

**THEATRE OF TESTIMONY:  
AN INVESTIGATION IN DEVISING ASYLUM**

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Signed:.....Pedzisai Maedza.....

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## ABSTRACT

The use of testimonies in performance is enjoying increased artistic and critical popularity on contemporary world stages and has a long and rich tradition on South African stages. Both internationally and locally, emerging and established playwrights working on migration and refugee issues are seeking to incorporate the testimony of asylum seekers into their work. This necessitates a need to critically reflect on the influences that shape and structure the staging of testimonies.

This study argues that increased migration and the mounting number arrivals of asylum seekers on South African shores, has motivated at times violent interaction between host communities and the new arrivals. These incidents have inspired a distinct trend of testimonial performances around the concept of asylum. This dissertation uses Narrative analysis to read examples of contemporary theatre of testimony plays that examine this phenomenon. The study examines how playwright positioning informs the structuring of asylum testimonies on stage in addition to contextualising the ethical and moral complexities the playwright's positionality places on their practice. Through three case studies, the study interrogates how playwright positioning informs notions of authorship, authenticity, truth, theatricality and ethics. The study further investigates the challenges speaking for 'self' and speaking for the 'other' place on testimonial playwrights.

Chapter One explores the use of testimony in the documentary theatre tradition. The chapter defines terms and associated terminologies in fact-based theatre to explore the insights various epistemologies reveal about the development and evolution of the documentary tradition to its multiple contemporary manifestations.

Chapter two outlines the methodological frame that informs the reading of the body of work under investigation.

Chapter Three presents the first case study *The Crossing*, (2008) which is an autobiographical work written and presented by an asylum seeker Jonathan Nkala. The chapter investigates how the playwright's positioning informs the structure of the testimony and concludes by examining what the testimony itself communicates about the asylum condition. The study

argues that the testimony forecasts the escalation of violence against migrants and asylum seekers.

Chapter four problematizes the work of a playwright who used testimonies solicited from survivors, perpetrators and witnesses of the 2008 mass violence against foreign nationals in South Africa in *The Line* (2012) by Gina Shmukler. The chapter concludes by interpreting the mass violence presented in the testimonies as constituting acts of genocide.

Chapter Five is a critical and reflexive analysis of my own practice in devising a play *Asylum:Section 22* from the testimony of asylum seekers. The chapter explores the devising and creation process from interview to writing. The chapter also examines the significance of the site of testimony production in the dramaturgical choices.

Chapter Six presents concluding thoughts on the research.

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## CHAPTER ONE

Words are all we have- Samuel Beckett (1986:92).

### INTRODUCTION

This chapter establishes a theoretical framework and critical context which will provide the backdrop for an examination of both the case studies and my own practice. This chapter takes a comprehensive view of the work of both scholars and practitioners blending them to create the analytical framework in which to investigate the playwrights' positioning in relation to practice and processes in the creation of testimonial plays. This chapter will examine the terminology used in relation to the work. In so doing, the study considers how classifying a piece of theatre as verbatim can be misleading and clouds arguments about truth and authenticity which frame the testimonial form. This study makes the case that in devising work with asylum seekers, the term theatre of testimony is perhaps less misleading. This study is more concerned with investigating how playwrights' positioning informs how they create a theatrical space that facilitates the telling of the contemporary South African asylum story, rather than trying to establish the 'objective' facts. Playwright's positionality will be taken to refer to the playwright's social location or social identity. This is important in the light of the fact that this has a significant impact on the speaker's claims and can serve to authorise or dis-authorize one's speech.

#### *Documentary theatre tradition*

Judy Mohamad Fawaz Maamari (2011:1) drawing on Gary Fisher Dawson's (1999) research, argues that one of the reasons why documentary theatre was not considered a distinct practice before the twentieth century is because it was not until February 1926 that the term was introduced to the lexicon. The term documentary was originally coined by John Grierson in relation to film and was embraced by Bertolt Brecht who used it in relation to Ewin Piscator's idea of epic theatre.

Watt (2009:191) contends that the work of Ewin Piscator raised documentary theatre to prominence in the early twentieth century. Piscator was concerned with creating theatre

that 'could show the link between events on stage and the great forces active in history.'

Derek Paget writes:

It is, in Stourac and McCreery's resonant phrase, part of a 'broken tradition' of activism that tends to (re-)surface in difficult times...the strength comes from documentary theatre's repeated ability to reappear as new and excitingly different; weakness follows from the way practitioners – especially young ones – are cut off from their own history (2010:173).

While Paget considers this 'discontinuity' as both 'a strength and a weakness', one can argue that it is due to this quality that the form always remains 'event and issue-centred in terms of its functions' (2010:173).

Further, Paget recognises that there is no one consistent form of documentary theatre. He makes the case that the various forms tend to have functions in common. As such he identifies the following functions as indicators of the documentary form.

They reassess international/national/local histories; They celebrate repressed or marginal communities and groups, bringing light to their histories and aspirations; They investigate contentious events and issues in local, national and international contexts; They disseminate information, employing an operational concept of pleasurable learning – the idea that didactic is not, in itself, necessarily inimical to entertainment; They can interrogate the very notion of documentary (2008:227-228).

In the context of my study, these functions underline the potential of the form to play a vital role in a society that deals with, and wants to learn from and about asylum seekers. Deirdre Heddon argues that the form's capacity to respond quickly to and engage with 'pressing matters of the present' (2008:9), maybe the reason why an increasing number of playwrights and theatre makers engaging with social and political realities turn to it.

Attilio Favorini contends that documentary theatre may have existed as a tradition for as long as theatre itself existed. He makes the case that the documentary 'impulse', which took expression in a documentary form with Piscator in the twentieth-century, may have existed since the earliest surviving Greek play, *The Persians* by Aeschylus written in 472 B.C. Favorini recognises *The Persians* by Aeschylus as the earliest existent documentary theatre in Western culture. He argues that *The Persians* is a fact-driven play commemorating recent events. *The Persians* portrays the battle of Salamis, which happened in Aeschylus's time. Favorini argues that the play was made seven years after the final Greek victory over the

Persians. It imaginatively captures the Persians' reactions to the news of their military defeat (1995: xi).

Additionally, the play embodies what Favorini identifies as documentary playwrights' 'passion for research' shared by the 'documentary descendants.' According to Favorini, Aeschylus' research was thorough and this is demonstrated by the setting of the play in Susa, the then Persian Empire capital. The playwright uses proper Iranian names for his invented warriors and excludes Greek characters. Aeschylus incorporated barbarian diction, numerous cries and interjections to enhance the foreign eastern atmospheric setting feel of the play. According to Favorini it is possible that Aeschylus was a war veteran of the Greco Persian war, and 'had seen the Persians with his own eyes' and shared a first-hand experience of the war (1995:xiii).

### *Developments in Documentary theatre*

Alan Filewood argues that in the twentieth century we have witnessed a series of 'interconnected experiments in form arising out of various cultures'. He observes that where documentary theatre has developed as a constant convention, this has been a result of a crisis in the culture where it is created (1987:13-14). Helena Mary Enright (2011:3) observes that with the advent of the twenty-first century, documentary theatre has also been concerned with what Carol Martin refers to as 'embracing the contradictions of staging the real within the frame of the fictional' while concurrently 'questioning the relationship between facts and the truth.' Martin argues that 'theatre and performance that engages with the real participates in the larger cultural obsession with capturing the real for consumption even as what we understand as real is continually revised and reinvented' (2010:1).

The evolution of documentary theatre can be tabulated as follows:

472 B.C.E	Aeschylus's <i>The Persians</i> and Roman theatre.
1835	Georg Büchner's <i>Danton's Death</i>
1920s	Piscator and the Weimar Theatre, Germany
1930s	The Federal Theatre Project and productions of The Living Newspaper, USA influenced by German agit-prop theatre.
1960s	Resurgence of the form in both USA and Germany. Peter Weiss' Fourteen Propositions for Documentary Theatre
1970s	Recording Tradition. Stoke-method innovated by Peter Cheeseman, UK. Workers Movement in Canada
1980s	Theatre of Testimony by Barney Simon, South Africa and Emily Mann, USA
1990s	Anna Deveare Smith – Direct Testimony
2000s	Reportage, Embrace of Naturalism. Robin Soans, David Hare, Political Theatre. Alecky Blythe and Recorded Delivery – UK. Awareness Raising and Political Tool - <i>The Exonerated</i> & <i>The Vagina Monologues</i> USA, Iceandfire, UK

**Figure 1. Developments in Documentary theatre.**

### *Contemporary Documentary Theatre*

According to Martin, contemporary documentary theatre represents a struggle to shape and remember the most transitory history. Documentary theatre seeks to capture the complex ways in which individuals think about the events that shape their lives (2006:9).

Several terms are used to describe contemporary documentary theatre. Among these are theatre-of-witness, theatre-of-fact, verbatim theatre, docudrama, testimonial theatre, and theatre of testimony. Critics and scholars seem to use these markers interchangeably and this can be problematic. Dawson (1999) believes this confusion can be attributed to the fact that the term documentary itself is problematic as no particular definition exists either in relation to film or theatre. There are differences as well as crossovers between these terms and the kinds of theatres to which they refer. For instance Forsyth and Megson (2009:1-3) prefer to use the terms 'documentary' and 'fact-based' rather than 'verbatim'. They argue that the form has continued to diversify away from its origins in interviews and storytelling to include a more varied range of data than interviews alone. To support their claims, they cite the archive, testimony, orature and anecdote, along with an arsenal of self-reflexive performance techniques.

Human rights practitioner Brian Phillips questions this lack of rules or governing practices surrounding the form particularly when these plays encroach on the territory of human rights. This is a significant point especially in this study which interrogates how playwrights gather and craft the testimonies of asylum seekers into plays and performances (2010:5). According to David Watt there seems to be two themes running in contemporary documentary. These are on one hand a reliance on the words of real people as primary source material, and on the other hand the return to naturalism which the earlier form tried to avoid. Watt argues that this is particularly evident in the emerging 'theatre of testimony' (2010:192).

