coloured'; the civic organizations demarcated geographical spaces as Coloured neighborhoods. The department of labor needed a Christian name and a letter of recommendation from the potential employee's pastor, thereby implicating the church as an official institution colluding with the political agenda's hegemonic strategies.

By concretizing itself through hegemonic social institutions, ideology also concretized, if subliminally, individuals as social subjects. In colluding with these official institutions, the individual agrees, if subliminally, with the dominant ideology and consents to being policed by it. Given that ideological interpretations of individuals as social subjects are structurally flawed by hegemonic motivation, truer reflections of individual identities could be located within cultural milieus. Cultural milieus seem to offer relatively less constricted movement, more freedom of thought and spaces for dissent. If individuals lose their desired identities through ideological subterfuge, one of the possibilities of contesting ideological deception seems to be in cultural mobilization.

The real struggle in contemporary democracy is, among others, a struggle for ideological freedom. Mobilization for political freedom is essentially an ideological struggle. Revolutionary thought and its representation has proven to be one of the historically enduring counter strategies against repressive political ideologies. In relation to official social institutions that service hegemony, counter hegemonic modes of representation offer transgressive alternatives.

Consequently, a new manner of reading and interpreting individual identities outside of ideology's hegemonic ideal seems to be mediated through alternative forms of representation.

This paradigm is dissimilar to the ideological limitation of interpreting individuals as social subjects, which to a large extent derives meaning (especially as reflected in the South African social imaginary) from the corporeal.

The critical difference is that individual subjectivity depends on the 'actual' lived experience within cultural milieus.

I have separated ideological processes of constructing individuals as social subjects and individual cultural agency(ies) in the construction of identity for analytical purposes; however, the boundary between the two is always porous and sometimes indistinct. In the same way ideology proscribed the Coloured body, it also tabooed Black and Coloured geographical spaces. This process of tabooing significantly informs the construction of identity, and is equally implicated in the way in which it informs how Black and Coloured bodies borrow significantly from dominant racial ideologies to interpret their identities.

Coloured Ghettos and The Black Townships

While Coco Merckel in *No Room For Squares* invokes memories of what it means to be Coloured in South Africa; and the effect of derogatory names given to the Coloured persona, he equally exhibits silences on what the Coloured subject thinks of his Black Township counterpart. Relations between the Black township resident and the Coloured ghetto subject – are not an entirely homogenous.

Vesta Smith, a luminary Coloured political female figure in Noordgesig comments on how the apartheid social engineering located light skinned Coloureds in Coronationville while those of a darker hue were relegated to Bosmont and Noordgesig, next to Soweto (a predominantly Black neighborhood).⁸ After her arrest for political activism, Vesta's Coloured pastor implored the congregation to offer prayers for her. The Coloured congregation was torn between those who sympathized with MaVesta because they identified with the political struggle and those who did not. The latter thought the pastor was overstepping his sacred boundaries by asking prayers for a Coloured meddling in Black politics.

There seems to be a significant Coloured social consciousness which locates the Coloured agency outside politics in general, relegating politics to the Black township. This consciousness inevitably appropriates Colouredness within the dominant political ideological centre. Mavesta's anecdote demonstrates the porous relations between socio-political desire and subjective imaginary. As a narrative of a Coloured

⁸ From the documentary on Vesta Smith titled: *Flowers of the Revolution* screened on SABC 1 on 02/08/2006. Vesta Smith represents Coloured female political consciousness and agency and proof of possibilities to imagine identity beyond colonial/apartheid racial reductionist strategies.

people it parades ways in which dominant ideology is inscribed in imagined subjectivity and its desires.

However, the pastor also serves as a voice of dissent not only within the church (an institution politicized as an extension of hegemonic control), but also within a general Coloured social consciousness of aversion to political activism. This paradox does not, however, annul the inherent ideological difference between the Coloured and Black township subjects.

The Coloured Identity: Gendering and Sexuality

The construction, marginalization and subliminal control of Coloured identities are also maintained through gendering strategies. Gendering and race-ing have been grotesquely linked since the advent of Europeans on African shores. Consequently, although Colouredness is a blanketing taxonomy, it is deployed differently in sexually differentiated bodies.

Sexuality, a biological aspect, and gender, a consequent of socialization, are critical in the understanding of processes of identity construction. Colouredness is politicized and experienced in arguably less crude terms in the female Coloured subject than it is in the male personae. Paradoxically, Colouredness carries within its race-ing strategies a subliminal bias to gender. Central to the notion of gendering in relation to racial identity is the white heterosexist male glance which, in its 'other-ing' strategies invests bodies with peculiar sexual connotations. This glance would later find its cinematic embodiment in the Hollywood camera and its symbolic tropes.

In the Hollywood tradition, female representation is not without overt sexual connotations, conveniently constructing sexual images of female subjects for white male spectatorship and consumption. The Coloured female subject is not without the tropes of gendered female subjectivities. In its ‘Othering’ strategies, the white heterosexist glance manifests a dual function in its representation of Black bodies. It constructs female subjects and their representation for the consumption of white male spectatorship, and taboos the black male body, as evidenced in the film - *Birth Of A Nation*. As the first American feature film by Griffiths, *Birth Of A Nation* articulated white American racial attitudes. The film suggested the black male body along the lines of a rapist and savage.⁹

This pervasive Caucasian attitude towards Black bodies underlies racism, as it also informs contemporary race-ing attitudes and ways in which the Black image is constructed and consumed within the milieu of white spectatorship. Today, racism masquerades as “a passion for the primitive, the exotic” (hooks, b. 1994: 10). The film’s appropriation of images of black men as undesirable savages in its syntax was a reflection of the actual bestial treatment suffered by black males in the hands of white American males in the American South.

It was common practice for white males to lynch black male bodies in the audience of the victims’ wives and children. As black male bodies hung from trees, their sexes would be cut off, as though this was a final act of redeeming the black male body from its bestial index. That his sexuality costs him his death, further entrenched the

⁹ *Birth Of A Nation*, an historic film by D. W. Griffiths, was seminal in propagating white America’s national attitudes toward the black body, where the black body was socialized as an antithesis to authentic human identity.

myth of the black male's bestial sexual endowment as an aberration in the white male imaginary.

However, if the white male tabooed the black male body because of its brutish sexuality, it became, in most instances, the psychological project of the white female to physically prove the myth. In South Africa, it is a norm in Coloured neighborhoods like Westbury, Newclare, Coronationville and other Coloured Ghettos to find most men unemployed while women find a sympathetic audience with white employers.

Consequently, the politics of living in a male Coloured body are at variance with those of experiencing Colouredness in a female Coloured body. This then suggests that desire and sexuality are central to the gendering of race. In both milieus across the oceans, the Coloured female became less of a threat to white male supremacy, constructed through the white heterosexist glance as a black body without its mythical sexuality and thus redeemed from being explicated in bestial terms.

The white bias in favor of their women has left the Coloured male psychologically emasculated. Bereft of his dignity and the ability to fend for his family and thereby earn their respect has left the Coloured male with very little room to maneuver the strictures that define the narrative of Coloured male identity. The import of sexuality on racism is a disturbingly enduring phenomenon. The psychological emasculation of the Coloured male carries just as strong a symbolism in his experiential cultural life as the memory of the physical emasculation of the South American Negro.

Emasculated black male bodies represent among other things, a loss of dignity, aborted narratives of identity and their performance, and an express symbolism of white male supremacy. James Baldwin in *Nobody Knows My Name*, comments:

“I do not think that I am the first person to notice this, but there is probably no greater (or more misleading) body of sexual myths in the world today than those which have proliferated around the figure of the American Negro. This means that he is penalized for the guilty imagination of the white people who invest him with their hates and longings, and is the principal target of their sexual paranoia”. (Baldwin, 1961: 151)

Since the historical meeting of peoples of Caucasian descent and African natives, the white male imaginary has often been conflicted by an intrigue with the black female body and terrified by the black male subject. It seems that the natural condition of man renders him incapable of simultaneously harboring two contradictory emotions. White male sexual desire for black female bodies and hatred for the black male manifest themselves as paranoia.

Unfortunately, this psychological condition cannot be addressed within the limited scope of this thesis. However, it appears that the body of myths and sexual paranoia generated in the white male imaginary, as noted by Baldwin, serve as an excuse to taboo the black male subject. It appears to me now, that possibly, without the investment of these myths, the black man’s burden would have been less vexing. But in all honesty, would it?.

CHAPTER 2

The Coloured Male Body: A graffiti wall of shame

Signed with vulgarity, Sealed with defiance

Coloured male identities

The history of Coloured subjectivities is also a history of Coloured males. More than the female body, the Coloured male body is arguably the most potent testament to the disruptive strategies that have marked Colouredness with a sense of shame. *Amper* – *Kaffir*, *Klonkie*, *Dooshie* etc. are but few of the disparaging taxonomies which serve the social imaginary as a means to concretize shame in Coloured male subjectivity.

In defiance, the Coloured male vernacular has evolved into a repository of vulgarity, which also functions as a buffer against social distress. The Coloured male has to curse his way out of hostile situations and the conundrums imposed by a society obsessed with racial categorization. It is in the Coloured male body where the most visceral and vulgar rapture of repressed discontent is made manifest.

The Coloured male body therefore, can be seen as a graffiti wall of shame, signed with vulgarity and sealed with defiance. While *No Room For Squares* sets itself up as a journey into alternative Coloured histories, it also employs male agency to retrace the journey of Coloured histories. This journey, I argue, is also a gender specific exercise marked with a significant preoccupation with Coloured male characters. *No Room For Squares* is an all male cast, Coco, the sole actor, performs to the

accompaniment of jazz music from Bobby's Saxophone, his father, and Henry's piano, his uncle; and at various times Jimmy Mngadi and Jesse Mogale playing the upright bass. In this play we are taken on a journey that retraces the protagonist's family history.

The family in the play serves as a prototype for the Coloured community. In searching for his family roots and history, Coco is also telling the narrative of the Coloured male. The play employs as its chief narrative strategy, non-official historical accounts. "...we'll be taking a trip back to the Sophiatown that my father, Bobby, and my uncle, Henry, remember growing up in" (p1). There is a clear declaration of the gendering of memory. The idea of memory is crucial in the play and the protagonist invests it with a credibility that replaces official historical accounts.

Mattera's *Memory Is The Weapon* does not only invest Coloured memory with defiance, but also interprets Colouredness within a historical imperative. There is a thematic recurrence of memory in Coloured narratives. Together with a resurgent image of combat collude to form a counter narrative to 'official' historical accounts of Coloured history. The play imagines the history of the Coloured as starting in Sophiatown, relocates our focus on this geographical space as a critical site for the construction of underclass identities.

But more than that, the play engages and dialogues with the body of historical and cultural representations of the Coloured persona. In this play the Coloured occupies the centre stage, the essential embodiment of agency, a direct contrast with the narrative strategies of *Sophiatown*, where the Coloured is confined to the margins of

the centre; or the Black Consciousness Theatre, where the Coloured subject is virtually erased from the frames of representation.

“Good evening ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to – Imagine you are on a bus
Bus Tours. So the first thing I’d like you to do is to imagine you’re on a
bus...I’m your tour guide, Coco Merckel”.

The above passage, spoken in an easy, streetwise Coloured accent is the opening of the one hander - *No Room For Squares*. Coco’s street-wise gait and ease on stage embody a contemporary Coloured youth’s arrogance and daring attitude. His costume, a pair of takkies (sneakers), a loosely fitting bright T-shirt, a pair of jeans and a fashionable two toned hat (the front flap rolled up), is an unmistakable prototype of the Coloured’s penchant for colourful clothes.

The protagonist’s call to the audience to imagine operates on a number of levels. Firstly, the theatre medium operates chiefly on suspension of disbelief and the (re)creation of imagined realities. Secondly, the ‘imagine’ pronouncement introduces the major theme in the history of Coloured communities. Since his advent on South African soil, the Coloured has been compelled to imagine who he really is, his identity and its meaning in South Africa’s legalistic social imaginary.

“In South African Law, it has become customary to define the Coloured by exclusion, i.e. a Coloured is a person who cannot be classified as White, Bantu or Asiatic” (Van der Merwe, 1957: 7. cited in Brindley, M. 1976: 73). As aptly noted “...this describes what the Coloured is not... if he doesn’t belong anywhere else, then he is a Coloured’

(Coetzee H.S. 1971: 31). A general sense of the Coloured not being white enough was thus generated. Furthermore, there was the Immorality Act of 1927, prohibiting sexual intercourse between white and African, amended in 1950 and the Mixed Marriages Act, No. 55 of 1949, prohibiting marriages between whites and blacks. The Coloured came to represent a transgression of these Acts, which limited his/her identity to criminal offence.

Consequently, living in a Coloured body was not without a sense of shame, more so in a country preoccupied with racial difference and the policing of its boundaries. Bound to corporeality, and explicated in transgressive terminology, the Coloured was thus compelled to imagine his/her 'real' identity. By summoning the audience to imagine, the play invites the audience to step into the historical shoes of the Coloured. The protagonist introduces himself:

“For those of you who might be visiting from abroad I’m what’s known as a Coloured in South Africa. More recently known as a ‘so called Coloured’. At various times known as an ‘other’, a ‘bushy’, a ‘dushy’, a ‘bruinmens’, a ‘lawu’, a ‘qewa’. I’m sure you can think of some other names” (p1)

The other names Coco refers to are the more recent appellations imposed upon Coloured identity, equally disparaging. And these are - *Amper Kaffir*, *Fifty fifty*, *Dooshie*, *Klonkie* etc. The invocation of these names in a dramatic presentation is also a summons to reflect on the seemingly natural flow of cultural phenomena. The protagonist redirects audience attention to the importance of non-official terminology in society. How cultural labels, often said in jest and posing as non-critical

phenomena, actually serve as symbols of power relations. The images invoked by these taxonomies are crucial to power hierarchies even among the disenfranchised, demonstrating that the disenfranchised are not a homogenous whole, that power relations are inscribed in human relations. These taxonomies are highlighted in the play as critical tools in the schema of stereotyping and serve to concretize stereotypical labeling.

In everyday social relations, the effects of these labels on those who are victimized by them seldom respond in an individual critical voice that demands attention. The obvious reason is that these disparaging taxonomies are seen in jest, blanketing the group more than the individual. However, the centrality of the Coloured subject in a theatre space and his invocation of imposed negative terminology humanizes the otherwise faceless Coloured community, thus giving agency to the Coloured voice.

The area of cultural representation is therefore critical as a barometer to a nation's ethnic grouping and its resultant attitudes informed by power relations. Furthermore, non-official labels seem to play a dual role in serving as witnesses to the construction of identities outside the official sphere, while they also seem to 'interpolate individuals as public subjects' (Althusser, L: 37).¹⁰

Consequently, these labels operate as resonant sites for the construction, dissemination and maintenance of non-official but enduring attitudes. Because their currency depends mainly on their everyday circulation, outside the confines of

¹⁰ Althusser interprets interpolation as a form of 'hailing' or 'calling' as ideology's policing device. His was based on the strategies of hegemony to reconstitute individuals as public subjects. I invoke this concept to demonstrate that even outside official hegemony, non official hegemonic strategies do exert their power.

theoretical prescription, they seem closest to the flux of identity perceptions in lived human experience. At times perceptions reflected in these labels eclipse official statistical accounts.

This simple yet intricate paradigm in non-official labels makes them a fundamental part of how societies imagine and construct their subjectivities which is central to non-official strategies of negotiating power through symbols. These negative nomenclatures, products of street patois, serve as indices of cultural hierarchy; reflectors of the place of the Coloured in society and what the Coloured ‘really’ means in the South African social imaginary.

Fifty-fifty refers to the Coloured as a hybrid made up of two distinctly perceptible halves. *Amper Kaffir* also commonly refers to the inadequate Black genetic import in the Coloured body, which consequently disqualifies him from being a legitimate Black, but a ‘situation’, a condition Modisane (in his investigation of an educated African) refers to as “...something not belonging to either but tactfully situated between white oppression and black rebellion” (Modisane, B. 1986: 94). Coco invokes this concept when quite early in the play he says “A lot of people in my ‘situation’ find themselves wondering just where they fit in” (p2).

The notion of a Coloured as a situation is equally echoed in contemporary disparaging appellations - *Dooshie*, *Klonkie*, *iQheya*, *iLawu*, etc. cognates, essentially linked by a common emphasis on hybridity as an undesirable phenomenon, and an attitude that questions the seemingly ‘unnatural’ biological in-between-ness of the ‘Coloured’. For the Black African underclass, the emphasis placed by these disrobing labels on

hybridity serve the political argument against colonial and apartheid regimes - that the 'Coloured' body is incarnate evidence of a land that was once forcefully taken from its rightful indigenous owners by colonial settlers. The Coloured body also serves this argument as evidence of sexual rape of African women by settlers. On the other hand, the 'Coloured' was for the colonist the embodiment of ambivalence towards the virtues and deficiencies inherent in processes of civilization on the African soil.

The miscegenation which resulted in the Coloured, betrays the Westerners' repressed desire for black bodies, inscribing shame upon the pioneers' grand multiple projects of civilization and Christianization. In this context, the historical ambiguity and restlessness that attends colonial and apartheid attitudes towards the 'Coloured' persona can be understood. Although differentiated by motives, these suggestions have one thing in common – the idea that everybody else, but the 'Coloured', is pure breed. This suggestion cannot proceed unheeded because it negates the complexity of human identity in the 'Coloured'.

The danger posed by perceptions of human identity informed by a value system based on skin pigmentation is central to all systems of subjugation, racism, and finally genocide, as reflected in Europe's understanding of the Jew.

“It is my view that the word *Semite* is derived from the Latin prefix “semi” which means “half”. Semites of the Jewish religion are persons from Africa ... although after much intermixing many Jews lost much of their skin color, they have continued to be identified as a colored people from Africa by whites!

This is the fundamental reason for the historic oppression of Semites within the white supremacy system/culture. (Welsing, F. 1991:95).

The South African 'Coloured's' existence and identity have equally been confined to the materiality of the body, with its perceived hybridist import. Even the label 'Coloured' is problematic in as far as its corporal codification limits the intelligibility of human identity. The term functions to simplify the complex meaning in human identity by an intransigent appellation. Consequently, the South African 'Coloured' is interpreted exclusively in physical terms.

“:But since every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing, it is possible that the very multiplication of categories ...may sometimes act as barriers instead of as means of access to understanding. Reliance on accepted categories ...may mean that certain phenomena essential for understanding identity escape attention” (Lynd, H M. 1958:16)

Lynd's observation raises the question – What is 'really' revealed and hidden by interpreting the 'Coloured' in disrobing terms? In other words, what is the cost of these disparaging labels? Central to the construction of the myths of a “pure breed”, is the necessity to present something that is not. The construction of the 'Coloured' identity has more to do with how 'non-Coloured' identities are imagine, protected and projected, than it has with the 'Coloured' identity.

It is perhaps a logical progression that by conceptualizing 'Colouredness' in disrobing terminology, the nakedness of 'non-Coloured' identities is covered in stolen robes. As

a defense, the objectification of the Coloured serves to hide ‘non-Coloured’ subjectivities.

“The fear of being surprised in a state of nakedness [is] only a symbolic specification of shame; the body symbolizes here our defenseless state as objects. To put on clothes is to hide one’s object state; it is to claim the right to see without being seen, that is to be pure subject”. (Sartre, 1956: 289, cited in Magogodi, 1999: 23)

The notion of illegitimacy inscribed in *Amper Kaffir*, *Fifty fifty*, *Dooshie*, *Klonkie* etc. strongly suggest that ‘Coloureds’ are a product of rape, a nation born from disgrace. The notion of nakedness, which is central to the idea of rape and its products marks Coloured bodies with a shame. Vulgarity is therefore, a consequent of nakedness, and is strongly implicated in *Amper Kaffir*, *Fifty fifty*, *Dooshie*, *Klonkie* etc and the representation of the Coloured persona. Two reactions are invoked whenever one is subjected to vulgarity – retaliation and shame. Generally, these two characteristics are displayed in ‘Coloured’ behavior as a manifestation of hyperbolic and repressed affect.

“In the final analysis, behavior is not simply an individual affair, for when multiplied by thousands, it has profound effects on the life, future existence and well-being of the total people” (Welsing, F. 1991: 81)

Full scale ‘Coloured’ retaliation, which is a “... behavioral practice which resists self- and group negation and destruction” (Ibid: 82) seems to be threatened by the complex

nature of both collective and personal shame that attend 'Coloured' identity.

Consequently, being 'Coloured' also suggests a strong affinity with shame. "Whereas guilt is generated whenever a boundary is touched or transgressed, shame occurs when a goal is not being reached" (Piers, G. cited in Lynd, H M. 1958:22). The eternal gulf generated by a cultural imaginary, which regards everyone else, but the 'Coloured', as fully human, seems hard to bridge.

Since cultural expression is always in dialogue with and reflective of dominant attitudes, vulgarity and shame are inevitably invoked whenever the 'Coloured' is a subject of cultural representation. Although these offensive names - *Fifty Fifty* and *Amper Kaffir* are not always overtly uttered in theatre productions, it is their accrued meaning (which now resides in a collective social consciousness), which further underlines 'Coloured' stereotypes with vulgarity and shame.

The inscription of shame within these taxonomies, and their exploitation in the sphere of cultural representation do not only redefine the materiality of the Coloured body in vulgar terms, but adversely inscribes the meaning of living in a Coloured body with stigma.

"By definition, of course, we believe the person with a stigma is not quite human. On this assumption we exercise varieties of discrimination, through which we effectively, if often unthinkingly, reduce his life chances. We construct a stigma theory, an ideology to explain his inferiority and account for the danger he poses. We use specific stigma terms such as *Amper Kaffir*, *Fifty-fifty*, *Klonkie*, *Dushie*, etc". (Goffman, 1970: 15) (Italics added).

Typically, the project of investing Coloured identity with shame, vulgarity and stigma is essentially about power. Upon closer scrutiny, the cultural representation of the 'Coloured' is a perpetuation of dominant ideologies, which serve to conceal the mechanisms of power. Contemporary ways of seeing the 'Coloured' imply that the 'new' South African democratic dispensation also carries the 'old' colonial ideological paradigm of classification. Althusser aptly notes that - "What seems to take place outside ideology, in reality takes place in ideology" (Althusser, 1971, 49). The idea of a 'new' South Africa therefore seems suspect, and conceals the compulsive relations between the 'old' and the 'new'.

The identity of the 'Coloured' male, relayed through subjective memory and official history, is a central theme in this play. In the play, Coco impersonates some of the male characters that inhabited his world as a youth. This impersonation is accompanied by his comments on the various identities and the impact some of these characters have had on his life and how they informed his own identity.

The treatment of Pubs' history in the play, his failure, disappointment, homelessness and eventual disappearance become a metaphor for the history of the male 'Coloured' identity. Through Pub's character the play serves as an indictment on the colonial and apartheid predilection on race and racial hierarchy when at the end of the play Pubs asks the audience:

‘What’s all this kak (shit)? What is a Bushy, or a Darkie, or a Larnie, a China or India, or whatever? We are all just people and at the end of the day we all end up taking our last journey...’ (p17)

Pubs’ inquisition foregrounds the anxieties that attend the ‘Coloured’ identity, and its place in the ‘new’ South Africa. Pubs’ plea reflects the historical obsession of colonial/apartheid regimes’ with racial hierarchies which marginalized African and Coloured subjects. The play’s narrative strategies engage a variety of Coloured male voices in its representation of what it means to be Coloured. One such voice is the voice of a Coloured gangster.

The Coloured as gangster

No Room For Squares takes us on a journey of Coloured male subjects; their loves, hates, longings and how they were constructed and defeated by the very mysterious forces that attend Coloured identities. One of the crudest and enduring definitions of Coloured male subjectivity is that of a gangster. The gangster can be equated to the biblical Old Testament sanctuary’s *azazel*, the goat that was burdened with the sins of the Israelites.

“There you go, isn’t that what you’d expect? The stereotypes of Westbury and other Coloured areas – junkies, dealers, gangsters and jailbirds? For many of the kids you see around the streets here, these guys are their role models, the junkies, gangsters, dealers and such like” (10)

The Coloured gangster has become a contemporary incarnation of *azazel*, a custodian of all negative stereotyping. In the play we are introduced to a gangster standing at a street corner. Coco walks over to him and cautiously says to him:

“Hey broer, hoe’s it? (Hey brother how is it?) These people are on a bus tour and are interested in what goes on here in Western. Anything to say to the good people?”

There is a tense moment of silence as the gangster, now acted by Coco, looks at the strangers before he gives a venomous outburst –

“Voetsak”! (Get the hell out of here!) (p7)

The house breaks into relentless guffaws, an irrefutable testament of Coco’s portrayal of a gangster. The above moment in the play is memorable due to a number of factors. In his representation of the character, Coco feigns a toothless male Coloured, simulates a gait peculiar to young urban Coloured males at street corners and outside convenient stores.

In the confluence of these attributes, the audience is not told of the gangster, but rather experiences him in a single brief moment of immense credibility. Although he says only one word, and a swearword at that, one hardly feels less familiar with the character because of the economy of words. Paradoxically, the character’s depth is

communicated beyond linguistic meaning. However, the meaning is complex in that the body of the gangster resonates with a truth garnered from the province of the stereotype.

Peculiar characteristics of the Coloured male have been appropriated in the construction of the fantastic male Coloured stereotypes. These include the streetwise *vark* (pig), with missing front teeth (a corporeal transmutation of the narrative of the Cape Coloured male), from which defiant diatribes are ever ready to erupt; the drunkard and lay about, a signification of laziness; the crooner, who sings of a new day he knows will never arrive, the clown who somehow buoys the unforgiving waters that menace his very being with a forced smile.

All these characteristics in the Coloured male simultaneously contest and entrench male Coloured stereotypes. The Coloured male body has therefore become an apparent site for crude codes of Coloured stereotyping. It is arguably in the Coloured male that the inscriptions of ambiguity in Coloured identity are defended and challenged. Some people have gone as far as rationalizing gangsterism among Coloured males as a violent response to an emasculated Coloured male sexuality.

Commenting on family and marriage problems in Western, one of the oldest Coloured neighborhoods, Brindley says:

“Many wives decide to work ...this does not make it any easier for the man to accept his position. He feels increasingly redundant. Some men react to this situation with anger, some by being irresponsible, and others by trying to escape from it through drink” (Brindley, M. 1976: 41)

The public spectacle of violence, as evidenced in gang wars simultaneously violates and vindicates the Coloured male body. The resultant bleeding therefore does not only prove his humanness but also demonstrates the virility of the Coloured male.

The stereotypical terms that have traditionally defined the Coloured male - rough, *dronklap* (drunkard), violent, and unfriendliness (the kind demonstrated in the menacing look of the gangster) etc – have spilled over to mark Coloured neighborhoods. In her essays on *Problems of urban slums*, Brindley observes the following about Western, a Coloured Township near Johannesburg, and one which features predominantly in *No Room For Squares* :

“One frequently hears statements such as: ‘I’ve never seen people live like this – they kill on a Friday in broad daylight!’ or ‘Western is terribly rough’”.
(Brindley, 1976:69)

In the above citation, one notices how putative characteristics of the urban male Coloured are equated with the landscape. The equation of the Coloured landscape with male attributes inevitably leads to a peculiar phenomenon where the Coloured identity and neighborhood are imagined in the male gender. In the play, the menacing look of the gangster is evidence of a lack of hospitality towards the tourists. Cultural theorists appropriate this lack of friendliness as one of the defining attributes for Coloured Townships.

“To some extent the absence of community feeling in Western Township reminds one of similar problems reported by Jennings on Barton Hill (east of Bristol, UK), viz. that every area has a history of difficulties and unfriendliness and that the development of community spirit emerges from this very slowly”. (Ibid: 70)

In the play, after impersonating a jailbird, a drug dealer and a junkie, Coco bemoans the proliferation of negative stereotypes in Coloured neighborhoods.

“There you go, isn’t that what you’d expect, the stereotypes of Westbury and other Coloured areas; junkies, dealers, gangsters and jailbirds? For many of the kids you see around the streets here, these guys are their role models...”
(p10)

The gratuitous violence that characterizes Coloured neighborhoods ‘Western is terribly rough’ (Brindley, 1976:69), is mentioned alongside gangster violence. This

violence ripples throughout the play, investing its rhythm with a hideous tonality. In the world of the play, violence seems to undergo a re-definition. It gushes forth, defiling everything, tainting everyone. It saturates the Coloured neighborhood until it blends with it.

The gangster is a product of this landscape. Instead of being repelled by violence, the gangster confronts danger, relentlessly, as one seeking salvation from its hideous possibilities. As an epitome of the Coloured landscape, the gangster is appropriated in the construction of the Coloured male stereotype. In its logic, the stereotype equates the Coloured male with violence, and represents him as a precarious psychic landscape.