As a researcher and as a playwright I am interested in how documentary plays have incorporated the personal testimonies of migrants seeking asylum. The examination of *The Crossing* and *The Line* will be extended in practice through the writing of a testimonial play *Asylum:Section 22*, to better appreciate testimonial playwriting with regards to content, form, and truth claims.

### *Terminology*

As noted earlier, critics and scholars often use terms interchangeably with regards to documentary theatre in general and theatre using personal testimonies in particular. This section will discuss two areas: Verbatim Theatre and Theatre of Testimony. The terms are related to the wider genre of documentary theatre. They are often used interchangeably, and for the most part are concerned with staging the stories of real people or accounts of events. A closer investigation of the terms is called for in order to understand the plays selected as case studies both from the perspective of a playwright as well as the manner in which asylum testimonies are being staged. The study will make a case for a distinction between the terms.

### *The Document*

Timothy Youker (2012:2) writes that the word document first appeared in English during the 15th Century, coming from Latin by way of Old French. It was at first used to denote any form of lesson, instruction, or evidence, whether written or spoken. In the middle of the 18th Century it settled into what the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* specifies as the word's modern definition: 'Something written, inscribed, etc., which furnishes evidence or

information upon any subject, as a manuscript, title-deed, tomb-stone, coin, picture, etc.' It is probably more than mere chance that the constricting of the term to exclude speech was simultaneous with the rise of print culture.

On a related note Mark Fleishman writes:

the linking of theatre to dramatic literature was a political process designed to enforce a particular dynamic of power vis-à-vis other less literary and more physical forms of theatrical practice, even within European theatrical history, and that when a European tradition of theatre was imported into Africa as part of the colonial project, it was the dominant literary part of that tradition that was imported and that set about side-lining the existent African practices of a non-literary theatre that were more diverse in their practices and accommodations (1991 in 2012:13).

My study adopts Youker's working definition where a document is understood as a media object that is presented as a record of a fact or as a privileged representation of an absent person or past event. A document is a representation that certifies for us that something happened...or that someone or something that is not present actually exists somewhere else. A document takes the place of people or events that cannot be apprehended directly by the senses. It certifies a particular account of the past (which is necessarily absent), or it is authorized to represent the memory or the will of a person who is, for some reason, unavailable. It may be a text on a piece of paper, a photograph, a video or audio recording, or a digital collection of data. What makes it a document is the fact that it is not the thing itself (though it is, itself, a thing) but rather a trace or depiction that can potentially be authorized to stand in for the thing itself. A piece of pottery, for example, is usually not considered a document, whereas a scene painted on the side of a pot might be considered a document, depending on whether someone chooses to present it as such (2012:2).

Youker contends that the form and content of documents and the make-up of archives are products of ideology, reflections of a community or institution's beliefs about what kinds of stories the total text of the archive ought to be telling, about who and what ought to be represented within such stories, and about what constitutes an 'authentic' representation (2012:8).

Jacques Le Goff contends that 'the document is not objective, innocent raw material, but expresses past society's power over memory and over the future' (1996: xvii). Michel de Certeau makes a related point. He defines historiography as a process that produces

intelligibility through continuous acts of selecting and discarding, taking 'social productions' that is, objects or pieces of writing from everyday life and translating them into 'symbolic objects', relics and documents of historical significance that become meaningful precisely because of the historian's 'gesture of setting aside.' In each of those cases, the act of 'setting aside' may leave the actual object unaltered, but it transforms the function and meaning of the object by imposing a new context on it (1988:9).

Le Goff suggests that the act of 'setting aside' that creates a document is predicated on the person who does that 'setting aside' assuming the authority to select which 'social productions' belong in the archive and consequently which memories, facts, or accounts are and are not legitimate and important. This is equally true of what we may call the 'counter-documents' and 'counter-archives' produced by postcolonial readings, opposition movements, countercultures and politically committed artists, as it is of the documents and archives produced by a dominant culture (1996:xvii).

### *The Documentary*

Peter Weiss ([1968] in '*Notizen zum dokumentarischen Theater*' (Notes of documentary theatre) wrote that the documentary theatre is a theatre of factual reports. It is made up of minutes of proceedings, files, letters, statistical tables, stock-exchange communiqués, presentation of the balance sheets from banks and industrial undertakings, official commentaries, speeches, interviews, statements by well-known personalities, press, radio, photo or film reporting of events, and all the other media which bear witness to the present and form the basis of the production. Documentary theatre shuns all inventions. It makes use of authentic documentary material, which it diffuses from the stage without altering the contents, but restructures the form.

According to Weiss, documentary theatre is only possible if it exists as an organised political working collective that has studied sociology, and is capable of scientific analysis based on a large archive. Documentary theatre then stands for the alternative reality, however inscrutable it may make itself appear to be, which can be explained in every detail (2003:67-68, 73). Martin argues that it is essential to understand documentary theatre as a body of work created from a specific body of archived material. The material might be compiled from interviews, video, film, documents, photographs, hearings and records among other

things. This distinguishes it from other forms of theatre, especially historical fiction. While most contemporary playwrights make the claim that everything presented in their plays is part of the archive, Martin cautions that not everything in the archive is documentary (2006:9).

Youker maintains that documentary theatre is theatre that presents and interprets documents without subordinating them to a fully autonomous dramatic narrative. It is documentary in that it is composed, to a significant degree, from materials that it presents as documents of something external to the performance event, and in that it implicitly or explicitly uses its own compositional and performance strategies to invoke and/or question the value of documents as a discursive category (2012:11). This definition is more expansive than Weiss's in that it does not exclude the presence of fictive or poetic elements in a play, nor does it exclude ironic or deconstructive presentational tactics.

This study adopts the understanding of documentary that does not place what Youker terms 'any inherent realist or empiricist connotations or inherent associations with the representative modes potentiated by film or other modern recording technologies' (2012:11). Youker dismisses the assumptions of the existence of a 'ponderously pedantic, pseudo-journalistic documentary theatre tradition from which recent examples of the practice have freed themselves' (2012:11). This assumption can be read in Martin's assertions of a 'conservative and conventional realist dramaturgy' of documentary theatre prior to the 1990s (2010:6).

The above demonstrates that it is important to recognise that documentary theatre does not denote a formalized genre. According to Youker it denotes a theatre practice 'that can produce works participating in or evoking a variety of performance genres, including tragedies, mystery plays, civic pageants, carnivals, shamanic rituals, happenings, funeral rites, liturgies, lectures, and science demonstrations' (2012:13).

A document in a documentary play carries at least two meanings simultaneously. There is the meaning it was presumed to have had in its original context, and the meaning that the playwright assigns it by repeating it in a new context. Some documentary plays are built around the assertion that the artificial configuration of documents created by artists can reveal actual patterns and causal links in the real world. In others, the artists engage in a

form of self-critique that is intended to put the lie to the denials of authorial influence made by putatively non-artistic, 'objective' arrangements of documents.

### *Verbatim theatre*

Paget originally coined the term verbatim theatre, in relation to a number of community-based plays which took place in the 1970s in Britain. Paget described it as:

a form of theatre firmly predicated upon the taping and subsequent transcription of interviews with 'ordinary' people, done in the context of research into a particular region, subject area, issue, event, or combination of these things. This primary source is then transformed into a text which is acted, usually by the performers who collected the material in the first place (1987:317).

According to Paget the emphasis on the word verbatim was because 'the firmest of commitments is...made by the company to the use of vernacular speech, recorded as the primary source material of their play' (1987:317). Mary Luckhurst observes that in contemporary times, the term 'verbatim' is being applied to all forms of contemporary documentary theatre. She writes:

From the 1990s, however, the term is applied by some informed practitioners, and more loosely and confusingly by others, to much documentary theatre, from Piscator's model in the 1960s, to plays like 'My Name is Rachel Corrie' (2005), based on diaries, notebooks and emails, as well as to plays which incorporate both testimony and invented material, such as Hare's 'Stuff Happens' and Gupta's 'Gladiator Games' (2008:203).

On the contemporary stage, the verbatim form has progressed away from a reliance on the interview as the primary source material. This reliance on the interview can be observed in definitions provided by Hammond and Steward among others who argue that:

The term verbatim refers to the origins of the text spoken in the play. The words of real people are recorded or transcribed by a dramatist during an interview or research process, or are appropriated from existing records such as the transcripts of an official enquiry. They are then edited, arranged or recontextualized to form a dramatic presentation, in which actors take on the characters of the real individuals whose words are being used (2008:9).

## *Theatre of Testimony*

Enright (2011) writes that the term theatre of testimony was first used by the late theatre director Barney Simon in relation to the work of Emily Mann after directing a production of her play *Still Life* in 1983. Athol Fugard, in the introduction to Mann's anthology *Testimonies*, an anthology of Mann's plays, relays the following conversation he had with Simon:

In talking about Mann's work [Simon] used the word —testimony several times — I made him check its dictionary definition: —To bear witness according to the OED . . . A perfect definition of the challenge [South Africa's] theatre faces at this moment in our country's history. . . Barney became very worked-up: We can't be silent! We must give evidence! We are witnesses! He said Mann's work had been a great provocation to him and had revitalized his sense of theatre's role in a time of crisis (Fugard in Mann 1997:ix-x)

The term theatre of testimony has also been used with reference to the work of Nola Chilton in Israel by Linda Ben-Zvi. In Chilton's case the playwright records the words of real people. These recordings are then 'shaped and theatricalized, but not altered, and presented in performance by actors' (Ben Zvi 2006:45). According to Ben-Zvi, Chilton's documentary work 'has provided a space for these ignored others: Arabs, women, the poor, and the elderly to be seen and heard, to tell their stories, and to emerge from the shadows to which they have been consigned by societal institutions that neglect or suppress them and by the media, which stereotypes or erases them' 2006:44). She observes that Chilton acknowledged theatre's possibilities as well as its limitations and quotes her as saying 'it can't change very much ... but it can at least bring people together. That is something' (Chilton in Ben Zvi 2006:44). This seems to be one of the main concerns for those like Anna Deavere Smith, whose work is associated with the term testimony.