“Growing up in the flats was noisy, crowded and rough. Most weekends you’d see gang fights in the streets and domestic fights spilling out onto the passages and down the stairs”. (p10)

The Coloured landscape is repeatedly defined as “rough”. The terms with which the Coloured male is defined, spill over to redefine his geographical landscape. Essentially, the rupture of madness in the Coloured neighborhood is associated with the express pathos in the Coloured male. The complex anxieties carried in the Coloured male body are vividly concretized in his environment. The Coloured male therefore, is perpetually confronted with the madness both in his material body and his material living conditions.

The double emphasis of madness in relation to the Coloured condition also concretizes all negative stereotyping and resultant myths about the Coloured. Chief among these is the myth that the Coloured is half human. This myth has consequently become the fountain head of counter narratives and myths that explicate excessive violent behavioral in Coloured neighborhoods:

“On questioning local people as to why they felt Western had so many negative features one interesting theory emerged: ‘The place is cursed so it won’t come right’. Someone else explained this belief: *‘Toe die Bantoe hier gewoon het wou hulle nie weg van die plek gaan nie, hulle het baie van die Western gehou. Toe forseer die Regeering dat hulle na Soweto moet trek.*

Toe hulle trek het die Bantoe ’n vloek hier gelos want die Bantoe was baie hartseer om hier weggaan’”. (When the Bantu lived here they did not want to leave the place, they were very attracted to this Western. Then the Government forced them to move to Soweto. When they moved the Bantu left a curse here because the Bantu were very heartsore to leave). (Brindley, 1976:69)

This Coloured tendency to mystify their condition could be read as an aversion to agency. The mythical explanation does not only naturalize this condition, but also normalizes the negative myths about the Coloured male persona and his immediate environment. In his agency, the Coloured seems to collude with the very forces that are bent on his/her demise. However, the play challenges the mythological rationale:

“Some people say Die Kas is haunted by the ghosts of the original inhabitants, when it was Western Native Township, and by the ghosts of Sophiatown. They say it would take ten *sangomas* and ten priests to exorcise the place and then the crime and violence would stop. All I know is we all have to settle our own ghosts. We don’t have to be haunted by the past, we don’t have to fill the shoes of what’s expected of us. We’ve got a choice. It’s tough but we’ve got a choice”. (p17).

The above passage calls for new ways of reading and relating to the Coloured condition. It also suggests a new system of apprehending the forces that have led the Coloured to incessant violence. Relating violently on one’s kin suggests ‘self hatred’. The ‘tough choice’ alluded to in the play is borne on the understanding that any clean break with a violent identity cannot come without pain. It also might have something to do with Baldwin’s observation that:

“I imagine that one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, that they will be forced to deal with pain”. (Baldwin, 1964: 98)

In the brief representation of the Coloured gangster, a significant body of Coloured stereotypes finds expression. But beyond the express enunciation of the stereotype, there is an ambiguity of identity which invests the Coloured psyche with immense anxieties. However, the Coloured identity demonstrates unyielding resilience by regulating itself amidst a definition fraught with indistinctness.

There are instances when the relationship between the Coloured male subject and the stereotype is problematized. Traditional stereotypes that have aided the construction of the Coloured male subject are not adequate pointers to the complexities that attend the representation of his identity. This identity cannot be defined by the anxieties of contesting traditional Coloured stereotypes. In the play, the Coloured male is also explicated in alternative gendered identities, beyond the gangster's reliance on violent behavior as a means to prove his manhood. In the following section I investigate the play's representation of affected male sexuality in the character of Gums, a fahfee runner.

Subverting Sexual identity in Coloured Male Narratives

In the play we are introduced to Gums, a male Coloured whose identity transcends traditional gangster stereotyping. Our tour guide, Coco, beams as he welcomes him:

“And here we’ve got Gums, fah-free runner to explain the intricacies of this popular game”. (p11)

As Gums enters, one cannot miss his very camp demeanor. Like the representation of the gangster, the power of this character is in the performative aspect of his being. Comparatively, the two characters are almost antithetical, one butch and brash, the other effeminate and reticent. However, both exhibit an insatiable need to perform. Perhaps the Coloured male is aware that he is being watched all the time.

As a result, Colouredness seems to serve both as a performance site and a spectacle in itself. On the surface, the superficial impression of this hieroglyphic might read as stereotype, and consequently be dismissed as such. But I hope that this aspect of the Coloured tells us something about the need of the Coloured to say something, and even a greater need to be heard. Brief as his moment was, Gums was very striking.

The numbers of the China man, which are the key to the game of fah-fee are elaborated upon in the speech. These numbers are codes, which are applied to decode the dreams of South African non-whites. Fah-fee, an illicit and predominantly adult game imported from the East is as old as black neighborhoods. Its lifespan in South African slums says something about the cultural role of the game. The semiotic of this game captures the popular imagination precisely because its syntax has forged a semblance to the actual life lived by its players.

At best Fah-fee is a game that translates the fantastic milieu of dreams into mathematical texts. By interpreting these dreams into a numerical text, and rewarding them in monetary units, fah-fee can be explicated as a conduit for the slum dweller's desire. A function similar to the blues, which became a fantastic text for the slave's desire.

The fah-fee game is a complex system that weaves a numerical explication within its fantastic narrative of symbols and dreams. The game invokes a sense of deep meaning of being in the world. "Who had a dream last night?", Gums enquires to a chuckling audience. "If you dream about money", he continues, "You'll play diamond lady or

king, number 17". The irony is that all the diamond fields in South Africa were colonized by the apartheid regime. However, in number 17, the disenfranchised find a certain kind of defiant pride. "Or if you step in some shit you'll play katpan, number 35", Gums continues with a straight face as the audience rocks with laughter, amused by his distant demeanor. Number 35 proves problematic since the township landscape is defined to a large extent by leaking sewerage pipes that discharge a repulsive smell of disease.

Consequently, living in the slums does not only amount to a metaphorical *shit* life, it transcends metaphorical hyperbole to translate into concrete terms. Shit is in the air that the people breathe. It runs wantonly through the streets alongside children at play. The slum dweller has long accepted his condition, and that he/she is last in the agenda of government municipality services that take forever fixing burst sewerage pipes, or never even fix them. As a result, the slum dweller is forced to make peace with all the black shit in the world.

If in Coloured neighborhoods the violence that spills out of flats into passageways and then into the streets appropriates the landscape into its rhetoric, then the human excrement in black townships inscribes the environment with a putrid rhetoric of vulgarity. In civil society, family disputes are contained, for they are potential carriers of familial pride.

The inability to settle these disputes within the privacy of the family is usually interpreted with shame when taken to the public galleries of legal courts. In Coloured

neighborhoods, the normalcy of the proliferation of family violence on the streets is also a forced public performance of the private, a violation of privacy and pride. This performance functions to obliterate the boundaries that delineate the private from the public, and inevitably leaves a sense of shame in its wake.

Similarly, human excrement is naturally a private matter, usually confined to the privacy of the household. Even though toilets were an outhouse in apartheid's spatial and architectural engineering, they are often a reflection of the integrity of the family. It is afforded a special regard and normally kept clean to avert disease. The spilling of excrement onto the streets (the sole playground for children) is a public display of an aspect of human privacy which inscribes the landscape with vulgarity. The ghetto landscape can therefore be understood as an embodiment of political and civil strategies that mark the ghetto and its inhabitants with a sense of shame and vulgarity.

Gums is introduced to us as coming out of this milieu to give expression to the fantastic dreams of the ghetto dwellers. He, Gums, carries all the contradiction of the ghetto in a charismatic manner. He is a performer, a homosexual numbers man, a much awaited figure with the verdict from the China man. Gums' power lies in his ability to shamelessly appropriate his sexuality within the public performance of his identity.

His persona becomes an embodiment of repressed desires that underscore the ghetto landscape. There is a general warm feeling among the audience at Gums' entrance, an unmistakable gesture of acceptance. In the theatre space, Gum's seeming politics of

sexuality are not condemned as aberration. Perhaps it is more the ease with which Gums carries his supposed emasculation and its resultant stereotype that earns him such amicable reception.

While the gangster creases his brow in protest of his emasculation and the ungodly place afforded the Coloured male under the sun, Gums embraces this hypothetical emasculation and celebrates it to the chagrin of the emasculator. If the gangster makes futile attempts to prove, even at the cost of his spilling blood, that he is also human, Gums welcomes the antithesis and bears this monstrosity like a hard earned trophy. Gums demonstrates that Colouredness, like all identities, cannot be extricated from performances of sexual desire. Because cultural gestures resonate beyond themselves in the manner in which they propose a multiplicity of meanings, Gums' carriage seems to suggest the politics of living in a homosexual body.

This sexual orientation challenges the white heterosexist glance and its gendering strategies. Without an honest appraisal of the homosexual phenomenon, it becomes difficult to apprehend the full spectrum of the politics of living in a male Coloured body. For in the homosexual, colonial/apartheid institutions of Christianity and civilization are turned into a farce. The absence of a fear of the white world, its condemning god and discriminating power, seem incarnated in a homosexual body.

For a change, colonial Calvinist strategies of transforming individual identities find no language to address the monstrosity of souls marked with aberration. In the process of consuming Gums as a spectacle, Calvinist pride is inevitably replaced with a

monstrous homophobia. For pride is the hub of indifference. And when indifference is discharged, it leaves confrontation in its wake.

Usually this confrontation is a private affair, where the 'self' detonates all its artillery upon itself. And this internal war sometimes manifests itself in fear, which seems to have very little to do with the status of the feared object, but everything to do with the state of the 'self'. The Coloured subject revels at witnessing a public performance of private fear when custodians of the Christian moral code of conduct publicly demonstrate their irritation at his homosexuality. For this phobia forces those around to reckon with Coloured presence. Because of this effect, the conflicted Coloured male body finds in its homosexual condition a peculiar truce with itself. But more than that, it finds occasion to be present.

Consequently, the Coloured male body and its attendant rage, is finally tamed and made habitable. And it does so by courting its otherwise despicable 'self', the monstrous 'self'. Although not spectacular, this is a significant strategy in the narrative of the self, especially where Coloured male subjectivity is explicable in the rough. The discursive body of stereotypes that have proliferated the construction of Coloured male subjectivity attests to fictions of identity that seldom transcend physical phenomena.

Paradoxically, the relatively open practice of homosexuality in Coloured communities is both a gender statement as well as a racial one. The subliminal yet confounding defiance suggested by the Coloured homosexual in the face of Christian morality has

become a question in transit without ever exiting, for it can never be answered, it seems. This defiance exposes the hypocritical fictions intrinsic to the Calvinist notion of the sacredness of the human body.

This exposure is not without a self determined arrogance validates the subaltern as the ultimate. It is this arrogance (fashioned in the fires of absurdity) that causes the Coloured male to think hard about his condition. And I imagine he reckons that – if deviation from ‘normal’ sexual orientation carries the apocalyptic prize of condemnation, then hell will be teeming with those whose ideologies profaned Coloured bodies. Instead of challenging the emasculation in the Coloured male, Coloured homosexuality, to a significant extent, seems to embrace the perceived aberration and normalizes it.

Coloured homosexuality therefore subverts a bodily aberration into a political power of a special kind, fervent enough to contend with. The Coloured homosexual has weighed the Calvinist god and found him wanting. For the Coloured homosexual, this god is a white construct, serving hegemonic needs of white political power. And like all constructs, the Coloured homosexual laughs the last as he watches this god succumb to the demands of time. He watches the spectacle of lies that propped up this god give in to the weight of time’s truth.

Gums and the gangster are not the only significant male Coloured characters in the play. One other character of note, is Pubs. He is the only one with a comprehensive

narrative trajectory. Of all the characters, Pubs is the only one whose story is told from beginning to end.

Pubs – A discarded Identity

“Our first stop is here at Oleander Place just up the road from Percy Pepper Street. Just in front of you here, you can see Pubs’ Willow tree. You may well be thinking, big deal, a willow tree, is that what we paid to come on a tour and see? But this willow tree tells a story. Up until two years ago, on any given day, you would find Pubs under this tree.. None of us really knew where he had come from. All we knew was that he was an institution. He used to sleep under this tree and then one day, Pubs just wasn’t there. All that was left was his jacket”. (p3).

After this introduction Pubs is summoned. He is an old battered man with a torn jacket. His speech recalls the music of the 1950’s. Although well stricken in years, his is still a vibrant character. After this brief impression Coco gives a comprehensive background about Pubs.

“And that’s old Pubs. Sadly missed. It was meeting him that made me start wondering, and asking, where it is that I come from. How could this old man be here one day and gone the next? What was his story? How did he end up under a tree in Westbury? Where was his family? Where did he come from? It

made me realize how important it is for me to know my history. To fill in the blank pages”. (NRFS, 5)

It is striking that Coco takes his cue from a wondering stranger. And that the core of who he is, is invoked by the presence and absence of Pubs. The tendency to define the Coloured identity what it is not is apparent. It is a tendency to define oneself through an appropriation of the discarded. That the trajectory of this search is evoked by Pubs, one outside the family circle, bespeaks the significance of a collective identity in the Coloured social consciousness. Contrary to the politicization of the nuclear family in Coloured communities, Colouredness is imagined in the collective.

The representation of Pubs resonates with a multiplicity of meanings. One of these is that any profitable exercise of re-examining the Coloured identity has to do with retracing the socially abandoned self. Pubs embodies an aspect of the abandoned. It is not the current ‘self’ that bears the marks of significant identity, but the shameful self that occupies the margins. For the latter bears the marks of all the historical defeats and triumphs necessary to chart the precarious narrative of who we truly are.

The shameful self is also emblematic of how much we can and have endured as a people. As we get to know him better, we learn that Pubs has taken his fair share of beating from life; a beating that cannot be divorced from his being a Coloured. In the play, Pubs, years after the removals, still reminisces with nostalgia about Sophiatown. The audience learns that he never really left Sophiatown. Although thrown out of it, he still inhabits it through memory.

For Pubs, Sophiatown is no longer a geographical site but a mental state. He still lives its triumphs and its failures. We learn that Pubs, a self-made crooner, never recovered from the setback of failing a talent contest.

“Ek was daar by die (I was there at the) talent contest. I gave it my best shot. If things had worked out, who knows, I could have been a somebody”. (p15)

In the play, we also learn that Pubs failed the talent contest because of his impersonation of Louis Armstrong. After his performance the jury shouts out “We don’t want another Satchmo, sing your own songs”. The indictment on Pubs for impersonating the American singer is a commentary on Sophiatown’s 1950’s culture. This culture was defined significantly by the consumption and imitation of American culture, relayed through popular movies of the time.

The culture of watching films in Sophiatown impacted strongly on the construction of both Black and Coloured male subjectivities. The construction of Sophiatown male identities was informed by the fashionable lifestyle of the American gangs. The 1940’s zoot suits, Stetson hats, the impressive Buick cars. All these colluded with a fast life that was accompanied by late night soirées and became synonymous with Sophiatown gangs. Pubs recalls the fast life of gang activity in Sophiatown:

“Wat weet die moegoes in Westbury van cleva’s, die Truckadors, FBI’s, Varadors? Daar in Kofifi daar was clevas. The Americans, the Whipsies, the Vultures, the Skiet Mekaars, the Russians”. (What do these squares (stupid(s))

in Westbury know about clevers, the Truckadors, FBI''s, Varadors? There in Kofifi were clever(s). The Americans, the Whipsies, the Vultures, the Skiet Mekaars, the Russians. (p16)

The Sophiatown gangster was known for his affinity with Jazz. Characterized chiefly by improvisation, Jazz lent an indeterminate slant to the mix, constituting Kofifi's male identity into one of flux and boundless cultural possibilities. In the social imaginary, the gangster and the jazz persona represented the same 'hip', unbridled image of a 50's youth who bore political consciousness and a range of fashion style imported from the American vogue.

If in this image congregated all the stereotypes of the social rebel, the image also bore an unavoidably sinister attraction that informs all villain personae. This attraction, I suspect, has to do with the complex aspect of improvisation that is a definitive characteristic of jazz. Commenting on the jazz phenomenon, Ralph Ellison notes that:

“There is a cruel contradiction implicit in the art form itself. For true jazz is an art of individual assertion within and against the group. Each true jazz moment (as distinct from the uninspired commercial performance) springs from a contest in which each artist challenges all the rest, each solo flight, or improvisation, represents (like the successive canvasses of a painter) a definition of his identity: as individual, as member of the collectivity and as link in the chain of tradition. Thus, because jazz finds its endless

improvisation upon traditional materials, the jazzman must lose his identity even as he finds it” (Cited in Gates, H. L.1988:1)

When this aspect of jazz improvisation is imagined as an intricate part of Kofifi’s male subjectivity, it translates the seeming aberration that is central to Sophiatown’s male subject into a phenomenon of intrigue that borders on the fantastic. It was this fantastic life lived on the dangerous fringes of society that explicated the youngsters of Sophiatown in the popular adage – *die young and make a beautiful corpse*.

However, Sophiatown’s gangsters were also the results of the blurred line between reality and filmic fantasy. The viewer’s appropriation of filmic fantasy into reality comments on the enduring impact the cinematic experience has upon imagined identities. The gangster genre favored the maverick. Its narrative structure demonstrated the triumph of the underdog against officialdom. Given apartheid’s racial policies which marginalized Coloured and Black subjects, the gangster genre became a conduit for the articulation of dissent. The Sophiatown male subjects internalized the illusions of the silver screen as a counter narrative to the repressive meta-narrative of the apartheid schema. However, this counter narrative was limited to gangster activism. As a result, Sophiatown young male subjectivity became synonymous with gangsterism.

Gangster narratives and the Contemporary Coloured male Identity

Since the days of Sophiatown, Colouredness has generated various myths that collude to construct the Coloured male subjects as a custodian of gang activity. Coloured neighborhoods are politicized as hubs for criminal activity characterized in gangsterism. This postulation implicates the Coloured male as a criminal agent. The resultant discursive hypotheses buttress the attempts to locate the genesis of gangsterism within Coloured male subjectivities. Such hypotheses also function to conceal the ‘actual’ origins of gangsterism. In its representational strategies and narrative choice, the play draws our attention to the construction of the Coloured male identity along the lines of a gangster stereotype.

The play does not overtly challenge this construction. By locating the advent of organized gang activity in Sophiatown, the play challenges the politicization of Coloured neighborhoods as enclaves of gang activity. It also contests the notion of the Coloured male subject as the sole custodian of gangster activity. Gangsterism in the play is implied as a myth that functions to hide its actual genesis. Pubs’ testimony redirects audience focus to Sophiatown as a site for the origins of gangsterism. The play suggests that Sophiatown, an admixture of racial identities, was a centre for peri-urban gang activity. The only record of a Coloured gangster of note in the 1950’s is Don Mattera.

Gangsterism and the Witwatersrand underclass

In his biographical account of gang activity, Van Onselen traces its origins to a certain ‘Nongoloza’ Mathebula’s *Umkhosi Wezintaba* – the Regiment of the Hills, an underworld band of black criminals living on the Witwatersrand hills. Nongoloza left Zululand after a disagreement over a lost horse with a white employer in Bergville. Upon arrival in Johannesburg he took up employment in Turffontein as a horse-groom. Impressed with his sense of judgment, his white employer invited him on one of his nocturnal trips.

Nongoloza witnessed how his master, together with three other white men, robbed coaches, waylaid carts ferrying wages to remote gold mines, and defrauded unsuspecting migrant workers by posing as policemen. Breaking ties with his employer, Nongoloza went on to form the first organized gang on The Reef of the late 1800’s. In the play *Pubs* alludes to a branch of this activity:

“Ek was ook met n’ gang, protection vir mense wat gewerk het daar in Jeppe Elke Vrydag on het hulle wages gaan collect. Hulle was bang vir bamba inkunzi – being robbed. We would meet them in town, daar by die OK Bazaars and give them their wages. We’d get a percentage. A tiep. (I was also with a gang, protection for people who worked at Jeppe. Every Friday we would go and collect their wages. They were afraid of being robbed. We would meet them in town, there by the OK Bazaars and give them their wages. We’d get a percentage. A tip) (p16)

The gangs that defrauded migrant workers by posing as policemen, gave birth to yet another gang – The Protection gang, who got their spoils from safeguarding the wages of the migrant workers. Van Onselen further observes that the economic boom of the area, following the discovery of gold in the 1880's, saw the escalation of prostitution and venereal diseases. To counter the weakening of his manpower, Nongoloza passed a law that elderly gang members were to take younger members of the gang as *izinkotshane*, 'boy wives'.

This activity found resonance with 'host cultures offered by the prisons and mine compounds'.¹¹ Although contemporary gang activity is generally seen to find expression in the agency of the male Coloured, its pioneer and architect are black and white men. The most colossal gang activity that defines the Johannesburg area is the stealing of land and its mineral resources by white men.

The Witwatersrand was a melting pot of white gangs rushing for fortunes of gold, and black men who "were systematically separated from their means of production – land and livestock – either through wars of dispossession, or through economic processes over which they were denied any form of political control by their white conquerors and compelled to take a move to the farms, towns and cities where they could sell their only remaining asset – their labour" (Van Onselen C. 1984: 2).

In *No Room For Squares*, Pubs is a repository of alternative history, the embodiment of Coloured memory and its enunciation.

¹¹ Van Onselen also captures Nongoloza's journey into various prisons on The Reef, organizing gang activity inside prisons. Defiant and organizing resistance against prison authorities, Nongoloza staged escapes and executed ruthless punishment to those who infiltrated his gang as informers for the prison officials.

Colouredness: A Contemporary Imaginary and its performance

On another level Pubs' life testimony showcases another pedigree of a Coloured male; one who possibly had his identity shaped by the apartheid system. His life of a defeated Coloured male refutes the idea that all Coloureds had better privileges. He is the incarnate evidence that passing for a Coloured was not always a guarantee against the menacing forces of apartheid's social engineering.

Many got shipwrecked while charting its dangerous waters, and Pubs, the debilitating remains of the wreckage, has come to haunt us with the smell of a shameful history. And it was possibly the shameless performance of this history that provoked Coco. For when people demonstrate defeat with undaunted precision, it is fear that they instill in their kind. Fear that - this could be me tomorrow; or worst still - that this could have been my father. And to avert the former, one is temporarily shocked into making something of one's own life, to force, as it were, one's own narrative .

The unsettling spectacle in the person of Pubs seems to confront Coco with questions of the meaning of his own life. As though responding to Pubs' unspoken question, Coco says:

I've tried various options in my life - my uncle Neville led me to politics and law. In fact my first TV appearance was courtesy of the SAP (South African police). I was on the news; dragged across the street by a police dog during a student protest. That was when I was studying law at Wits. In standard nine

myself and some other guys were arrested for allegedly attacking a cop during the Tri Cameral Elections. Apparently we had been identified and the police had evidence; a rock with our fingerprints. How four different people's fingerprints ended on one rock still remains a mystery. I gave up politics and law. At the end of the day it seems that my grandmother Florrie's blood still runs in my veins, like her and my dad, I ended up on the stage" (p16)

The above extract locates Coloured students within the currents of political agitation. The Coloured youth is often explicated in unruly terminology. In the social consciousness, such terminology serves the rhetoric of subjugation. It is this rhetoric that constructs the Coloured youth as a perpetrator of gratuitous violence, lacking political consciousness and agency. Commenting on this aspect of Coloured representation Coco draws our attention to Tommie and Rita: "...those two are getting on and moving up.

They're both final year LLB students at RAU (Rand Afrikaans University). That's the problem with stereotypes. You only hear about the baddies. You don't hear about the success stories. When it comes to news they are boring. So it's only the gangsters and Co. who make the headlines" (p13). The problem of Coloured identity with regard to the Coloured youth is strongly highlighted in the play.

Coloured identity is understood as a *situation* or a *dilemma* even in the world of the play, which demonstrates how the Coloured persona has internalized his marginal place in the social imaginary.

“A lot of people in my situation find themselves wondering just where they fit in. The common response is – I am not black enough, or white enough, so, am I enough? Who am I better than, or lesser than or equal to? Hopefully these questions will cease to worry people and we’ll all just get along with the fact that we are all just human. No matter what colour or mix of colours we may be. I have my own solution to this dilemma. One I can highly recommend. I have learnt Zulu, Sotho, Xhosa, SiSwati...so I fit in everywhere. (p2)

The ‘new’ Coloured voice in the Coloured youth seems to be more at ease with living in a body potentially marked with a multiplicity of identities. Recently, two Coloured young women, the Muis-hond sisters, have formed a poetry performance duet which they have titled *The Bushwomen*, embracing historically tabooed ancestry among the Coloureds. Commenting on the notion of ancestry among Coloureds, Mda notes that:

“Some of South Africa’s Coloured people even attributed their dark complexions to Brazilian sailors rather than to Xhosa grandmothers. They identified more with imagined Italian or Irish ancestors and denied any connection with to the indigenous Khoikhoi forebears” (Mda, 2001: 4)

Where the older generation generally took pride in imagined singular European ancestry, the contemporary Coloured youth seems to celebrate his/her identity as a confluence of compound identities. The latter seems to perceive the potential power

of the ability to relay a collective consciousness in a seemingly problematic singular Coloured identity.

This power seems to appropriate the dialectical principle articulated by the German philosopher, Hegel, who argued that the evolution of ideas occurs through a dialectical process – that is, a concept gives rise to its opposite and, as a result of this conflict, a third view, the synthesis, arises. The synthesis is at a higher level of truth than the first two”. (Encarta Encyclopedia Standard 2004). If Hegel’s understanding of dialectics is extended to explicate racial identity and the construction of its hierarchies, then the Coloured identity, precisely because it is an express confluence of various identities, this identity occupies a higher rung in the hierarchy of “truth”.

The contemporary Coloured youth demonstrates this higher level of truth when s/he gives a coded performance of Coloured identity as an identity inscribed with differences. This contemporary understanding of Coloured identity is a threat to a history obsessed with racial binaries. This binary manner of viewing and constructing racial hierarchies still informs contemporary dominant ideologies, where the self is defined by how it is different from the ‘Other’.

The bias on racial difference in dominant ideologies of identity and its representation is central to the cultural strategies of ‘Othering’. Coloured identities, as evidenced in contemporary youth cultural representations seems to transcend the threshold of difference in its celebration of difference. Contemporary Coloured subjectivity seem to operate beyond the limited conceptions of colonial/apartheid apprehensions of identity.

Pubs' performance of a vagrant Coloured male that mysteriously disappears could also be seen as a performance of caution. This caution is personal and collective. Its collective pertains to the flaws in imagining identity in exclusive terms. Pubs is a recluse, living under a tree, without any social interaction with his immediate environment.

His demise is also an uneventful local exit, a reflection of his lack of agency to interact with his community. It is from such exclusive Coloured imaginary that Coco and the Muishond sisters attempt to break. On a personal level, his life demonstrated the depths into which young Coloured lives could be hurled if lived recklessly, with no connection to the collective.

His life is suggestive of a moral lesson based on the power of choice. It could be read as advocating for individual agency in the construction and performance of one's journey in life within communal boundaries. And this agency is aptly echoed by Coco in the play:

“...we all have to settle our ghosts. We don't have to be haunted by the past.
We don't have to fill the shoes of what's expected of us. We've got a choice.
It's tough but we've got a choice” (p17)

No Room For Squares represents a Coloured milieu riddled with the ghosts of the past. Pubs, although beaten and homeless, is appropriated as a voice of reason in the world of the play. “What's all this kak (shit)?”, he confronts the audience as he exits.

“What’s a dusky (Coloured), or a darkie or a larnie (whitey), or a China, or Indian or whatever? On is almal net mense (we are all just people). And one of these days we’ll all end up taking our last journey. So we may as well make the most out of life and enjoy it while we’re at it”.

The woes in Pubs’ life are traced to the colonial/apartheid’s strategies of social engineering and its neurosis with racial hierarchy and contamination. Pubs redirects audience attention to the finality of all human journeys – death; and how racial differentiation robs individuals of the joys of life. Apartheid racial differentiation and its menacing ability to mark human bodies for hegemonic purposes, has inevitably left Pubs with an indelible mark of regret for a lost life.

This loss is not without an empty sense of being. Pubs’ life, relayed through his memory, was stuck in a multiracial Sophiatown. The amnesia of his life before the infamous removals becomes a solitary psychological weapon of resistance against the removals that took away his home. The Coloured body, seen in the person of Pubs, is represented as a site of political transgression by colonial and apartheid forces.

One sees in Pubs, idiosyncratic characteristics which define him within the spectrum of the 1950’s politics - an individual battling with the political exigencies of being Coloured in a white dominated South Africa. The body never comes empty on stage. It is a carrier of subjective meanings. The representation of the body is also a simultaneous demonstration of unintended subjectivities. Through Pubs’ invocation,

the play also aimed to summon the history of Coloured communities in the Johannesburg area.

The play's central theme is that of forgotten Coloured history. In its narrative, the play invokes Coloured memory and agitates for its place in the social imaginary. However, collective memory also harbors a subjective impulse, which is not always reflective of collective consent.