In line with Hammond, Claire Deal defines theatre of testimony as 'a form of theatrical performance created from the narratives of real people interwoven with excerpts from primary documents such as diaries, letters, participant observer's field notes, court transcripts and other texts' (2008:5). Watt refers to theatre of testimony 'as a new form of verbatim theatre', in relation to the work of Emily Mann and Robin Soans. He describes this form of theatre as being one where, 'disparate authentic voices speak apparently directly (but actually through the medium of an actor) to an audience able to vicariously experience another world, on the assumption that such vicarious experience offers access to real

knowledge (2009:192). In the same vein Eileen O'Brien (2003) argues that the authenticity of the material being presented demands interrogation. This comes out of the realisation that interviewees may yield to the 'seductive appeal of fame' and as a result exaggerate or lie about their life stories and experiences. The second concern is ethical and relates to those who tell their stories and whether this 'telling and retelling might have the effect of re-enforcing rather than liberating their victimhood' (2003:8).

According to Melissa Salz, theatre of testimony can be divided into two broad camps. On one hand are plays that can be read as social and/or political. On the other hand are plays that are personal and/or autobiographical (1996:3-4). She defines social and/or political theatre of testimony as, 'aestheticized documentary drama that dramatizes oral history in the form of fractured and fragmented memory'. Salz contends that 'social/political contemporary drama combines interviews, trial transcripts and multimedia materials to create a kaleidoscope of images, perspectives, and memories'. In theatre of testimony, unlike in documentary theatre, 'the primacy of written archival documents has dwindled and interview-based materials have become central. These documentary performances continue to blur the boundaries between realism and more argument-based formal structures where juxtaposition, fluidity of time and place and multi-role casting are the norm' (1996:2).

Martin believes that testimony involves the narration of memory and experience (2006:11). Caroline Wake contends that testimonial theatre can be defined as a form of theatre that both depends on and depicts subjects testifying to, or speaking about, their experiences of trauma. In this way, testimonial theatre operates as an overarching term for verbatim and documentary theatre as well as autobiographical performance (2010:19).

### *Testimony and Theatre*

According to Enright (2011:51) theatre practitioners adopt various methods and practices when they adapt and or adopt testimonies in performance (2011:51). The prepared script might be performed by actors, or in the case of Anna Deavere Smith and Jonathan Nkala's *The Crossing*, by the practitioner, to name some of the renowned examples. In some cases those who have given their testimonies perform in the play, or a mix of these approaches is adopted as was the case in *The Story I Am About to Tell* by Duma Joshua Kumalo in collaboration with the Khulumani support group.

It is essential to highlight that the peculiarity of testimonial work is not a universally held norm. Christopher Bigsby, commenting on Emily Mann's testimony plays, argues that when working with real people's words, 'the theatrical challenge is in a sense no different from that confronting any other playwright'. He argues that this is because the documentary playwright like his counterpart working in the fictional frame still has to 'give shape and form to the material, to develop character through language and action, and find a way to bridge the gap between the subjectivity of the character and the subjectivities of the audience' (1999:134).

Documentary scholars and critics agree that rendering oral testimonies in a form that is dramatic or theatrical can be problematic. Enright for instance believes that this is because people's speech patterns are not always clear and do not have a natural narrative arc (2011:52). In the case of this dissertation, transferring the oral testimonies in Nkala's *The Crossing*, Gina Shmukler's *The Line* and *Asylum:Section 22* entailed encountering the challenges that come with language translation for the playwrights as well as for myself.

This study then seeks to examine how playwright positioning informs the creative treatment of playwrights working with the testimony of asylum seekers. This treatment raises questions about authenticity, aesthetics and ethics of practice. According to Ryan Matthew Claycomb, each interviewee speaks to the playwright as in a monologue (2003:166). This study seeks to critically engage with how the playwright alters the notion of subjectivity as it is conceived in the initial interviews with asylum seekers, not only in terms of the words spoken, but also in terms of their context when the testimonies are repositioned in performance.

Claycomb argues that this disruption of the monologue voice may or may not have adverse consequences (2003:167). This is because the playwright wrestles authority from the interview subject by having the final word in the editing and ordering of the final script. It is through this control that the playwright can either empower or disempower the subject in the public sphere. According to Claycomb, this selecting and arranging of voices speaks to the power of the playwright not as neutral observer, but as ideologue. The range of voices and opinions presented in the play stage a communal conversation that makes dialogue more possible for the audiences in attendance (2003:181).

Favorini points our attention to the fallacy of authentic representation on stage. He claims that the dichotomy between the fictive nature of the theatrical frame and the playwright's attempt to create the illusion of truth persists. Favorini observes that the paradoxical nature of the documentary impulse presents multiple dilemmas to the playwright. On the one hand the playwright, as an artist has to relinquish his creative autonomy by limiting the production to the actual, ahead of imagined events. On the other, the playwright's impulse to 'tell the truth' is threatened by the playwright and or propagandist's 'urge to persuade'. Accuracy in documentary theatre thus causes great contestation (1995: xiii). According to Maamari, documentary theatre allows the coexistence of the two paradoxical elements, which are the freedom of artist expression and the restriction to depict factual information (2011:30).

This study seeks to interrogate how a playwright embodies the tension between performance and authenticity, given the contestations of notions of reality and authenticity. Postmodernists like Jean Baudrillard (1997) have problematised positivist notions of reality arguing for the existence of 'simulated' versions of reality because discourse 'is no longer true or false' or 'fancy-free' in its language. This tension in Maamari's (2011) view is the heart of documentary theatre and blurs the line between reality and staged spectacle.

#### *Theatre of Testimony: My Practice*

This research study follows Salz (1996) and Heddon's lead (2008) in using the term theatre of testimony to describe the work of playwrights working with and from the life stories of asylum seekers, ahead of terms like verbatim and any other discussed here and in other writings. Firstly, the theatre of testimony seems to foreground and privilege the experiences and person of the testifier than the terms verbatim or documentary theatre. Secondly the meaning of the phrase in the literature informing this study seems to be fairly set, agreed on and accepted. Thirdly the phrase embodies the basic tenets of a transcribed 'life history' as developed in practice in South Africa by Barney Simon and others.

According to William Tierney this applies as far afield as Latin America where it exists as a literary form called '*testimonio*'. In '*testimonio*' a single narrator, who is often a member of a marginalised community, bears witness to a social urgency in the hope that the testimony will motivate the reader to action on behalf of the community for whom the person speaks

(2000:108). I am convinced that in South Africa and elsewhere, theatre offers an accessible platform that is reachable for those who maybe illiterate or may not have access to publishers.

John Beverley adds that '*testimonio*' is typically spoken to an 'interlocutor' who can be an ethnographer, journalist, or professional author' (2004:320). Beverley argues that 'the predominant formal aspect of the '*testimonio*' is the voice that speaks to the reader through the text in the form of an 'I' that demands to be recognised, that wants or needs to stake a claim on your attention (2004:320-321). This study seeks to interrogate how playwrights handle this urgency when they work with asylum seeker testimonies.

In my view, ascribing the label verbatim to the work in *Asylum:Section 22* is problematic particularly because of its associations with ideas of 'truth' and 'authenticity'. When a play is labelled 'verbatim' critics appear to assume that the purpose of the play is to reveal or expose the 'real' truth behind something or an event that has occurred. For instance Heddon observes that 'verbatim and indeed documentary... operate as signifiers that propose a relationship of veracity to the supposed facts' (2010:117). While the asylum testimonies that I have included in the play text of *Asylum:Section 22* are 'authentic' in that it was genuine testimony that was produced in interviews with asylum seekers, I have no means by which to guarantee either the veracity of these testimonies or those in the other case studies.

Given the unreliability of memory it would be rather naive to assume that this was the case. My interest in working with asylum testimonies in performance is not about whether the person is telling me the truth of a situation but more about how the playwright's positioning in relation to the subject matter informs how they work with these testimonies towards devising performances.

On the surface this might look like a contradiction, because one usually relies on somebody's testimony by believing the testifier. Arnon Keren cautions against this by noting that testimonies are subject to distortion when they pass through the structures of memory. He argues that this is not the same as believing that the content of the testimony is really true (2007:368-381). Derrida observes that 'testimony always goes hand in hand with at least the possibility of fiction, perjury and lie' (1998:27). A playwright should thus understand

testimony as a narrative account of what happened and not necessarily what actually happened. Luisa Passerini writes in Joan Sangster that:

When people talk about their lives, people lie sometimes, forget a little, exaggerate, become confused, get things wrong. Yet they are revealing truths ... the guiding principle for (life histories) could be that all autobiographical memory is true: it is up to the interpreter to discover in which sense, where, and for what purpose (1994: 15-28).

C.A.J Coady defines testimony as that which 'puts us in touch with the perceptions, memories, and inferences of others' (1994:78). Derrida argues that a testimony tells in the first person 'the sharable and un-sharable secret of what happened to me, to me, to me alone, the absolute secret of what I was in a position to live, see, hear, touch, sense, and feel' (1998:43). In other words it is always autobiographical.

In this study, I use the term theatre of testimony to describe the process of devising plays out of interview material because: firstly, it offers more of a sense of where, why and how the words in the script originated. Secondly, it affords the playwright more creative space in terms of interpretation. Using the word testimony conjures up notions of someone testifying to their knowledge about a particular event, rather than the semantic notions of 'word for word' that come with using the term 'verbatim'.

In the religious and the legal arena someone testifies when they have information that they can share for the benefit of other persons. This study contends that theatre of testimony can provide a forum for audience to bear witness to asylum testimonies and this can be a place where the testimonies find individual and social resonance before a community of listeners. According to Chris Megson when personal testimonies are performed they give 'expression to the unthinkable realities of everyday life by placing the human subject at the centre of the theatrical experience' (2006:526). I agree with Enright (2011:43) that this focus on the human subject testifying to their experience is the essence of Theatre of Testimony.

Unlike in the religious and legal arena where as Derrida maintains 'to testify is always on the one hand to do it at present the witness must be present at the stand himself, without technical interposition', in the theatre, a testimony is delivered within a framework that essentially imposes a form of 'interposition'(1998:32). Enright (2011:44) argues that the playwright should thus be aware that theatre audiences familiar with the theatre's

conventions realise that the person before them in performance may not necessarily be the real person (2011:44).

### *Speaking for the Other*

The responsibility of speaking for the 'other' has attracted a lot of attention from scholars and critics. Linda Alcoff is primarily concerned with how, in the very act of speaking for the 'other', the speaker may not only misrepresent that 'other' but also, in the very act of attempting to give them a voice, one may contribute further to their silence (1991-92:32). As a form of discursive practice, speaking for others has come under enormous criticism and in some quarters is being rejected. There are critics who hold that speaking for others is arrogant, vain, unethical and politically illegitimate. Alcoff and others maintain that speaking should always carry with it an accountability and responsibility for what one says (1991-92:32).

Watt urges us to consider 'the doubt that the experience we are being offered constitutes knowledge' given the fact that much of this new 'type of verbatim theatre remains in thrall to the naturalist habit' (2009:193). He suggests that this is because in this emergent theatre of testimony there has been a tendency by playwrights to move away from the dramatization of interview transcripts into scenes, towards more of a restaging of the interview. This aesthetic exists in the form of characters telling their stories directly to the audience who stand in for the interviewer (2009:193).

Rustom Bharucha cited in Enwezor highlights the difficulty of being a spectator to the other's pain. This is a position that various theatre of testimony playwrights have to negotiate and work from. He asks:

What happens when you are not a victim yourself, but you become a spectator of someone else's pain? How do you deal with it? How do you resist the obvious possibilities of voyeurism, or the mere consumption of other people's suffering? How do you sensitise yourself politically to the histories of others that might not have touched on your own? (2002:397)

There is mounting acknowledgement that where one speaks from affects the meaning and truth of what is being said and that an ability to transcend one's location cannot be assumed. It is thus essential to interrogate the positioning of playwrights who adopt a mode that necessarily asks them to speak for the other.

## *Asylum*

The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as:

A person who owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR, Convention 16)

The subjects of my study are asylum seekers who have to go through the refugee determination process to be recognised as refugees. Wake argues that while the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) provides guidelines on how to conduct this process, it varies from country to country. She observes that this may consist of a series of interviews, forms, and sometimes involves a series of interviews, forms, and sometimes appeals. The precise process depends on how the asylum seekers arrive. That is to say whether by air or by other means as well as when they apply immediately or sometime after entering on another visa, and whether or not they have to appeal their case (2010:87).

Following on Wake's theorisation of asylum in Australia, I believe that the refugee determination process and the migrant experience have operated as one of South Africa's disturbing 'public secrets'. Michael Taussig defines a public secret as 'that which is generally known, but cannot be articulated' (1999:5). This study examines how playwrights have used the asylum testimonies to reach an audience that even though they know about the refugee determination process, chose also to 'know what not to know'. Wake argues that the refugee determination process exists in 'one of the blind spots of the public sphere' (2010:6).

The unreliability of memory has been the subject of much debate with regard to eyewitness testimony and has particular implications for the personal narrative as a valuable source of knowledge in postmodern times and the oft quoted 'crisis of representation' in which we find ourselves. This notion that testimonies reveal more than just what they say is the essence of testimony work. It has a particular resonance in the case study plays under investigation.

In this vein, Jennifer Lackey argues that strictly speaking we do not learn from one another's beliefs. We learn from one another's words. She argues that failing to appreciate this, has

led to an incorrect understanding of testimony. To correct this, Lackey writes, 'we need to stop looking at what speakers believe and focus, instead, on what speakers say'. She calls for attention to be paid to the linguistic or communicative items in testimonial exchanges such as statements and or other acts of communication (2008:15). Lackey's work offers us possibilities for understanding how knowledge can be learnt from the testimony of asylum seekers despite the possibility that the speakers themselves fail to possess such knowledge. She argues that if we are to progress towards understanding how testimony operates as a way of knowing, then we need to focus on what people say instead of what they believe or they know. This call is of particular significance to playwrights who seek to devise plays from the testimonies of asylum seekers. It calls on the playwright to check the impulse to want to explicate what they believe to be the 'truth' behind the words, which may lead to misrepresenting the 'other'.

### *Testimony and the Interview*

Holstein and Gubrium in Silverman argue that the interview has become one of the most popular ways of generating information in postmodern society (2004:140). This study focusses on how playwrights too, are using the interview to generate data for their plays, and in particular how a playwright can generate material to stage the concept of asylum. Unlike Holstein and Gunrium who were writing for qualitative researchers this study investigates how playwrights might conduct interviews and what this contributes to meaning making.

Holstein and Gubrium further argue for interviews to be understood as social encounters where knowledge is actively constructed arguing that the 'interview is not so much a neutral conduit or source of distortion; but rather a site of, and occasion for producing reportable knowledge' (in Silverman 2004:141).

This is essential in testimonial work in light of Schaffer and Smith's observation that 'all stories emerge in the midst of complex and uneven relationships of power which prompts certain questions about their production particularly to whom they are told and under what circumstances' (2004:5). Holstein and Gubrium contend that a testimony which occurs within the context of an interview is the product of an interaction between two people (in Silverman 2004:49). Silverman writes:

Interviewing is understood as an interactional event in which members draw on their cultural knowledge, including their knowledge about how members of categories usually speak; questions are a central part of the data and cannot be viewed as neutral invitations to speak rather they shape how and as a member of which categories the respondents should speak; interview responses are treated as accounts more than reports that is, they are understood as the work of accounting by a member of a category for activities attached to that category (2004:48).

According to Marjorie Shostak such an interview is an occasion where 'one with unique personality traits and particular interests at a particular time of life...answers a specific set of questions asked by another person with unique personality traits and interests at a particular time of life' (2009:100). Sangster concludes that the interview cannot be removed from the circumstances of its making, which of necessity is one of audience participation and face to face interaction because it 'is not created as a literary product is created, alone and as a result of reflective action' (1994:44). By paying attention to the interview as a creative act in devising theatre of testimony, we can better understand the role and function of the playwright when devising asylum plays.

## CHAPTER TWO

Testimony demands to be interpreted because of the dialectic of meaning and event that traverses it - Paul Ricoeur (1972:35).

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the theoretical and methodological factors at play in the study of theatre of testimony. In light of the nature of the research subject, with its bias towards people's asylum seeking experiences and their representation(s), and given that the experiences vary from person to person, and from playwright to playwright, I have chosen to use qualitative methodologies, namely narrative research. Qualitative methods were deemed better suited to engage with migrants' and playwrights' subjective experiences and realities. The use of qualitative methods in this study does not presume to supersede possible alternate findings of quantitative researches, nor does it seek to put qualitative and quantitative methodologies in a hierarchical order. This research seeks to complement all such efforts in the pursuit of understanding the contemporary South African migrant experience as embodied in the play texts by playwrights who engage with and represent asylum seeking migrant testimonies on stage.

The study will present as case studies; the autobiographical one hander *The Crossing* (2008) by Jonathan Khumbulani Nkala, who is a migrant and refugee and former asylum seeker himself. *The Line* (2012) written by Georgina Shmukler as part of her Masters research on Trauma and Theatre Making, which focusses on the escalated violence directed against migrants in 2008, and my own work-in-progress *Asylum:Section 22* (2013) written from the fieldwork conducted for this research. These plays form a body of work that the dissertation will examine as theatre of testimony. The study is premised on the understanding that playwrights have to work in real time in the universe to address not only historical and current issues, but also in remembering the past in the present. While the plays focus on the migrant experience in general, the study will further examine the plays to underscore the representation or lack thereof of asylum seekers.

This research is essential in the light of Achille Mbembe's observation that in the contemporary postcolony 'all struggles have become struggles of representation' (2001:6). It

is therefore necessary to engage with the work of testimonial playwrights in the representation of the other and or self. In Pierre Bourdieu's terms, playwrights can be considered as a group who 'objectify without being objectified' (1988:5). Personal narrative research was chosen as the methodology of analysis because 'testimony as a source does not offer a transparent window into the past, but it does provide access to the felt experience and significance of events to the survivors in their present moment' (Lisa Peschel 2009:10).

The second arm of the methodological framework will seek to unpack the violence directed against migrants and perceived migrants in South Africa with specific reference to May 2008. The attacks reportedly left 63 people dead and displaced thousands who had their property either destroyed and/or illegally confiscated. The study will make the case that the displays of systematic and ferocious violence against migrants or perceived migrants constitute what can be read as a distinct trend in contemporary South African performance. Dehumanisation and violence are common threads in the case studies. Given the time frame covered by the plays, the research will argue that the plays offer us a lens through which we may understand or read the contemporary moment of the asylum seekers' existence. The acts of violence documented in the play texts have been variously theorised and commented on by scholars. Thus far most conceptualisations have tended to focus on accounting for, historically or otherwise, the motivations behind the attackers' actions, generally conceived of as xenophobia.

I will utilise Gregory Stanton's (2006/7) *The eight stages of genocide* to argue that the body of work under study reveals the onset of, and preamble to, acts of unacknowledged genocide (*The Crossing*, 2006/2008), the genocide through the eyes of the survivors and perpetrators (*The Line*, 2012), as well as the migrant existence in the aftermath of the violence (*Asylum:Section 22*, 2013).

### *Genocide testimony*

The word and conceptual application of the term genocide is accredited to the lawyer Raphael Lemkin (1900-1959). Lemkin created the word 'genocide' in 1944 by combining the Greek word for race or tribe, 'geno', with 'cide' Latin for killing. The United Nations ratified the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in 1948. Several

formulations have been proffered to define and expand the concept. For instance Pieter Drost (1959) suggests that genocide should be understood as the 'deliberate destruction of physical life of individual human beings by reason of their membership of any human collectively as such'. Steven Katz argues that the concept of genocide is only applicable 'when there is an actualised intent', regardless of the degree of 'success' in the execution of the intent to 'physically destroy an entire group'. Katz observing that 'group' is a fluid concept highlights that the concept applies to persons identified as such by the perpetrators (1989: 127).