Memory and the Subjective voice

The social historical account proposed in *No Room For Squares* is also a history of Coloured patriarchy. The celebration of Coloured memory in the play's narrative choices cannot be seen outside Coloured patriarchy. In this play, Colouredness is remembered, reconstructed and represented in unmistakably male terms. Patriarchal concerns in the play cannot be readily discerned since the play sets out to reconstruct Coloured history and consequently masquerades as a collective voice of Coloureds.

The performance of memory therefore, also functions to hide the position from which the subject remembers. Within its performative dynamic, memory involves omissions, silences and selection. Such a dynamic also reflects critical positions of the subjective and collective, male and female voices in the reconstruction of history. Consequently, patriarchy informs the tone, and function of history and its representation in society.

Wood alerts us to the hazards that attend collective memory and history:

“There is no truly objective history; each generation interprets the past according to its own needs, and this applies to art...the way in which we select and reject, analyze and define, reveals our own priorities, our own ways of seeing” (Wood, M. 1989: Foreword)

No Room For Squares seems to see the past through a male lens. In contemporary cultural studies modern feminists question historical accounts that are biased towards patriarchy. They argue that such historical accounts are intrinsically about power, and that they harbor strategies to subject female subjects to discursive as well as material discrimination. It therefore becomes crucial to investigate the role of Coloured female subjects in *No Room For Squares*.

The representation of Coloured female subjects in *No Room For Squares* seem to occupy a peripheral space. For example, Florie’s maternal stature in the family narrative is significantly truncated. Her life’s meaning is scantily alluded to in the play.

“Bobby and Henry’s mother, Florie, was a piano teacher. One of the prized possessions at 59 Ray Street was a baby grand piano...Bobby remembers how it got there. Every time Bobby’s mother was asked to play it meant that his father had to drive to their in-laws in Alexandra to borrow their piano. Eventually old Hentie (Bobby’s father), got fed up, went into town and bought his own. That’s how the baby grand ended up in the house. And that’s how most of the family, 13 kids, ended up musical” (p5).

The above excerpt is the only time Florie is significantly recalled in the play. As a narrative device in relaying memory, the passage tells us a lot about how it organizes its subjects within the landscape of memory. The narrative, as a frame of memory, represents male activity.

Although the narrative starts off with Florie as a potential protagonist, it veers off to focus on other male subjects, relegating Florie to a peripheral space. In the time and space that it takes to narrate this memory, Florie becomes a memory within a memory. The meta-narrative is almost completely about males remembering other males.

The act of remembering is also inevitably, an act of re-membering, where the latter pertains to an act of putting together, or assembling. Perhaps Colouredness is interpreted in male terms precisely because it is the Coloured male body that is crudely marked with physical, emotional and psychological dislocation and dismembering.

However, this does not appease our curiosity that in a musical play that has a piano on stage, Florie is not remembered through what she was known for – playing the piano. The play seems to dislocate Florie's memory from the piano, which served as a spiritual and material pivot for her whole being. The play's silences on Florie are the silence of a rambling piano at her hands, echoing the unimaginable things that filled her bosom – the Sophiatown slum, bitter men drenched in *Skokiaan* (home brew beer) and cursing. And Florie sitting at the piano, her skin glowing faintly like spent candle

light, I imagine what it meant for her to be reflecting a lesser light, and the joy that emanated from the music in the wailing of her thirteen children.

In the world of the play, Florie is crudely dismissed and allowed to die with her music. Her minor reflection screams for the rambling full range of the piano keys. It is this full range that the play's representation of women lacks, which also suggests the actual place of Coloured women in the Coloured male psyche. In the play, Coloured females are almost constructed as fairies.

Like all proverbial fairies, these women seem inexperienced and are conjured up and dismissed at will. The place of Coloured women in *No Room For Squares* is peripheral. This attitude in the play's narrative strategies and modes of remembering reflects a male-gendered bias.

In this chapter I have reviewed the colonial/apartheid racial strategies that have invested Coloured identities with a reading that seldom transcends corporeality. This reading, has bequeathed Coloured identities with a sense of shame and trauma. I have demonstrated that *No room For Squares*, in challenging this limited and limiting reading of identity has ironically embraced this limitation in its narrative strategies.

I have shown how the play appropriates apartheid's geographical demarcations which marked the land with racial difference in the manner in which it imagines Colouredness as a geographically separate phenomenon. Also, I have tried to illustrate the susceptibility of memory as social history and how its performance functions to simultaneously hide and reveal subjective and gendered voices.

The play reflects modernist apprehensions of identity, its construction and representation. However, these limitations in the interpretation and representation of Coloured identities are highlighted and challenged in *Umm...Somebody Say Something*.

CHAPTER 3

Rethinking Identity: Umm...Somebody Say

Something

Introduction

Umm...Somebody Say Something was work-shopped in 2000 by an all female cast from Wits University. Within the political euphoria of a newly attained democracy, the influx of 'new' rights, and the attendant flux of imagined freedoms, a group of young Black and 'Coloured' women studying at Wits University got together in a series of playmaking workshops which culminated in the production of *Umm...Somebody Say Something*.

In the play we are introduced to five SPECIMENS, young women in their early twenties. Each of these specimens performs the narrative of their identity and its construction. Two of them are Coloured girls, one who went to a predominantly white school, and forged intimate relations with fellow black students. This, together with her affected accent earns her the envy and resentment of her Coloured peers and neighbours. Despite the criticism, in the play she argues for the dignity of the Coloured community. The second one narrates the difficulties she encountered in dealing with her identity as a hybrid between races.

The third SPECIMEN performs her narrative of growing up under a controlling wealthy mother; while the fourth, introduced as SPECIMEN 1 in the play, is an androgynous female whose narrative entails a performance of the trauma of being trapped in a female body whose affected sexuality torments her with male sexual needs. The fifth, introduced as SPECIMEN 4 in the play, narrates the story of growing up in a white household, going to predominantly white schools, and acquiring a predominantly white South African aesthetic sensibility while her mother, a maid, lives in a backroom in the same yard.

The interpretation of 'Colouredness' in *Umm...Somebody Say Something* strongly suggests a departure from traditional modes of representation. This departure, I argue, is also a move from modernist modes of representation which informed apartheid's racial stratification. This hierarchical structure conceived of white racial identity as a purer breed. As a result, it was constructed, politicized, and polarized as a homogenous coherent entity, anxious of contamination by less purer breeds. This anxiety is also a central and contentious distinction of modernism, as is its dichotomy between high art and mass culture.

Colouredness: A Postmodern state

“Modernism constituted itself through a conscious strategy of exclusion, an anxiety of contamination by its other: an increasingly consuming and engulfing mass culture. Both the strength and weaknesses of modernism as an adversary culture derive from that fact” (Huyssen, A. 1986: vii).

To generate meaning, modernity as an ‘adversary culture’ is contingent on the binaries of high and low art. Within modernity’s meaning creating strategies is the pre-industrial moralistic dichotomy between good and evil. This modernist apprehension reflects a contingency on the autonomy of identities and their susceptibility to contamination by the ‘Other’.

Umm...Somebody Say Something poses a discursive rationale in its representational choices which necessitates a new reading of Colouredness and Coloured identities. The play’s stylistic and thematic temperament forges a sorority with postmodernist thinking where identity is understood to be a complex confluence of paradoxes, an inevitable result of the collapse of modernist hierarchies.

In this play, Colouredness is understood, beyond limiting racial implications, to be a post-human condition that informs the politics of living in a postmodern body. This understanding transcends colonial/apartheid racial apprehensions, which reflects a corporeal reductionist imperative. *Umm...Somebody Say Something* problematizes the body politic by shedding light on the contradictions underlying identity and the possibility of its rupture in a postmodern milieu. There is no distinction between the

body and the postmodern condition, instead, the body is understood to be a postmodern site.

The play's tangential apprehensions of identity draw our attention to the postmodern body as a site of contradiction, incoherence and rupture. This divergence is a break with modernist discursive practices and it also challenges binary notions that traditionally informed racial organization. The reflection by the play on the body as a postmodern phenomenon necessitates a brief overview of modernism and postmodernism as discursive and material conditions that inform the problematic milieu of identity, its construction and representation.

'Modernism' is understood to have emerged after the two major wars, the American civil war and the French Revolution. These wars affected the American and European public imaginary in a significantly radical manner and showcased the possibility of protest as a viable tool for public subjects. This possibility exposed the inherent flaws in traditional thinking and social organization, the notion that social organization was beyond critique since it was a divine pattern, handed down to man by God.

The results of 'modernization' were seen in the transformation of human environments into urban landscapes where the pursuit of freedoms became a pivotal theme. The print media mobilized for greater freedom to police the transactions of civic, regional and national governance. Industry organized its labor force into unions to lobby for better stakes and shares in the spoils of industrial labor. The mass cultural identity resonated with the icons of modernism - power plants, the reliance of production on industry and the emphasis placed on speed.

With old traditions rendered suspect, new forms of imagining the status of the human subject in society took prevalence, challenging, in their wake, old traditions.

“Modernization, must be thought of, then, as a process that is simultaneously creative and destructive” (Black, C.E. 1966: 27). In destroying old traditions, modernism entrenched novel ways of imagining the role of the individual as a free agent in a socio/political milieu. As a free agent, conscious of her/his power to mobilize and challenge hegemonic strategies, the individual bequeaths modernity with endless possibilities of technological, economic and social advancement, equally matched by resultant strife.

Jean – Jacques Rousseau was the first to introduce the term *Moderniste* to our modernist glossary. He applied the word to the condition of Europe during his time. He is said to have found the society “...at the verge of the abyss”, and experienced the Parisian capital “as a whirlwind”. Rousseau is famed to have bequeathed the literary world with a discursive tool to unpack the wanting condition of pre-French Revolution Europe. Consequently, he is seen as “...the source of our most vital modern traditions, from nostalgic reverie to psychoanalytic self-scrutiny to participatory democracy...”(Berman, M. 1982: 17).

One characteristic that defined the nineteenth century generation was the simultaneity of inhabiting two worlds, resulting in access to memories of pre-industrial tradition and the experience of modernity as a contemporary culture. However, in time, the density of modernism would overshadow recollections of its dawn and the forces that necessitated its advent.

This condition catapulted modernist subjects into a complex space where the ‘actual modern experience’ could not be traced through memory. Similarly, the definitive crisis of modernity for the postmodern subject is the schism between contemporary postmodern states and the collective amnesia of the advent of modernity. The postmodern subject seems to be defined by a paradox of an immersion in the modern, accompanied by a loss of the roots of modernism.

If modernity’s crisis stems from a sense of amnesia with origins - the break with old pre-industrial traditions, then postmodernism can be seen to be challenging modernist systems of creating meaning, which seem to have expired for the demands of postmodern states.

For the postmodernist, the transmutations of contemporary subjectivities necessitate novel strategies of interpreting identity. Modernity’s anxieties of high art’s contamination by the masses’ low art hide more than represent the inherent intertextuality that defines the sorority between the two. *Umm...Somebody Say Something* locates itself within similar postmodern debates that challenge modernism by deploying the body as a self-conflicted entity marked with contradiction and incoherence.

The body therefore, in the postmodern imaginary, is already contaminated by its own contradiction. The rapture of modernity’s homogeny is threatened by the postmodern body’s internal difference. Through its narrative strategies, the play proposes this complex postmodern condition as a Coloured state critically central to the construction of contemporary female identities.

In the play, these identities are demonstrated as encoded with a postmodernist Coloured imperative that necessitate a reading beyond modernity's 'adversary' strategies. Stylistically and thematically, the play mobilizes for mass appeal, and models itself as a form of mass cultural product by embracing aspects of hi-hop.

Contemporary Histories – Local content within a Global form

“Oral history can be a means for transforming both the content and the purpose of history. It can be used to change the forms of history itself, and open up new areas of enquiry...it can give back to the people who made and experienced history, through their own words, a central place” (Thompson, P. 1978: 2)

Because 'official' histories are narrations of events from positions of power, and because these positions are informed by hegemonic agenda, they tend to edit out the multiplicity of voices that in reality construct historical events. In *Umm...Somebody Say Something* there is a deliberate attempt to embrace non-official strategies of enunciating history.

In a peculiar manner, the construction of both the script and the dramatic action in this play tap on contemporary uses of music in rap and hip-hop. In both these styles of music, other instruments are deliberately edited out in order to fore-ground the urgency in the spoken word.

In this play, the formal construction of the plays text attempts to erase all the formal traditional manner of writing plays. For example, the scene titles in the play are

replaced by character titles, and the event title. The text layout looks like a workshop event captured on paper. This device seems unapologetic, almost a deliberate intervention aspiring towards ultimate transparency, nakedness, and rupture.

As a result, the play text seems to make no effort at hiding its processes, which it consciously reflects upon in its performance. To reinforce this strategy, the play makes no use of dramatic plot. Instead, the theme becomes the plot where characters isolate critical events that inform the construction of female identities. All these strategies strip the theatre space of its traditional aesthetic paraphernalia in a quest for a vacant sonic space where the agitation in the human voice can travel, affecting the world with its pathos. Incidentally, this quest is also prevalent in the musical forms of hip-hop and rap music.

In hip-hop, the spoken word is usually enunciated from a position of a highly agitated emotional state, and the themes are about the inefficiency of the status quo, the desire to topple the system, the need to disaffiliate from sanctioned social structures, and social betrayals suffered by the youth and how these have literally ‘messed’ up global youth identities especially in disenfranchised communities.

Both hip-hop and the play display ennui to world social systems. They are also both creative responses to the condition of the world, and echo the words – “Against the ruin of the world there is only one defense – the creative act” (Rexroth, K. 1959: 272). At best, what both manage to do is creatively throw a shocking light on the state of the ‘official’ adult world, revealing the muck and rot that have taken the guise of official social standards. Both however, take different poses of disaffiliation and cast

disdainful glances at the world that everyone is trying to fit into. If hip-hop deliberately offers no solution beyond the call for a kind of Armageddon, the play is a performative gesture of the same.