While the definition seems to read a group as a homogenous unit, history shows us that perpetrators hardly ever single out a homogenous 'gene', or 'race' or 'tribe'. This is in view of the fact that no 'pure race' exists. Historical instances show that the killing is targeted at persons who show similarities that can be 'grouped' or classed by the perpetrators as such. In the documented cases, the aggression has been against several 'groups' and or their sympathisers as well.

### *Personal Narrative methodology and context*

Karri A. Holley and Julia Colyar observe that in narrative research, people 'are essentially raconteurs who experience the world and interact with others through storied lives' (2009:680). Through narrative research studies, this dissertation examines how the asylum seekers at an individual level work as storytellers, and how playwrights choose, mould and present the asylum testimonies as play texts to engage with the audience. Narrative research as a methodology is concerned with people's experience of the world and in the stories they make out of these experiences.

Narrative inquiry as a method enables one to engage with the stories that asylum seekers (as migrants) consciously tell. Jill Sinclair Bell argues that the stories have foundations in deep-seated stories of which the person might be unaware. The stories people tell are a window into their experiences and the beliefs they hold (2002:209). This study then, examines how playwrights work with testimonies and the possible assumptions that might be behind authorial decisions.

Asylum seekers give testimonies to shore up their interpretation of self, and may omit life events and experiences that might challenge this interpretation. María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo (2003) argues that focusing on narrative theory can offer insights into how a story can be organised and presented. In analysing how playwrights use asylum experiences in their play texts, this study problematizes notions in documentary theatre and theatre of testimony in particular, which present an unproblematic view of experience as a source of knowledge. Joan W. Scott for instance makes the case, often overlooked by proponents of documentary that, 'what counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straight forward; it is always contested, and always therefore political' (1992:412).

Deal (2008:5) drawing on Robert Stake recommends that we 'take that case studies, from which we feel we can learn the most' about the case itself and in terms of the phenomenon (2008:5). The study will thus investigate an instance where an asylum seeker reproduced personal narrative in Jonathan Nkala's *The Crossing* (2006-8), and how playwrights expand these to produce performance text in Gina Shmukler's *The Line* (2012). *Asylum:Section 22* (2013) embodies the researcher's attempt to devise a production from the testimonies gathered from asylum seekers.

### *Defining Narrative Analysis*

Donald E. Polkinghorne defines narrative analysis as a process in which 'researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize or configure them by means of a plot into stories or events'. For Polkinghorne narrative analysis entails the usage of stories to define human actions and experiences (1995:12). To sociolinguist William Labov narrative is 'one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred' (1972:359). Paul Ricoeur foregrounds the chronological nature of narratives, observing that 'narrative is the temporal character of the human experience' (1984:52). According to Catherine Reissman (1993) in narrative analysis, the story (testimony) is the object of investigation. The analysis seeks to reveal and further an understanding of how people make sense of their life actions and events.

Laurel Richardson contends that '[n]arrative is both a mode of reasoning and a mode of representation. People can 'apprehend' the world narratively and people can 'tell' about the

world narratively' (1995:200). In this study the focus is on the 'mode of representation' in playwrights working with the testimonies of asylum seekers rather than the 'mode of reasoning.' This dissertation argues that when asylum seekers testify about their experiences they use elements of story like plot, focalization and character. This research interrogates the manner in which playwrights work with the testimonies and then, from these testimonies create theatre of testimony plays. In this study narrative is understood as the result of sequencing actions. Narrative becomes the 'telling (or retelling) of a story in a specific time sequence'.

Interrogating the authorial decisions of playwrights is important to this study because of the power that is located in the decisions made about the shaping and moulding of the plays. Narrative analysis entails research that will interrogate the character perspectives forwarded by the playwrights. These perspectives reflect on the cultural and societal perceptions that emerge from the way the narrative is told. I will interrogate the plots and story elements of the text in order to interrogate how the playwrights use the testimonies in performance. Narrative analysis as a methodology enables the study to investigate which asylum story is told, and the manner in which it is organised. Holley and Colyar cite Hoshmand (2005) who observes that a playwright's 'identity and objectives can be present in a text, sometimes deliberately, and sometimes without the author's intention' (2009:684).

Holley and Colyar argue that textual choices communicate the playwright's understanding of the subject matter, subjectivities, and experiences as well as their position in the power matrix (2009:684). This is because when playwrights devise the texts, they make decisions that influence how audiences will appreciate the production and the asylum subject matter. Tom Barone contends that unlike conventional research which attempts to ascertain and verify knowledge about the state of the world, narrative research seeks to portray people's experience of the world. Narrative research offers 'a degree of interpretive space' and seeks to question the status quo (2002:150). According to Riessman, narrative research enables us to study 'what life means at the moment of telling' This notion of life as 'storied' in terms of the forces that shape human behaviour, is the basis of the narrative study of asylum seekers' testimonies. He does, however, concede that since we cannot have direct access to the experience of another, representation remains ambiguous at best. With this in mind, it is

optimistic to expect neutrality and objectivity when representing another to the world (1993:52).

This study interrogates notions of giving voice to the marginalised that underpin most theatre of testimony work. Riessman (1993) makes the case that this is theoretically impossible since voices on the margins are never silent to begin with; they can only be sidelined by the mainstream. At best, we can hear voices that playwrights record and interpret.

### *Rationale*

According to Riessman narrative research allows for a 'systematic study of personal experiences and meaning: how events have been constructed by active subjects'. As a methodology it is distinct in that it allows for the analysis of 'a process, a narrator or participant telling or narrating, and a product, the story or narrative told' (Riessman, 1993:70).

Mary Kay Kramp contends that by conducting a narrative inquiry, one gains 'access to the personal experiences of the storyteller who frames, articulates, and reveals life as experienced in a narrative structure' of the play (2004:105). This is because narrative inquiry places the story as the basic unit of study. In narrative research, the study of plot and character is read against the time and place from which the story/testimony is drawn. This study uses narrative inquiry to anticipate and discuss how the playwrights use context in connecting and situating the asylum experiences into coherent and structured life experiences. These processes reflect, structure, and narrate disparate events into a meaningful whole. In other words, the study seeks to unravel how asylum narratives or stories are re-constructed in theatre of testimony productions. According to Elliot G. Mishler 'it is clear that we do not find stories; we make stories. Personal narrative is not 'given' as a text; rather, personal narrative is a strategic practice of textualising and contextualising performance' (1995:117). This study examines how playwrights 'make stories' from migrant testimonies.

According to Jerome Brunner, in narrative analysis, 'a life as led is inseparable from a life as told' (1987:137). In this study, the play analysis is grounded on the acceptance of migrant plays 'as told'. In selecting qualitative methods the researcher recognises Elliot Eisner's

argument that 'there is no telling it like it is, for in the telling there is making' (1991:191). The study will engage with how playwright positionality informs how asylum testimonies are 'made' in theatre of testimony plays in relation to who the story is told to, why it is told, when it is told as well as where it is told.

According to Polkinghorne the script embodies the playwright's agenda as well as the tone of their demeanour during the interview (2007:4). Mishler (1986:482) and Polkinghorne (2007:4) outline multiple ways interviewers may affect and influence the responses of research subjects. For instance, they argue that research subjects use detail like the researcher's gender, clothing choices, speech and accent patterns, amongst other characteristics to determine and offer responses they believe are expected. Polkinghorne observes that research participants look for affirmation in the interviewer's vocal intonation and in their body language. With this in mind this study will query and problematize how playwrights recast interviews in performance where they are used to authenticate the testimonial form.

### *Narrative analysis as Research Methodology*

The study adopts Reissman's (1993:70) narrative categories to study the playwright's representation of the asylum experience. Riessman makes the case that narrative research can be broken down into five porous categories:

#### *Attending to experience.*

Attending to experience assumes an awareness of phenomena. Riessman argues that at the conceptual stage the selection of certain phenomena for consideration make them meaningful. Reality is thus actively constructed to oneself by thinking about and through subject matter (1993:70).

This means that the first step preceding the actual playwriting research and scripting is connected to the awareness on the playwright's part of the asylum phenomena. These thoughts translate into ideas, questions and observations about the asylum situation. These ideas shape the research question. The playwrights can be understood then to shape and construct their research according to their perception of reality.

#### *Telling about the experience*

Riessman writes that at this stage, 'events are re-presented, already ordered in a sense, to these listeners in a conversation, with all the opportunities and constraints the form of discourse entails' (1993:70). That is, the telling about an experience through conducting interviews becomes the performance of the narrative. At this stage the playwright conveys awareness into words and shares it as a story and sets the scene for others to formulate their own stories. Riessman argues that the telling might be audience specific since a person's perception of the audience can influence the interview responses (1993:70).

### *Transcribing Experience*

Theatre of testimony playwrights need to find a way to record their conversations with asylum seekers. Most playwrights under discussion seem to prefer to use tape recorder. A tape recording captures pauses, inflections, emphases, unfinished sentences, fluency, tone of voice, and wit. These features are hard, if not impossible, to capture in the written word. Riessman cautions that transcribing narrative is, like the narrative itself, also incomplete, partial, and selective. This study interrogates how these choices influence the shape of the asylum testimonies in the productions under study. This is because each inclusion and or exclusion, as well as the arrangement and style has implications on how the audience will understand the text.

### *Analysing Experience*

At this stage, the playwright analyses the transcript texts. According to Riessman, at this stage in narrative analysis; 'the main challenge is to identify similarities across the moments into an aggregate, a summation. An investigator sits with pages of tape recorded stories, snips away at the flow of talk to make it fit between the covers of a book, and tries to create sense and dramatic tension'. This study examines by what means 'these decisions about form, ordering, style of representation and how the fragments of lives that have been given in interviews will be housed' (1993:71). Riessman believes that it is the responses the work is expected to evoke that ultimately determine what and how material is excluded and/or included. The play scripts craft a 'metastory' about what happened by influencing what the interview narratives should signify through editing and narration. The resultant script also shapes what the research subject tells, turning it into a 'hybrid story, a "false document"' Riessman (1993:71).

### *Reading Experience*

The audience brings their own meaning to the new written testimonial script that the playwright presents. Brunner (1987) contends that this collaboration brings a new dimension to the work, in that the text has many voices, and is therefore open to many readings, and many constructions. Riessman adds that varying historical or political contexts, can lead to different readings in the same reader. According to Riessman there are no master narratives, as all texts stand on moving ground. The findings in this study are similarly relative and do not assume to represent a final or incontrovertible truth.

Riessman contends that the narrative research approach tries to create a plot from fragments of all, often disordered, experiences in order to lend a sense of reality to the varied experiences. This insight captures the essence of theatre of testimony and documentary writing that this thesis investigates.

### *Limitations of representation in narrative research*

In adopting narrative research as a method of study, and in interrogating the way playwrights use asylum testimonies in performance, this study argues that despite positivist claims to the contrary, we have no direct access to the experience of others. Riessman (1993) observes that all forms of representation are 'limited portraits'. Each playwright allows different voices in the chorus to dominate in the final performance script. This study, grounded on an awareness of the limits of representation, reflects on how playwright positioning informs the use of testimonies of asylum seekers in performance. This is essential given the widespread use of theatre of testimony as a form in exploring asylum and refugee concerns.

This chapter established the methodological frame within which the research was grounded. The following chapters draw on this methodological framework to analyse the theatrical body of work that was selected to examine how asylum is represented on the contemporary South African stage and well as the subject matter of the representation.

## CHAPTER THREE

All the cruel and brutal things, even genocide, starts with the humiliation of one individual - Kofi Annan in Whack, R. C [Executive Producer] (2013).

### *THE CROSSING*

This chapter focusses on Jonathan Khumbulani Nkala's one hander, *The Crossing* (2008). The play presents an autobiographical performance of his experiences as an undocumented immigrant trekking from Zimbabwe into South Africa. The way in which the writer's positioning informs the manner in which he uses the asylum-seeking experience in creating this testimonial work will be examined. Emphasis is placed on the use of testimony to recall and represent the migrant and asylum-seeking experience.

The choice of *The Crossing* as a case study partly draws on Alison Forsyth's observation that in contemporary time, as was the case in historical times; traumatic events produce distinct testimonial forms of expression. Forsyth argues that

the most well-known Holocaust survivor accounts were often propelled by an urgent need to tell all about the atrocities perpetrated during the Nazi's campaign of murderous persecution against the Jews and other groups selected upon the grounds of sexuality, religion, ethnicity and political persuasion, at a specific time and in a specific place (2011:153).

In the case of contemporary South Africa, *The Crossing* is part of a growing body of work exploring the at times fatal migrant experience of coexistence with the host population. The migrant experience and associated trauma informs a new wave of contemporary performance in South Africa and further afield (Jeffers 2011, Balfour 2013). In South Africa, performances about foreign migration and societal integration peaked in the wake of covert and overt acts of violence targeting African foreigners that escalated in intensity and media coverage of the 2008.

Stanton's (2007) 'the eight stages of genocide' model and Evelin Gerda Lindner's (1996) concept of humiliation are referenced in order to analyse *The Crossing* as well as discourses around this time (2002-2009), suggesting that the play in some way heralded the May 2008 mass violence. Lindner's notions of humiliation help us to appreciate what motivates the

desire to objectify and create a public spectacle of the victim as seen in *The Crossing* where Nkala's testimony captures the objectification of the migrant.

During the 2008 mass violence, indigeneity and phenotyping were used as a basis to define citizenship and belonging for all persons of African descent. This 'looks' profiling was based on stereotypical constructions of what African foreigners and citizens should look like in terms of physical features, dress code, body odour, speech pattern, and walking mannerisms. According to Landau the physical appearance profiling was complemented by mob administered language fluency tests in the nine Bantu or 'African' languages within South Africa's eleven official languages. Migrants and persons perceived as non-indigenous were open to attack and in lesser cases, humiliation (2006:133). According to police records, the 2008 mass violence displaced thousands and left sixty-three people dead. A quarter of these were South African citizens, who had been 'mistaken' for foreign nationals in the mob profiling.

### *Play genesis*

According to Flockemann, Ngara, Wahseema and Castle *The Crossing* evolved out of a chance meeting between actor and director Bo Petersen and the playwright Nkala in 2006. Nkala was then selling wire and bead-work figurines at Camps Bay beach and featuring in television commercials. Nkala's written account of his journey to South Africa became the basis of the play. The play premiered under the title *The Journey* in 2006 at Petersen's Garage Theatre in Hout Bay, Cape Town, where it was revived in May 2007 and September 2008. *The Journey* followed Nkala's journey from Kwekwe, Zimbabwe to Johannesburg South Africa (2010:249).

*The Journey* was re-worked against the backdrop of the May 2008 mass violence to incorporate Nkala's experiences on the road and relocation from Johannesburg to Cape Town and presented as *The Crossing*<sup>1</sup> in 2008. In 2009, the play and two of Nkala's other plays *The Bicycle Thief* and *Faith in Love* were published by Junket Publishers.

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<sup>1</sup> Between 2009 and 2010, *The Crossing* featured at seven major arts festivals; Infecting the City Festival – Cape Town in January 2009, Harare International Festival of the Arts (HIFA)- Zimbabwe in April 2009, Grahamstown National Arts Festival- South Africa in July 2009, End Conscription Campaign Festival (ECC) in October 2009, Ikwezi Festival –(Baxter Theatre), Cape Town in March 2010, Out the Box Festival- Cape Town in March 2010 and Global Dancefest, New Mexico in the USA in 2010.

The playwright uses a comic framework to deliver his testimony to create a work that celebrates life and the triumph of the human spirit in spite of material challenges. In an interview with Flockemann, Nkala reveals that the play was inspired by an encounter he had with a certain man on Camps Bay beach. Nkala says this man was contemplating suicide after he had lost most of his wealth and property in a divorce settlement (2009:213-214).

This anonymous man followed Nkala around as he met and pitched his wire and bead figurines to potential clients<sup>2</sup>. He queried how Nkala managed to remain merry and upbeat when his business was obviously not doing very well. According to Flockemann, Nkala's response was 'I just appreciate life as it is...you are crying because you have lost a block of buildings. My shack got burnt, but I am not crying...I actually wrote it for him...Like-you can go read this and see where I come from and what challenges have I gone through' (2009:213-214).

The second impulse for sharing his testimony was to break the silence that accompanies most foreign migrants' experiences. In Flockemann Nkala says 'there are people who experience more [trauma] than I do and I will be very happy if they can open up and tell me more stories and let them be told' (2009:212).

### *Synopsis*

*The Crossing* is a linear narrative, delivered in direct audience address, that records the playwright's trek and encounters from his city of birth Kwekwe in the Midlands of Zimbabwe, to the illegal crossing of the border through flooded and crocodile infested Limpopo River into South Africa at the age of twenty-one in 2002.

The performance opens with Khumbulani<sup>3</sup> making wire and bead handicraft figurines, striking a familiar street figure for most of the audiences, who file past him oblivious that he is the performer. The play starts with Nkala trying to sell the figurines to the audiences. Like most young people who migrate to South Africa as undocumented travellers, the playwright

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<sup>2</sup> Nkala's sales pitch on Camps Bay. [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCg\\_ROgpMrQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCg_ROgpMrQ).

<sup>3</sup> Throughout the show the playwright uses his given name Khumbulani. Like many other Zimbabweans of his generation (as a mark and legacy of colonialism), the playwright has two given names; a 'European' or biblical first name used for 'official' school and other public bureaucratic business, and a second mother tongue name used at home and in private by family and friends. In the play the playwright uses 'Khumbulani' for all encounters in his home country and when speaking of the self, and 'Jonathan' to denote the encounters in the country of refuge, South Africa.

ran away from home. The playwright lied to his religious mother that he was going away into the bush to fast, pray and meditate. The playwright lied that he would as usual bring her firewood for cooking and warming their urban home. This was a plausible reason as frequent power outages lasting weeks on end at the time marked Zimbabwe's economic and political meltdown.

Khumbulani journeyed with his childhood best friend Jacob Banda. The pair hitchhiked to Beit Bridge. Jacob Banda is presented as the well-read, verbose but stuttering mastermind of the migration plan to escape from Zimbabwe by 'any means necessary'. Khumbulani and his travelling party then trekked the Great Limpopo Transfrontier National Park, home of 'the big five' and other wild beasts, to skip the border into South Africa in soaring temperatures without food or fresh water supplies. Jacob became one of two undocumented persons (among the 2 dozen others), to be swept away by the Limpopo River during the 200 kilometre walk from the official border post through the thick forests to a usable ford on the river.

Apart from the threat posed by the wild animals in the forest, the travellers risked being arrested by game rangers who patrol the game reserve or being shot by the Zimbabwe and South African armies that patrol either side of the electric and razor wire fence and the Limpopo River which serves as the border between the two countries. The travellers were able to evade the official patrols, but they fell prey to one of the notorious criminal gangs who lie in wait for potential border jumpers, in order to extort and rob them at knife point. They are known and identified in the text as the '*maguma-guma*', (the one who tumbles and shakes you). Nkala (2011:12) alleges that the police know of these 'knife, panga and *izinduku*' wielding robbers, but will not intervene.

These criminal gangs serve multiple functions in that they also, for a fee, serve as route guides and lead the travellers to the possible fords on the river. In the play the travelling party went to a ford called Chivara, where they thought it was safer to cross. Having lost all his money to the gangs for their 'protection', the playwright had to pay with the only valuables he had left, the clothes and shoes he wore. In performance, Khumbulani strips off his shirt, pair of trousers and shoes which he hands over before stepping into the river.

In the play's trademark humour that references pop culture, the playwright nicknames the log that was used to cross, the 'Titanic Reloaded'. The makeshift boat was nothing but a big dry tree truck that could float in the current. The lead navigator and thug, the 'captain' assisting the crossers, held the front of the log, while his second in command took the opposite end. Khumbulani and his fellow travellers filled the space between the two, swimming with their legs and one arm and holding on to the log with the other.