The timbre of these young voices is shrill from hollering the apocalyptic prophesy, and their unstable bodies echo the tremor about to befall the world. What hip-hop and the play represent is not protest, but something beyond, almost akin to John Coltrane, the legendary Black American Saxophonist whose repetitive notes spelled out not sameness but difference of a haunting quality. It seems to come from a great need to demolish the world, to topple it and drown it in the sea. The desperate spiritual condition embodied in the play and the hip-hoppers, which is equally macabre, is almost akin to the one expressed by the beat youth generation. Commenting on this generation, Rexroth stated:

“Like the pillars of Hercules, like two ruined Titans guarding the entrance to one of Dante’s circles, stand two great dead juvenile delinquents – the heroes of the post-war generation: the great Saxophonist, Charlie Parker, and Dylan Thomas. If the word deliberate means anything, both of them certainly deliberately destroyed themselves. Both of them were overcome by the horror of the world in which they found themselves, because at last they could no longer overcome that world with the weapon of a purely lyrical art”. (Ibid, 273)

As every generation produces its own social heroes, warriors and men of noble stature, it also contains the recalcitrant maverick, who is often dismissed as a

delinquent. The non-conformist in the play and hip-hoppers has acquired the same title, if not prophets of doom. Bent on the conviction that the only way to save world systems and their incessant failures is to burn them down, both mavericks display a marked impatience for Armageddon or the proverbial – *fire next time*.

The play therefore, does not only reflect in its narrative structure the indifference to world systems, but also condemns traditional ways of seeing the ‘Coloured’ subject in corporeal terms and the perpetuation of this disrobing manner of seeing in modes of cultural representation. Hip-hoppers on the other hand echo the same sentiment for the American ‘Coloured’ in the Diaspora. Both form a fortified vanguard that sheds a critical light on the construction of ‘Colouredness’ and ‘Coloured’ states in South Africa and the American Diaspora.

Coloured States and contemporary popular mass culture – the reconfiguration of traditional theatre spaces

The play is a theatrical hip-hop in that it reorganizes the visual and sonic atmosphere of the theatre space such that the spoken word is unencumbered by traditional decorum that has come to define theatre spaces. In this aspect, the play sacrifices normative aesthetic traditions to foreground the exigency of the spoken word. In hip-hop, the traditional band structure is truncated to its barest minimum and the spoken word takes centre stage.

The traditional full band set generates harmonies which mediate the delivery of lyrics in song, making the product ever so sweet, even if the mood and lyrics of the song agitate for a revolutionary apprehension. In musical arrangement, harmony functions to mollify the ear of the listener and draws attention to itself, rendering the primary position of the lyrics secondary.

Instead of enhancing the message in the song, harmony, by drawing attention to itself, undermines the potential combative messaging in the lyrics. In hip-hop however, this traditional configuration is jettisoned, leaving only the drumbeat to accompany the spoken word. The drum in a hip-hop and traditional African ritual setting enhances the performance without calling attention to itself.

The drumbeat enhances the performance in that it gets diffused behind the primary act of the spoken word without upsetting the hierarchical configurations of performance. Furthermore, the sonic dynamics of the cowhide drum bear a striking sorority with the human voice. While African kings have from time immemorial donned the coats of wild beasts, it has been the cow hide that has been domesticated, worn by both women and men, sometimes used as a rug, or fashioned into sour milk tumblers and many other uses.

It is no wonder then that the cow hide is a significant part of the African household. This phenomenon is exemplified in the delivery of praise poetry in a traditional African ritual setting, where the audience never loses the virility of social commentary although the latter is accompanied by a drumbeat. Harmony in Hip-hop is discarded precisely because it tends to mute the screaming undertones of anger in

contemporary youth poetry, and bites into the sharp tongue of anger that has come to be associated with the poetry of the global underclass.

As a form of contemporary mass cultural product, Hip-hop embraces the drumbeat, the definitive musical accompaniment of high African art forms which are steeped in ritualistic and spiritual milieus. Hip-hop therefore, is a postmodern express example of the inevitable relations between high art and mass cultural products. Similarly, the play's stylistic choices exemplify the inscription of mass culture in high art, thus challenging modernity's anxieties of the contamination of high art by mass cultural products.

The play consciously redeploys "Brecht's immersion in the vernacular of popular culture" (Huyssen, A. 1986: vii), exhibiting stylistic and discursive departures with traditional modalities, thus subverting modern apprehensions of dramatic art and representation by embracing hip-hop's subaltern symbolism. This symbolism is a new syntax against a socio/political milieu of imperialism and Western capitalism.

The iconography of this youth is that of anti heroes, which finds a sorority with the underclass and disenfranchised. Thematically, *Umm...Somebody Say Something* takes up agency in the global youth culture of the underclass, and locates youth struggles of Coloured upbringings, sexualities, and race apprehensions in the centre of global concerns. Consequently, Colouredness is imagined beyond local racial and cultural references to allow for a global dialogic platform where it bespeaks complex identities that are informed by the politics of living in a postmodern body.

This condition reflects how postmodern bodies are inevitably coloured by sexual, psychological, and racial ambiguities. In the play, the characters are introduced as SPECIMENS. This stylistic choice destabilizes the deployment of traditional forms especially the appellations given characters in the formal dramatic structure and the construction of stage plays.

The label SPECIMENS suggests a detached clinical relationship with the characters. The play suggests an aversion to engage with them as legitimated human bodies, but entities under construction. The break with a dramatic tradition of giving names to characters is also a break with the socio/cultural identification of bodies.

The term SPECIMEN seems to strip the body of its polite camouflage and thus radically directs our attention to the body as a sample, a trial in a postmodern laboratory.

The aversion to acknowledge human bodies as social subjects becomes a means to circumvent the trappings of ideology in its translation of individuals into social subjects, and a means to allow for a critical interrogation of identity, unencumbered by the strictures of ideology. The narrative strategy to subvert traditional stylistic choices can also be interpreted as a metaphor for newer ways of imagining and interpreting the human body and its meaning in representation. Stern aptly notes that:

“Since certain metaphors have become naturalized and we do not tend to notice the ways in which they channel our thinking about the signifiers to which they refer, deliberately using unconventional tropes can sometimes help

to denaturalize taken-for-granted ways of looking at phenomena” (Stern 1998: 165)

The ability to appropriate even radical phenomena into its own syntax is ideology’s way of policing social subjects and their modes of thinking. This transcendence of ideology and its impact on the construction of identity could also be seen to be a strategy to forge a new language, beyond the vernacular of capitalist and imperialist ideologies, a radical stance beyond hegemonic referencing. In its narrative procedures, the play produces a meta-taxonomy as a representational counter narrative of constructed identities.

“If all representations in ‘ordinary’ language are already constructions then we cannot use ‘ordinary’ language to talk about ‘ordinary’ language without forever remaining enmeshed in the contradictions and ambiguities of our own constructions and our own constructedness” (Morris, 1988:34 cited in Threadgold, T. 1990:11)

Conscious of complex inscriptions in the seemingly ‘ordinary’ ways in which identity is constructed; the play also applies metalanguage as a way of deconstructing ‘ordinary’ ways which inform the construction of our identities. The five SPECIMENS in the play are young women from different cultural backgrounds, all narrating the notion of Colouredness and how it informs the construction of female identities.

This narrative device allows the play to foreground intertextuality in the narratives of female identities as a form of counter-narrative to dominant apprehensions of identity. Unlike *No Room For Squares*, the play is not set in a specific geographical location, nor does it acknowledge illegitimate historical geographical spaces. Consequently, it offers newer readings and potential possibilities of reconstructing negatively affected identities outside the limitations of apartheid's temporal spatial politics.

This allows for a closer reading of Colouredness and its tropes, away from the margins of a racialised centre. Given this paradigm, the play explores sexual identity as a Coloured postmodern phenomenon.

SPECIMEN 1: Coloured Postmodern Sexuality

SPECIMEN 1 is an androgynous looking black girl tortured by male sexual desire and yet trapped in a female body. She laments "...I've never seen myself through my eyes" (p4) A few scenes later in the play we witness the performance of her torture in what the play titles a GOD SCENE. In this scene SPECIMEN 1 walks into an interrogation room, on a judgment day. God's voice blurts out:

G: Walk into the spot...sit down

1: Excuse me?

G: I said sit down!...So tell us how you do it.

I: Do what? Who the fuck are you...I don't have to tell you jack shit.

G: This is your last chance...

I: I had to do it...it wasn't easy but I had to do it.

G: Do what?

I: Kill her! That's why I'm here right?...she brought nothing but confusion into my life, always asking what I wasn't, what I couldn't be. She had to die or else I'd never have been free. I needed a chance.

G: How?

I: I cut her hair...burn't her clothes.

G: And what else?

I: I made her look at herself. She was naked and I made her look at herself for the last time as a girl...she cried for the last time as a girl...I couldn't stand her tears but she cried until the sight of her was too much to bear. That's when I knew I had to save her from her misery.

G: How?

I: I bound her up so tight she couldn't breathe. She was gasping for air but I wouldn't help her. I couldn't stop. I had to do it. I strapped her up until I felt her go limp in my arms.

G: She still alive. You know that right? She still lives.

I: No way! She's dead. I made sure of that. I got rid of her. I had to...she died...

G: But I see her.

I: You are crazy! No you can't...you don't...I'm not ashamed of her anymore. I'm not ashamed.

The potency in this scene is hinged on a number of factors. Chief among these are the three – firstly, the concise but pacy writing which evokes emotional states, secondly, the reference to a ritual of confession which has a strong central space in the public imaginary, and thirdly, the element of spectatorship where the audience is allowed to witness a performance of aberrant sexual identity.

Structurally, the success of scripted scenes for stage performance depends on a number of factors; however, the emotional and psychological journey of the character (especially in classical Western forms), significantly affects the success or failure of a scene. When a character shows no evidence of movement from his/her initial emotional or psychological state by the end of a scene, then that scene affects the overall trajectory of both the scene and the play.

The above scene resonates with potency chiefly because the character traverses an emotional plain. At the beginning of the scene, she is arrogant and adamant, showcasing a toughened spirit and sternness of purpose. By the end of the scene we get a sense of ambiguity, doubt and vulnerability. Her imagined triumph over her subjective adversary is proven to be a delusion, leaving her open to old intra-personal struggles.

The orchestrated repetition – “I’m not afraid of her anymore...I’m not afraid” depicts doubt more than it does emphasis. At an existential level, we relate with her because she is an express image of our postmodern condition, where subjective desire and body politic assume paradoxical relations. The scene ends with her defeat, and a verbal reiteration of her desire. This verbal repetition evokes a desired subjective which cannot be attained but through verbal conviction if not delusion.

The status of the spoken word against a frustrated imagined sexual identity also bespeaks the inevitable tension between imagined identities and actual identities. The scene is short but manages to capture the internal world of the character, her inner turmoil and its affect. The public display of this distress also amounts to an act of

confession. The elements are just right, there is a God figure, an impenitent sinner who is found wanting by the end of the act of confession.

The top/down spatial configuration of the space, an inevitable import of popular Christian ideology's apocalypse, is suggestive of a heaven above and a hell below, a binary suggestive of the eternal and the temporal. This act of confession (since SPECIMEN 1 is narrating and performing the ambiguity of her sexual identity), is also an intricate instance when theatrical performance resonates beyond representational referencing.

As audience, we are implicated in the superior glance that is a preserve of the God in the world of the play; because God is played by a female, the play also implicates the audience in God's female identity. The play's double schema of implications is also a strategy to recast the masculine/feminine dichotomy into a feminine/masculine imperative where femininity becomes a centre of reference as well as a feminist hypothesis.

“How can one escape dichotomic thinking? Marguerite Duras [1982:175] suggests the following strategy: ‘Reverse everything. Make women the point of departure in judging, make darkness the point of departure in judging what men call light, make obscurity the point of departure in what men call clarity.’ ‘When we have a male in front of us, we could ask: does he have some female in him? And that could be the main point’ (Royer, M. cited in Threadgold, T & Cranny-Francis A. 1990:129).

In its structural and narrative choices, the play explicates identity phenomena with reference to femininity. The proposition of searching the male body for traces of femininity is a strategic subversion of phallogentric definitions of the feminine, where masculine apprehensions of femininity are about 'Othering'. In the phallogentric imaginary, women are seen for what they are not.

Contesting phallogentric representation and its tropes, the play is evidently in tow with an understanding that identity is always a coupling of femininity and masculinity. This hypothesis further suggests that the distribution of our sexual attraction to others depends largely on the degree of the deployment of the feminine and masculine characteristics in their sexual and behavioral characteristics. The understanding of bodies as admixtures of the feminine and masculine imperatives challenges dichotomized heterosexist conceptions of sexuality and gender.

The critical notion of representing God in feminine terms proposes a discursive difference between gender and morphology of genitalia. That God is female does not preclude any masculine behavioral and or sexual traits. The play extends the circumference of God's identity beyond the dichotomy of rigid and separate sexual identities.

If traditional conceptions of identity are limited to the imperative of a dichotomy, which stresses the separateness and antithesis of femininity and masculinity as sexual identities, the play proposes that although femininity and masculinity might be different, they are not necessarily separate. SPECIMEN 1's performance therefore,

translates into a performance of the duality of sexual identity and its manifestation in a single body politic.

This performance explicates the body as a site of postmodern condition which translates contemporary bodies into “posthuman” milieus where contradiction and ambiguity coexist. If postmodern bodies are at ease with this duality, it is in the discursive and social institutions that it gets persecuted. If this rationale is extended, SPECIMEN 1’s dilemma does not stem from her conflicted sense of self, rather, her conflicted sense of identity is a result of the import of social and cultural strategies that insist on the biological markings of the body as determinant factors in the construction of individual identities.

In essence, SPECIMEN 1’s dilemma stems from the fact that society dictates that culturally, her sexual and behavioral characteristics should align to her biological sexual identity. However, her behavioral characteristics are at variance with the morphology of her sexual identity. Hers is a demonstration that biological signage on the body does not always dictate behavioral identity. In essence, SPECIMEN 1 exemplifies the pressures visited on the behavioral autonomy of the body due to its sexual identity.

The play’s hypothesis also amounts to a radical declaration that if people are made in God’s image, then that image bears a dual narrative of femininity and masculinity. And if God is omnipotent, omnipresent and eternal, our potency lies in the celebration of the duality of our identities along feminine and masculine narratives of the self.

The hypothesis further suggests that more than the femininity in the heterosexual schema, men might be attracted to traces of masculinity in women, and vice versa.¹²

The meaning of SPECIMEN 1's performance relies significantly on the notion of spectatorship and the role it plays in mediating nuance, expression, and the dynamic of the body on a theatre stage as a generator of multiple meanings. The act of confessing a disrupted sexual identity in an androgynous looking body overrides characterization and affects the performance with a peculiar meta-truth and a hyperbolic dynamic.

This instance, where spectatorship is no longer about watching representation but witnessing an existential dilemma, and acting is no longer about impersonation but an act of subjective truth, demonstrates the precarious nature of the performance space and the vulnerability of the performer. This is the locale of the power of representational media, and especially theatre, where the corporeality of the body is fully present in real time and three dimensional space, with its smells, gait, composition and unmistakable idiosyncrasies.