Khumbulani's joy at reaching the South African bank of the river, despite the loss of all his material possessions, is dashed at the realisation that his best friend was one of the two who were swept away by the river. His grief is compounded by the dilemma he faces with regards to reporting the loss of his friend. On one hand to report the accident to the authorities would expose him as an undocumented person leading to his immediate detention, and swift deportation back to his home land. Taking such a risk would still not guarantee that a search party would be dispatched to search for the bodies by either state, since the dead were in no man's land. Secondly without any official documentation, the dead's existence and citizenship could not be traced to either state. In the event that the search party was dispatched, there were no guarantees that the bodies would be retrieved. On the other hand, to remain silent and forge ahead with achieving their shared dreams would condemn his friend to a watery grave, weighed heavily on his conscience and was a cultural taboo. Nkala writes:

I felt totally alone. I did not know what to do. Should I report this to the police? No. I now was an official border jumper, an illegal immigrant, a cockroach, a kwere-kwere. Reporting this would mean my deportation, I would be giving away a life that Jacob wanted, a life that I wanted, a life that would make people at home proud (2011:15).

The play further details Khumbulani's experiences of working for food and board and being underpaid to work for long working hours on a tomato farm in the Limpopo province. On the farm, Khumbulani met and assisted a man who was semi-literate to read the operation manual of a new mobile phone he had bought. This man turned out to be a tomato delivery van driver. The driver offered Khumbulani a ride in return for his help in reading. Khumbulani set off for Johannesburg despite the discouragement from fellow farm workers, and the supervisor who did not want to pay him his full earnings for his services. The van driver dumps him without any money at a gas station in Louis Trichardt on the pretext that he had to make a delivery and would return to pick him up.

Realising that he has been abandoned, Khumbulani follows the road signs and starts walking parallel to the highway to Johannesburg to avoid patrol police details. On the road he joins a woman and two other men also walking to Johannesburg. After walking for hours on end, the woman risks capture by walking on to the highway to flag a ride. A kind-hearted truck driver stops and takes on-board the woman and the men who hide in the bushes to his destination in Germiston. This driver gives Nkala money to buy a train ticket to Johannesburg. Khumbulani reaches Johannesburg, destitute and homeless. Knocking from door to door he unsuccessfully hunts for a job as a handyman and freelance gardener, for days surviving by picking mulberries and cleaning himself in public restrooms. With his hope diminishing, he meets Margaret, who offers him his first job. Khumbulani calls her his 'guardian angel'. Impressed by his work ethic, she offers, in addition to his payment, his first decent meal in days, and shelters him. Margaret clothes him and introduces him to her work colleagues, offering him opportunities for 'networking'.

All this while, Khumbulani risks arrest as he does not have the prerequisite documentation to regularise his stay in South Africa. He then decides to head to Cape Town, where he had heard that unlike Johannesburg, it was easier to seek asylum and legalise his stay. Unlike their Johannesburg counterparts, the Cape Town home affairs officials did not demand bribes which the playwright calls 'a little something' to process the documentation.

Khumbulani heads for Cape Town by road as an unauthorised passenger in a haulage truck. The driver who picks him up initially accepts R50 as adequate fare for the journey. The driver insists that he is not interested in the money but needs somebody to keep him company and to talk to so that he does not fall asleep at the wheel. After midnight and in the middle of nowhere, the driver pulls up the truck, and demands more money or a cell phone while pointing a gun at Khumbulani. Satisfied that Khumbulani does not have any valuables on him, they proceed with the journey. The driver directs a verbal tirade at Nkala, and forces him to crouch on the cabin floor, in spite of his height, as punishment for having 'insufficient funds'.

The trucker picks up two more passengers. When they are informed that Nkala is a moneyless, foreign migrant they join the driver in making fun of Khumbulani who crouches on the cabin floor. The trucker throws Khumbulani out into the cold at the break of dawn

when he stops at a truck drive in to catch some sleep. The trio continue the verbal abuse when the journey resumes and Khumbulani is allowed back in to his place on the floor, where he straddles the hot vehicle engine. On disembarking in Cape Town, the driver threatens Khumbulani again and gives him three hours to get the 'outstanding' fare money and call him to settle the balance.

In Cape Town Khumbulani successfully applies for asylum and once he is granted his section 22 permit legalising his stay, he becomes eligible to ride a bus back to Johannesburg. Despite regularising his stay, Khumbulani becomes a frequent target of the South African police who use crude 'looks' profiling to arrest him and extort bribes to release him. On numerous occasions he is arrested and detained despite possessing the permit which the officers disregard. To secure his release he either has to pay 'a little something' or call his employer Margaret. Khumbulani testifies that whenever his boss came through to pick him up, and the officers discovered that she was a white person, they would apologise to her, not him, for his wrongful arrest.

Not wanting to carry on inconveniencing Margaret when the arrests become more persistent, and realising that the trips to Cape Town to renew his asylum-seeker permit were draining his resources and involved asking for more time away from work from Margaret, he decides to relocate. In Cape Town the playwright sustains himself by working as a vendor, performing his story and selling his own handcrafted wire and bead-work figurines in the streets and on Camps Bay beach.

### *Narrative analysis*

As the play title suggests, the performance is a crossing on many fronts. The text is testimony to not only crossing country borders, but facing and confronting differences in culture and values. The play serves as a coming of age tale, recording the loss of innocence through the pain of losing a beloved friend and the celebration of what Baxter (2013:np) calls the 'brilliance of the ordinary' in Nkala's search for a better life which he repeatedly terms 'life of abundance'(2011:8). The play provokes debate about the treatment of the migrant other, through the prejudice and xenophobic nature of the encounters.

*The Crossing* uses humour, irony, traditional and church songs to comment symbolically on the action and narration of Khumbulani's life choices. The performance explores the struggle for human dignity that migration and cross cultural encounters place on him and the host population. Khumbulani uses humour as an insurrection against the enactment of power that attempts to dehumanise him. Khumbulani's testimony turns these encounters into some kind of crucible that strengthens his resolve and character.

A narrative analysis of *The Crossing* reveals two main approaches in the Nkala's positioning. Firstly the playwright uses vernacular storytelling conventions like idioms, direct address and music. The playwright draws on traditional and church choral music notes to create theme music. The play's music score draws from choral, folk, liberation and secular repertoires. The performance adapts the music to mark time and place transitions, as well as providing running commentary on events.

The second approach the study will dwell on is the sustained use of humour to keep the testimony from 'victimhood narrative' tropes. *The Crossing* uses a comedic framework to discredit and invert stereotypes that universalise migrants and refugees as non or sub-human beings. For example, Nkala satirises the associations that his foreign nationality often evoke in South African audiences and introduces himself as a person from the 'US...Z, - the Unstable States of Zimbabwe' (2011:2). In the same vein he adds that his best friend was unpopular because of his name, 'Jacob is a name given to donkeys only and it is pronounced as Jacobho' (2011:3). This can be read as a bender of the stereotype notion that all non-South Africans speak unintelligible languages and have thick incomprehensible accents.

Nkala (2011:4) satirises the notion of Zimbabwe as a failed state and jibes that his community 'only has one tarred road and one set of traffic lights, that no longer works' (2011:4). He pokes fun at the stereotype of hungry migrants by suggesting that he migrated in order to enjoy 'sitting in a restaurant, eating the whole chicken using a fork and knife' (2011:2-6). Flockemann concludes that Nkala uses this comic framework to 'mediate and contain even the most harrowing scenes, such as Jacob's drowning, but without trivialising this trauma' (2010:255).

Julie Salverson (2001:124) observes that migrant and asylum seeker narratives are usually framed to evoke sympathy through the reliance on pain, grief, loss and the presentation of

'pain as an unexamined spectacle' (2001:124). Laura Edmondson seconds this observation, noting that in refugee representations, 'visibility and the commodification of suffering go hand in hand' (2012:15). Edmondson also argues that often 'testimonies of human rights violations afford an extremely limited form of subjectivity' with pain being used as a 'form of symbolic capital' (2012:15).

Contrary to these observations, the playwright positions his testimony to create a work that is 'vigilant about the fragile border between deepening our understanding and exploiting our emotions' (Kaplan 2005:168). *The Crossing* confronts and breaks with the mainstream representations of refugees that commodify suffering to create the image of an asylum seeker and refugee as a mute suffering body. By writing himself into the story, and retaining his real name and performing the text, Nkala breaks the anonymous corporeality that strips the migrant experience of individual political and historical specificity. To borrow Liisa Malkki's phrase, refugees are often represented as 'speechless emissaries' (1996:377). Nkala's 'I' positioning lends immediacy and currency to his testimony. By sharing his testimony he embodies the idea of self-representation, which debunks the impression that the enfranchised should speak for the disfranchised group.

Through devising a performance, Nkala turns the self into a public spectacle that declares and reclaims its agency through self-representation. This study suggests that by essentialising the self, Nkala and other similarly placed asylum seekers use performance to verify their experiences. Through performance the migrant body that had been held up for vilification, is reclaimed from the discourses that sought to marginalise it. According to Jeffers for refugees and asylum seekers like Nkala 'just speaking up in a world where silence is expected can be read as a confrontational even potentially 'violent' act...and any association with violence or activism mean that they risk, at the very least, losing sympathy and at worst undermining their grounds for asylum' (2011:83).

Sociolinguist Daly cited by Jeffers (2011:5) has identified what has been termed the 'negative semantic slide' in language. This is understood as a process by which seemingly neutral words and phrases accumulate negative meanings with the passage of time and repeated use in the media. Arun Kundnanani comments on how the term 'asylum seeker', has changed 'from a legal term to a synonym for 'illegal immigrant' (2001:43). Khumbulani's

positioning in *The Crossing* can be understood as an attempt to halt or slow down this semantic slide that criminalises every foreigner of African descent in South Africa.