The references by SPECIMEN 1 to the anxieties of living in a sexually ambiguous body are apprehended in the context of her body's presence. However, her physical presence, with its manifest androgyny as evidence of a disrupted sexual narrative does overtly serve the needs of an objectifying heterosexist gaze. SPECIMEN 1's androgynous physical appearance and confession to a sex identity beyond the

¹² Threadgold and Cranny-Francis argue that "such are the dangers of speaking, meaning, writing, inside phallocentricism. Phallocentricism located in all our dominant mainstream Western ways of thinking and talking about and making our world, is a discursive and representational construction of that world in binary terms such that one term is always regarded as the norm and highly valorized, while the is defined only ever in relation to it and devalorized" (1990:1)

‘normal’ referential range has the potential to appropriate her within the mass patriarchal ‘pornographic gaze’ that divests female identity of its subjectivity (hooks, 1994: 13).

Once the female body is divested of its subjectivity, it functions to gratify the heterosexist pornographic gaze. Inscribed within SPECIMEN 1’s performance are strategies to challenge the sexist objectification of female sexuality. In the framing of her sexual identity, there is deliberate radical embodiment of the alternative. This alternative shifts heterosexist constructions of female sexuality where this sexuality is fixed through a series of images that are produced to cater to a patriarchal pornographic gaze.

If patriarchy is understood to be fashioned in traditional sexual orientation, SPECIMEN 1’s confession, like bell hooks’ Madonna in *Outlaw Culture*, is “a daring to be different...not expressive of shallow exhibitionism but of a will to confront, to challenge, and change the status quo” (hooks, b. 1994: 13). However, this performance is not without a multiplicity of meanings.

In a society bent on traditionally authenticated sexual identity and behavior, SPECIMEN 1’s performance can be easily dismissed as aberrant freak spectacle. However, the consumption of the freak as aberrant spectacle mediates the processing of the undesirable in imagined ‘normal’ subjectivities. The freak is generally seen to occupy the lowest rung in the hierarchy of human evolution and its representation functions to prove that since the audience is not on stage, performing outside or below normative aesthetic appeal, they are not freaks.

Paradoxically, exhibitions of the freak are also evidence of constructed normality. However, this neat dichotomy gets disturbingly complex when it is recognized that in the freak, undesired selves are paraded unashamedly in public performance. This is the subversive power of the freak and its performance – people are it drawn to it precisely because they recognize themselves reflected in its aberrant identity. Grosz comments as follows on this phenomenon.

“The freak illustrates our so-called normal pleasure and fascination with our mirror-images, a fascination with the limits of our own identities as they are witnessed from the outside. This is a narcissistic delight at the shape of our own externality, which is always inaccessible to us by direct means and is achievable only if we can occupy the perspective others have on us...Fascination with the monstrous is testimony to our tenuous hold on the image of perfection. The freak confirms the viewer as bounded, belonging to a proper social category. The viewer’s horror lies in the recognition that this monstrous being is at the heart of his or her own identity...” (Grosz, E. cited in Garland Thomson, R. ed. 1996: 65)

Postmodern sexualities are a commentary on modernity’s apprehensions of sexual identity. Consequently, modernity’s anxieties of contamination are critically brought to sharp focus, as are the dichotomized notions of femininity and masculinity. Postmodern conceptions of sexuality implicate the feminine in the masculine and vice versa, where biology is not seen to prescribe behavioral characteristics in sexual subjectivity.

However, SPECIMEN 1's narrative is also problematic in that it is one of sexual difference within the play's heterosexist logic. In the play, all other characters are represented as embodiments of a heterosexist imperative. This narrative choice gives the audience license to resist SPECIMEN 1 as an aberrant intrusion. Within the heterosexual logic, her act of confession entails a declaration of selfhood that is incongruous with the dominant heterosexual audience and a desire for assimilation into the group's identity.

Consequently, her sexual difference can be "appropriated within a popular heterosexist milieu of representation, where the potential power of her difference is diffused" (hooks. 1994:16). If the burden of Coloured subjects is defined chiefly by strategies of appropriation into the black/white binary, SPECIMEN 1's Coloured sexuality suffers the stratagem of an all appropriative heterosexist centre. This centre, as Foucault has aptly noted, has a hidden geography: the legal, medical, religious and other institutions which discursively constitute and regulate sexual identity (Foucault, 1978 cited in Phillips & Watt 2000: 1).

Given the regulatory mandate afforded these social institutions, SPECIMEN 1 is no threat to the heterosexist centre, but an aberration, and a self confessed sinner in need of salvation. Her condition is consumed as spectacle and malady whose cure resides in the asylum of a heterosexual logic. SPECIMEN 1's confession propagates heterosexual narratives, which operate within the domain of salvation through confession.

Essentially, her act of confession and representation of sexual deviance buttresses sexual stereotypes that inform our popular cultural imaginary, which relies on ‘the sustained mass patriarchal pornographic gaze’ (hooks 1994: 12). For the ‘heterosexist pornographic gaze’, the embodiment of an interrupted gender narrative where the body is marked with physical ambiguity, the effect can be unpredictable. As spectacle, and exotic bodily arbitrariness, it carries possibilities of being consumed, quickly, privately as a fantastic taboo.

At best, the play’s portrayal of sexual deviance only mirrors heterosexist hierarchies, where non-heterosexual identities are neglected or denied. And if they do exist, they do so only as deviations from a patriarchal heterosexist norm. Within this logic, SPECIMEN 1’s confession cannot afford any crossing of borders, nor alliances, rather an appropriation into patriarchal hegemony. The act of confession as an act of religious ritual serves as a currency for the exploitation of guilt in individuals. Similarly, theatre, as a malleable institution can serve as the alternative alter where the construction of individual identities is informed, policed and regulated.

That notwithstanding, in the narrative and confessions of SPECIMEN 1, the play argues for postmodern sexual states, where the body is seen as a complex site that embodies ambiguity and paradox without rupture. This embodiment calls for new apprehensions of the body as a complex site marked by biology, but whose behavioral traits and peculiar sexuality may not necessarily be informed by biology’s signatures.

In positioning a disrupted sexual narrative in the body’s biology alongside narratives of female Coloured subjects, the play seems to propose a broader reading of

Colouredness. If Colouredness in the social imaginary is seen as disrupted racial narratives in dichotomized racial identities, this reading argues for Colouredness as an inevitable postmodern condition where contamination is a pragmatic affect, defining sexuality as separate from gender in postmodern sexual states.

In this section I have given a detailed interrogation of the play's narrative choices. These choices, I argue, are significantly informed by postmodernist imaginary, which also pose a challenge to modernist stylistic choices in modes of representation. The postmodernist imperative is not, as I have demonstrated, without limitations. Like all forms of ideology, postmodernism reflects in its vocabulary and cadence, a reliance on its modernist adversary.

However, the play's meta-theme is its postmodern impulse, which challenges modernity's modes of representation, liberating historically marginalized subjects to a postmodernist centre. One such character is SPECIMEN 4, a black girl who grew up in a white family, a marginal character whose behavioral traits are at a significant variance with generic black cultural patterns.

SPECIMEN 4: Coloured Black Children – the contemporary condition

In introducing SPECIMEN 4, the play states: “A black woman raised by white people” (p1). Four pages later we hear SPECIMEN 4 speak: “I dress my up my face in the mirror until it smiles back at me. I’ve never seen myself, through my own eyes” (p4). I have decided to rewrite at length SPECIMEN 4’s monologue as performed in the play because of various reasons.

Firstly, it is a remarkable demonstration of the interplay between subjective memory and racial identity; essentially how racial narratives can be disrupted by subjective desire and imagined identity. Secondly, I feel that by transmuting it in its original form it will relay the spirit of the character as it is told in the first person. Thirdly, I find it an evocative read constitutive of a confluence of milieus of representation and the ‘real’.

“Once upon a time there was this girl. She lived in this big beautiful house with her mother, her father, her sister and an extended family member, the maid. They were a very happy family who owned three cars, a beach house and everybody who knew them said they were well off. And they lived happily ever after.

However there is a twist in this story because of that menacing factor called race. This girl’s parents are black; thus that would make her black right? But these black parents are not the parents I mentioned in the beginning. The two sets of parents, that’s the source of her struggle.

I remember when I was in primary school. I had this friend called Simone James. One day she came up to me and asked me: “Are you going to be a maid when you grow up?” I instantly saw this picture of my real mom scrubbing the kitchen floor and I defiantly replied: NO! When I grow up I’m going to be a journalist (like my white mom). The sheer sound of journalist when I said it sounded so profound and so important. I think that’s when I stopped wanting to be associated with my real mom. Her job as a maid, her clothing, her way of speaking, started becoming an embarrassment to me.

And thus my journey of inventing myself into this white person began. It became much easier when I got my room in the main house. Now I can safely say I have an accent like them. I dress like them. I dream in English. In fact, my shit smells like theirs. Its like I’ve been living this lie. This twisted fairy tale that’s so far away from reality. Now that I’m bordering on that cliff of reality, I’m falling and it hurts like hell.

...I cannot believe that for such a long time I never got to know my own mother. I looked into her face the other day and I saw the shape of my own eyes, my complexion, the curve of my mouth even the roundness of my face. I managed to cut off the root that determined my blood, my heritage, my culture and in the end, myself.

Growing up, all that I ever saw her as was a maid and I treated her like one. I feel sad and guilty on losing out on all those years. I wonder how she feels about this situation; to have a daughter so near and yet so far because she couldn’t provide for me in the way that her employers did. Don’t

misunderstand me. I don't blame my white family for my current status. In fact, I'm very thankful for my upbringing. I just want to revisit the way I see my real mom. To see her as a real person and not as a maid...because the more I speak to my mother, the more I see this image of myself carved out" (p9).

Through the above monologue, SPECIMEN 4 evokes states that question arbitrary identifications which bear no semblance to her racial moorings. In her mother's biological structure, she notices the advent of her very being and its resemblance, but finds no subjective sorority with her 'real' racial self as mirrored in her mother. This first instance of 'seeing', engenders a conflicted consciousness of displacement and nostalgia.

It is also this instance which leads her to proclaim – "I have never seen myself through my own eyes". This realization places in question the trope of identity, demonstrating the constitution of imagined subjectivity within fictions of identity. The desired white world, its culture, ideology and racial identification put on by SPECIMEN 4, seem to offer her, at least for a time, an alternative to the dead end proposed by a negatively politicized racial black identity - "I instantly saw this picture of my real mom scrubbing the kitchen floor and I defiantly replied: NO! When I grow up I'm going to be a journalist (like my white mom)".

The complexity of her situation is compounded by what SPECIMEN 4 imagines herself to be, a white girl, and the first thing that other little white girls register upon seeing her – the howling black skin. The very proximity of her fantasy – a room in the

main house, dressing like them, and dreaming in English, is also the specific distance that makes her fantasy unattainable.

The grotesquely fantastic proximity to her dream is equally its very menacing distance. The inability to process this dichotomy is at the root of SPECIMEN 4's traumatic discontent. This trauma is also the trauma of a little girl caught up in a racially demarcated adult world. The above passage says nothing of white agency in her admittance into the main house. More often than not, it is their cuteness that allows black children to pass as 'white'.

However, since they are not really white, they are systematically appropriated as non-racial children in the main house. De-racialised, they pose no threat to the politicized black and white problematic imperative. Consequently, SPECIMEN 4's narrative of displacement cannot escape the politics of passing, especially when considering that 'the term passing designates a performance in which one presents one-self as what one is not' (Rohy, V. cited in Ginsberg, E. K. 1996: 219). However, in SPECIMEN 4's case, notions of passing and white agency, where blackness is de-racialised, are imbricated.

If we borrow from Rohy's assertion that "the trope of "home" can hardly escape political inflection in a culture that champions the white, heterosexual, bourgeois home as icon of a mythical and sentimentalized family whose "values" reflect those of the dominant culture, then white agency is implicated in SPECIMEN 4's sense of displacement.

The manifestations of white desire to embrace the ‘cute’ in the racial black Other, expose the unreliable white supremacist racial pretensions.

This exposé entails the black cute as a cultural site where white desire to naturalize the fantastically aberrant Other becomes the staging of salient “attempts to naturalize social difference” (Merish, L. cited in Garland Thomson, ed. 1996: 185).

“And thus my journey of inventing myself into this white person began. It became much easier when I got my room in the main house. Now I can safely say I have an accent like them. I dress like them. I dream in English. In fact, my shit smells like theirs”.

The above excerpt demonstrates that the ‘cute’ is also a product of the convergence of white desire to ‘naturalize social difference’ and black subjective desire to overcome politicized racial inferiority in white supremacist hegemonic ideologies. This convergence is not without collisions and embraces. The ‘cute’ therefore, is simultaneously a victim and a conscious agent that colludes with white desire in the construction of his/her identity. SPECIMEN 4’s embodiment of white aesthetics while living in a black body, is a significant commentary on the flux of racial identity.

As a ‘cute’ commodity fashioned in the fires of a white gaze, SPECIMEN 4 is at once constituted in a cultural rhetoric of white spectatorship as she simultaneously redirects and informs this spectatorship, inevitably redefining its tenets. To be constituted in the aesthetic of the ‘cute’, is also to redefine the classic “symbolic properties and qualities that define the cute in a white supremacist culture (white skin, blond hair, blue eyes)” (Merish, L. 1996: 186). Herein lies the power of the ‘cute’, in that it has the power to

subvert the symbolism that defines and regulates what passes as the 'cute' in a white supremacist cultural milieu.

However, the subversion of white cultural aesthetic in SPECIMEN 4's self creation is not without "psychological alienation and self hatred" (Ibid, 185). The 'meta self' reflected in and embodied by the mother becomes the disruptive aspect which frustrates SPECIMEN 4's makeover. "I had this view of my mother scrubbing the floor" – this irksome recollection of her mother, bent down, seems to serve as an admonition that attends the hazards of being black in a white world.

The mother figure in this context is appropriated within the symbolic vocabulary of the child and its reference and aversion to identification with her own race. Shorn of her desire to identify with her black race, SPECIMEN 4 fashions her identity within a milieu of white symbolism and aesthetics. Consequently, since in the normative white supremacist culture the 'cute' "– entails a structure of identification, wanting to be like the cute or, more exactly, wanting the cute to be just like the self", SPECIMEN 4's condition is confined to the latter.

Within this paradigm, the 'cute' is a black child whose cuteness is appropriated within the dominant white cultural aesthetics. In the film *The Colour Purple* Sophia, a black impoverished woman is seen walking with her little girl by a white affluent woman who promptly comments on how cute the little girl is. She then turns to the little girl's mother and suggests that she should come and work for her. This suggestion earns the white madam the scornful response from Sophia. This in turn provokes the wrath of the white madam, which can only be assuaged through vengeance.

By the end of the film Sophia is broken down to size by the white madam and the surrounding white power. Through this power, Sophia is eventually a meek, domesticated savage, working for the white madam, a black woman broken down to subservience. This narrative is very telling of racial bias and subjugation, but more than that it is constructed on the politics of living in a black, potentially de-racialised 'cute' body and what the white glance brings onto that body in terms of power and desire.

In Sophia and SPECIMEN 4's instance, the black girl child is divested of her racial identity and equally desexualized by the white glance. If a white woman during apartheid would forbid another black woman into her household as a family member, the 'cute' black girl child transcends these limitations precisely because she is sexless, and therefore poses no threat to the sexual dynamic in a white household. construction of individual identities.

The construction of the 'cute' through white spectatorship also entails the consumption of de-raced and sexless black subjectivity. SPECIMEN 4's narrative is a commentary on complex Coloured subjectivities inscribed within contemporary black identities, expressing "values that are by no means trivial in their political significance nor in their psychological effects" (Ibid: 185).

Through SPECIMEN 4's character, the play demonstrates the intertextuality embodied in subjective desire and racial categorization. This intertextuality underscores the fact that racial identity can serve as a subaltern at the mercy of subjective desire and

imagined identity, and not the other way around; thereby attesting to the phenomenology of Colouredness as an inevitable postmodern condition that informs contemporary psychological states.

Seen from a subjective level, SPECIMEN 4 is also a character decrying the exiled self. While speaking from a legitimate geographical space in a post '94 democratic dispensation, her narrative carries political inflections of a desire for a habitable body. This desire is essentially a longing for a home. Home in the postmodern context extends beyond geographical referencing to suggest the racial body as an index that is capable of dichotomizing its own subjective centre.

The narrative propagated by this character is also a redefinition and critique of the dialogic meaning of the terms 'home' and 'exile'. Her representation foregrounds the racialised body as a site for exiled subjectivity explicated in postmodern states. However, the exiled self is located in an interiority that challenges the body's racial constitution.

In challenging the racial narrative which is at a significant variance with her subjective desires, SPECIMEN 4 evokes a conflicted interiority that informs individual subjectivity. This inner conflict bespeaks the problematic racial identity. Race is not a sufficient index for identity, often, it is averse to the body's subjective truths. As Baldwin attests:

“Though we do not wholly believe it yet, the interior life is a real life, and the intangible dreams of people have a tangible effect on the world” (Baldwin, J. 1961: 230)

SPECIMEN 4's performance does not only demonstrate a definite dichotomy between the body's racial constitution and its complex subjective interior, but also argues for greater independence of subjective desire from the body's racial identity. I argue that this disparity between the interior and exterior realities is not an antithesis but rather politicized as such in our cultural representations and discursive preoccupations, where subjective and imagined desires are subordinated to the body's racial constitution.

In the same manner that racial Colouredness is explicated in terms of hybridism, a culturally tabooed admixture of species, SPECIMEN 4's intrapersonal conflict similarly results from a culturally tabooed confluence of black racial identity and white desire. In SPECIMEN 4's character, the play illustrates postmodern subjectivities as Coloured phenomena, whose sense of displacement can lead to discontent and rupture. This is all the more relevant in a milieu where subjectivity is constituted within the dominant tropes of racial identity, whose hegemonic ideals are steeped in supremacist racial imperatives.

Colouredness, as a racial index, is a limiting appellation, and serves to mask other forms of Colouredness in our racial and subjective identities. It is precisely this preoccupation with the Coloured identity in contemporary discursive exercises that postpones a meaningful interrogation of manifestations of Colouredness beyond racial categorizations. It also serves modernity's anxieties of a putative contamination of purer racial identities by those that are seen to be hybridized. Rehashes of discursive projects on Colouredness eventually almost always serve this discriminating centre.

These eventually serve to quell the threat posed by the Coloured, that s/he serves as a mirror to our own hidden interior Coloured identities. In the Coloured is the incarnation of our own interior discontent. However, we need the Coloured as incarnate proof that we are free from systems of hybridization that define postmodern subjectivities.

In this chapter I have made a detailed analysis of the two SPECIMENS in the play to demonstrate the notion of Colouredness beyond racial limitations. In the two SPECIMENS I find the play strongly suggestive of novel ways of apprehending and interpreting Colouredness and its representation beyond historical notions of race, gender and identity in general. The play emphasizes Colouredness as an inevitable and pervasive condition that is inscribed within contemporary subjects.

The play's assertive narrative strategies in dealing with 'Colouredness' as a potent contemporary identity, are not only suggesting a subversion of old identity theories, but also forge a much needed new ideology whose prerogative is to open a better way of comprehending and embodying 'Colouredness'.

Since history almost always towers over our understanding of life events and the construction of our identities from such events, this new way of apprehending the Coloured subject is also a way of liberating him/her from being consumed as a historical phenomenon.

The paradox also demonstrates the dichotomy between the power of dominant political ideology in the construction of individuals as social subjects through official social institutions, and individuals as independent cultural agents capable of demonstrating distinct identities.

Conclusion

Umm...Somebody Say Something strongly suggests that the problem is not necessarily in Coloured sexualities, mental states and subjectivities as it is in society's aversion to contemporary Coloured states. Rendering suspect theatre's traditional ways of creating and accessing meaning suspect, the play also concerns itself with subverting old forms in favour of newer ones. These forms find a sorority with hip hop and the current global youth culture.

I have tried to engage the two plays, if not directly, in debate. This debate has demonstrated how these plays engage and reflect in varying degrees the male and female 'Coloured' voices. *No Room For Squares* focuses on the male 'Coloured' voice while *Umm...Somebody Say Something* serves as a critique of patriarchy and its influence on traditional modalities of interpreting and representing contemporary Coloured female identities beyond the racial imperative.

No Room For Squares seems to imagine the 'Coloured' identity in exclusively male terms, and reflects on the construction of this identity as a phenomenon that takes place exclusively in historical 'Coloured' neighborhoods. The play essentially seems

to imagine the 'Coloured' identity and its construction as something that takes place in isolation.

Umm...Somebody Say Something places emphasis on 'Colouredness' as contemporary pervasive phenomenon that transcend the bounds of traditional colonial/apartheid racial and geographical classification. The play challenges the gender and geography reductive strategies that have informed Coloured representation to date; and demonstrates the inscription of Colouredness on contemporary identities as a critical condition that pervades the post-modern body politic.

While the two plays differ in composition and style, they exhibit thematic similarities. Chief among these are the historical and contemporary places of the 'Coloured' and his/her identity in the 'new' South Africa. On this thematic level, the two plays' dialogue with previous traditions of representing the 'Coloured' subject. It also demonstrates how traditional forms of representation continue to inform contemporary 'Coloured' identities and their construction.

They also echo each other in pointing out how the old colonial/apartheid residuals inform ways in which the 'Coloured' subject is perceived and represented in the 'new' South Africa. Both plays directly and indirectly echo the fairly homogeneous 'Coloured' outcry – “In the old South Africa we were not white enough, now in the 'new' South Africa we are not black enough”- thus questioning the validity of the '*Rainbow*' nation concept.

The argument in both plays is the precarious social position of the Coloured subject in both colonial/apartheid racial schema and postmodern Coloured states that inform

identities in the ‘new’ South Africa. Colonial and apartheid sociopolitical modalities demonstrated uncertainty in its treatment of the Coloured subject, subjecting the Coloured to an ambiguous relationship with the self, while the ‘New South Africa’, in its restlessness with the placement of the Coloured in contemporary South Africa, collapses Coloured identities into an imaginary ‘*Rainbow*’ collective.

The two plays foreground ways in which the Coloured subject has come to relate incongruously to his/her condition. Central to this incongruence is the traumatic quest to reconcile two seemingly irreconcilable extremes that inform historical and contemporary Coloured identities. While colonial and subsequent apartheid regimes rewarded the Coloured for being Coloured, the Coloured today feels that the ‘new’ democratic regime is punishing him/her for his/her identity.

The identity s/he groomed with the incentives of colonial regimes and the rewards from the apartheid governance s/he now resents because it has become the source of her/his marginalization, hence the outcry – In the past I was not white enough, today I am not black enough”. The heritage of the two extremes informs contemporary Coloured identity and seems to place this identity on the margins of the centre.

Both historical epochs, the plays argue, display a singular ideology, a relationship which amounts to a sinister predisposition to erase the Coloured subject from frames of historical and cultural reference. This bias, the plays contest, informs the deep structure of the ‘*rainbow*’ sentiment. In essence, ‘*rainbow-ism*’ functions to conceal its relations with the old colonial/apartheid racial strategies.

I have deliberately not dealt with racially defined Coloureds in the play *Umm...Somebody Say Something* as a way of giving newer readings to Colouredness and contemporary Coloured phenomena. To a large extent the play requires newer ways of reading, since its form, content and themes are at variance with traditional ways of imagining dramatic art.

In its rebellion against imperialist and capitalist informed strategies of identity construction and its representation, the play, as I have demonstrated, infuses its form with other contemporary global youth cultural aesthetics and narratives such as hip-hop, rap, and the spoken word. Like the innovators of the theatre of revolt, contemporary youth cultures find a common goal “in a world without God”, where they “must shape a congregation, invent a liturgy, create a faith. ‘To kill God and build a church’, writes Camus, ‘are the constant and contradictory purposes of rebellion’” (Brustein, R. 1965: 11).

Through a detailed analysis of *No Room For Squares* I have tried to illustrate the various cultural, political and social forces at play in the construction of Coloured male subjectivity and the resultant discontent that informs its subjectivities. While both plays deal with questions of Colouredness, they focus on its different aspects of this phenomenon.

No Room For Squares attempts to find its voice within the limitations of its constructions by colonial and apartheid legacies, while *Umm...Somebody Say Something* jettisons geographical referencing as a strategic defiance to colonial and

apartheid social spaces which were configured as a means of policing non-white bodies.

The contextual infidelity with apartheid forces in *Umm...Somebody Say Something*, coupled with the intertextuality of historically classified Coloured narratives and Coloured Black subjectivities, is a critical review of historical representations of Colouredness and Coloured subjectivities; illustrating the shift in the apprehension of Colouredness and its representation.

The contemporary younger generation, whose thinking is central to this play, demonstrates Colouredness as a contemporary condition that pervades the construction of all contemporary identities. While historical official appellations of Colouredness and its tropes emanated from a preoccupation with the superficial exteriority of racial categorization, the play interrogates the interior landscape of subjectivity.

This interrogation reveals hidden Coloured characteristics that inform the celebrated and seemingly unadulterated racial pedigrees. There seems to be a Coloured sensibility among the contemporary younger black generation. It manifests itself in colloquial terminology like *Coconut*, *model C*, etc. This terminology underlies the younger generation's ambiguous relationship with the black world.

Possibly like no other black generation before them, contemporary black youth are confronted with ambiguities that forcefully impact on the construction of their identities. They seem to find no ready references for ambiguities that emanate from a

confluence of 'white/model C' education and the black body, burdened with all its historical and political references.

Umm...Somebody Say Something can be arguably comprehended within this context. If the black world won't free the black body from its historical and political obligation, the white world equally hinders its mobility. Implicated in this phenomenon is the black skin's articulacy of its own stereotypes and tropes that attend black identity.

The prevalent inability of contemporary youth to express themselves in indigenous African languages, beyond the functional, further problematizes their relationship with a historical black identity and milieu, and also bespeaks significant peculiar Coloured subjectivities. The reality of these factors in contemporary black societies creates a tangible impression of a distinct dichotomy between today's youth and the older generation. And this dichotomy, I suggest, is significantly informed by Colouredness and Coloured subjective states beyond limited racial references.

The complex identities represented in *Umm Somebody Say Something* are the express identification of the post apartheid state with postmodern Coloured states that define contemporary subjectivities, where historical racial and cultural binaries are synthesized. The contemporary younger generation is arguably relatively much more integrated and offers unprecedented possibilities of the embodiment of racial, psychological and sexual ambiguities.

It is therefore no wonder that the virtual realism that defines so much of our contemporary lives finds a sorority with our contemporary Coloured dispositions. The play foregrounds a postmodern virtual milieu which poses a threat to modernist identity narratives, and through its performative and stylistic narrative choices alerts us to how we are almost always translated and constructed into “posthuman” bodies and subjectivities.

The play is an important landmark in as far as it interrogates and challenges repetitive discursive exercises on the notion of Colouredness which only function to conceal the pervasive Coloured imperative which informs contemporary identities.

Finally, this thesis was limited to two play texts, both unpublished, yet very critical to our understanding of Colouredness and contemporary apprehensions of this phenomenon and its representation. I strongly feel that there is a great need to make these two plays accessible to a greater audience and readership. If this thesis helps in any way in the publication of these plays, significantly two of the best contemporary plays on Colouredness I know, perhaps that would have been its greatest achievement.

My own understanding of identity has been significantly challenged throughout this process, especially with regard to the multifarious African identity, and the interconnectedness of races. I strongly believe that our evolution as humans will reach its highest level once our consciousness is ready to embrace this interconnectedness beyond superficial appellations that rely on the corporeality that informs socio/political systems of racial stratification.

A global Coloured consciousness seems a viable way of being. If embraced, this consciousness might avert global conflict. The debris that seems real on the cultural/political sphere is a shadow cast from our real attitudes to one another locally and globally. For we are not our bodies, but something much more intelligent, compassionate and loving beyond what any written book can suggest.

In our contemporary world, defined much by licentiousness and a deep yearning to be free, meaningful plays still compel us to contend with who we really are and what really, in private, informs the meaning of our lives. Such plays have the potential to serve the function of the prophets, prophetesses, and seers, who herald a new dawn and caution us to impending doom. These two plays in their different ways remind us that:

Something deep within us is yearning

For things language cannot express for learning

Nor concoct words for meaning

No dirge can still its mourning

Something deep within us hungers

It never sleeps nor slumbers

But glares pitifully at these numbers

Us

As we live dangerously like mambas

Until we stop it will never flop

But rise it will to the top

Until the earth we lie atop

Reduced maybe to a pulp

Something deep within us is wanting

To want us to want it back

To it we are creatures that lack

For that, it never grows slack

The yearning is great

The hunger frightening

Who dares stop it?

For it wants

What it wants

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