For example, Nkala contradicts the 'criminal' and 'illegal' migrant discourse by drawing attention to the political crisis that prevailed in Zimbabwe in 2002, forcing him to migrate (2011:3). Khumbulani and his friend Jacob Banda understood that crossing the border as undocumented migrants was against the law. However in their desperation, they felt justified since acquiring travelling documents legally was made impossible. Nkala writes 'neither Jacob nor I had passport, not that we did not want to, but it was way too difficult to get one' (2011:3). The two could not get passports because the government of Zimbabwe introduced astronomical charges to acquire the documents. The high fees were introduced as a measure to discourage emigration as the economy and the state machinery collapsed.

Nkala testifies that the shortages of basic foodstuffs led to the development of a state patronage system where 'one needs a political party membership card in order to buy basic foods' (2011:3). He fashions his testimony to make the case that it was morally justifiable to break migration regulations 'in order to survive' in the climate of injustice (2011:3). Nkala writes 'being poor is the real crime...we all knew that this was dangerous and illegal, but I told Jacob being Zimbabwean itself was dangerous and illegal' (2011:4). To this Nkala reports that his friend Jacob Banda concurred, responding:

Khumbu my friend, we cannot stay here and die waiting for the Lord to provide...we are not going to kill or steal from anyone; we are just jumping the border, jumping the fricken border (2011:4).

Nkala's testimony on the drowning of his friend, Jacob Banda (and an unidentified second person) in *The Crossing* introduces audiences to the grim reality of the illegal border crossing. This calls to mind James Thompson's warning against the 'positive gloss given to the creative possibilities of the 'border' in bringing about new forms of identity and relationship between people' (2009:84). *The Crossing* and Sonja Linden's *I have before me a remarkable document given to me by a young girl from Rwanda* stand as testimony to Thompson's observation that sites on the edges of cities and nations are more often experienced as dangerous places where lives are lost and under threat (2009:84).

Mobility is generally understood through three strands. The first being the fact of physical movement, or the transfer from point A to point B. Secondly the meanings that are ascribed to the representations of movement and thirdly the experienced and embodied exercise of movement. The second and third arms of mobility particularly apply to the movement of migrant bodies. Meanings are ascribed to the migrant body's movement, and Thompson aptly observes that where such movement is forced, it may be fatal for the mover. The material condition of the mobile body and location or space of movement informs and influence how the body experiences mobility. In other words the embodied experience of migration has so much more to do with who is being mobile than the fact of mobility in and for its self. Nkala's play offers insights into how who moves and how they move can be interpreted and embodied.

*The Crossing* highlights the physical and human fatal dangers migrants crossing the Limpopo face. Nkala uses the comedic frame to hold the next order of events to make light of this by saying:

I was afraid of the crocodiles, I was afraid of the river, I was afraid of swimming. I was afraid! ...I saw my dreams slowly but surely disappearing into the river.

My totem is Nkala, which means crab in English. And since a crab stays in water, by law I am not allowed to eat, or play near its dwelling place. That explains why I only shower twice in three weeks (2011:11).

Nkala nick-names the makeshift raft they use the 'Titanic Reloaded'. Like its grandeur, historical namesake and predecessor, Nkala's *Titanic* leads to fatalities. In Nkala's testimony the border is a site that tests people's mortality. He narrates:

After about thirty minutes of paddling, a guy second from me lost control of the situation, and I only saw his hands waving helplessly in the river and no one made an effort to save him...

Our leaders screamed at us not to look at those being flown by the river for it would disrupt our concentration. They were not responsible for anyone drowning...

A few minutes later, someone else lost control...he was out of my sight and I couldn't see who it was (2011:14).

*The Crossing* is testament to the fact that for the asylum seeker and refugee in new spaces, identity is essentialised and the body becomes a marker and subscription to one view of being. Nkala testifies that while in Johannesburg he was routinely arrested and detained regardless of having his asylum leave to stay documentation. He was arrested on the grounds of fitting the arresting officer's 'look' profile of the African foreigner.

Results from social science research show that Nkala's fate is not unique, or isolated. According to Belinda Dodson there are many 'incidents of police brutality and indiscriminate arrests of suspected foreigners' and 'the Lindela Deportation Centre has seen numerous rights abuse against foreign nationals' (2010:4). The South African Human Rights Commission records that some elements within the police frequently refuse to recognise documentation like work permits, asylum seekers permits (also known as section 22 permits) and refugee identity documents. In some cases these documents are either confiscated, or destroyed to justify the arrest (1999:3-4).

Loren B. Landau argues that some elements within the police exploit the foreigners' unpopularity (2006:133). This is captured vividly in *The Crossing* in the treatment Nkala receives at a farm as a tomato picker and on the road. Nkala testifies that he started work 'at seven, and finished way after sunset' for a 'weekly salary of R30 in coins' (2011:14-15). The police arrests and detention of foreigners serve two ends - it enhances the police reputation that they are 'effectively' dealing with the 'foreigner problem', and it bolsters their bank accounts through the bribes they extort from the arrested persons (2006:133). Nkala writes that both before and after processing the documentation to legalise his stay, he was 'dodging the cops and making sure that I did not leave home without at least R50 to make the trouble go away' (2011:23).

### *The Crossing as testimony*

As playwright and performer, Nkala's positioning creates an auto-diegetic narrative in *The Crossing*. The play is anchored on the correlation of Nkala's embodied experiences; his authorial voice and the performance self he lends the text as performer. Helen Nicholson contends that when staging the words of real people, and they recount 'their narrative of first-hand experience before a listener, they are in essence testifying' (2005:89). Lisa Cody

observes that 'testimony puts us in touch with the perceptions, memories, and inferences of others' (1992:78).

In *The Crossing*, the playwright shares his personal narrative to communicate what in feminist terms has been framed as 'the personal is political'. This is in line with Lisa Kron's argument that 'the goal of autobiographical work should not be to tell stories about yourself, but instead, to use the details of your own life to illuminate or explore something more universal' (2001: xi). The play's efficacy is enhanced by the fact that the 'storytelling reveals meaning without the error of defining it' (Hannah Arendt in Dlamini 2009:178).

### *Playwright Positioning*

The correlation of playwright as migrant asylum seeker puts *The Crossing* in a distinct category of cultural productions on migration in South Africa. Enright argues that when working with testimony, playwrights craft what she terms 'an appropriate framework: appropriate theatrical means to 'hold' the testimonies' (2011:184). This process can be seen at play in the creation of *The Crossing* as a travelogue from a book text that was not meant for performance. Flockemann records Nkala saying 'it wasn't my intention to perform it, it was intended to save a person's life and then she [Bo Petersen-director] saw it could be performed. So, that's how we started' (2009:212).

Mikhail Bakhtin maintains that 'the use of words in live speech communication is always individual and contextual in nature' (1986:88). He further argues that words exist in three facets: as neutral words of a language, that do not belong to anybody. Secondly as the other's word, in this aspect the word is full of the echoes of the other's utterance, and thirdly as my word (1986:88).

In this sense this chapter investigates the manner in which Nkala's performative self, the playwright's 'I,' informs his use of the asylum testimonies in the performance situation requiring the rendering of his embodied experience into text. This positionality leads to the development of the particular speech plans that imbue *The Crossing* with the playwright's distinct speech expression, poignantly captured in the play by the use of cultural music and vernacular language inspired idioms and phrases idiosyncrasies.

Like other verbatim theatre performances, *The Crossing* as an autobiographical play draws its authenticity currency from the problematic impression that the audience will get things 'word for word' straight the mouths of those 'involved'. Stephen Bottoms among others condemns the manner in which testimony based work fetishizes the notion that theatre can provide 'unlimited access to the words of the original speaker, and by extension to that speaker's uncensored thoughts and feelings' (2006:59). *The Crossing* is an instance where the positionality of subject, playwright and performer are collapsed and converge in one person. The resulting congruence of historical and performing body and narrative voice informs how the asylum testimony is fashioned and used in performance as authenticating devices for the testimony.

The study suggests that the authenticity value that audiences ascribe to such a speaking position illustrates that what audiences hear has very much to do with who says it; in as much it is dependent on where and how the speaker says it. The study would go further to suggest that in testimonial theatre, meaning lies not only in the speaking body, but on a continuum of the interplay between the actual testimony and what the audience anticipates and the legitimacy it ascribes to the speaker.

While poststructuralists and feminist critics often highlight the problematic of speaking for the other, this study would suggest that the same problematic applies to instances where the playwright has to speak for the self. Nkala in speaking for the self, as in speaking for the other, faced similar choices in choosing to represent the self in a particular way. This representation called on him to occupy a particular and defined subject position. Michèle Young observes that the 'I' positionality is marked and defined by a choice of characteristics chosen ahead of others, to serve a particular purpose (2008:22). What lies outside the playwright's control is the efficacy of the choices to serve the particular intention they had in mind, given the fact that meaning making runs on a continuum and the legitimacy that the audience ascribe to the one who utters the 'word' among other variables.

We can deduce that acts of representation equally apply to all instances of speaking, be it for the other or for self. This study suggests that understanding this positioning offers us potential gateways to appreciate how playwrights devise performance from testimonies. This is essential to unravel what Bottoms terms the tendency to omit or overlook 'the world-

shaping role of the writer in editing and juxtaposing the gathered material' (2006:59) in non-fictional performances. Logocentrism underpins the legitimacy we ascribe to various speaking positions and theatre of testimony as a practice. Amanda Stuart Fisher defines logocentrism as the 'metaphysical truth claim, whereby the truth is transparently self-evident and always only revealed to the speaker and in the words that are spoken' (2011:115).

### *Writing asylum in autobiography*

To appreciate the positioning of the playwright and the manner in which Nkala used his personal testimony in *The Crossing*, it is essential to understand the generic structural construction of autobiography. According to Fritz Schütze (1984) cited by Michael Bamberg there are three basic principles in structuring a narrative. The first is an obligation to enhance the density of the story (2006:69). This entails picking the relevant experiences from the body of work that is remembered. It is ineffective to tell 'everything' that one can remember.

For the playwright Nkala, this meant crafting his embodied experience and memory into a personal testimony that conforms to the dictates of theatrical conventions with regards to time and place. It meant that he had to reduce and textualise events that he had embodied in his years of living and being, into a narrative that could be delivered within an hour. In writing his testimony, Nkala fixed a version of his memory into a self-contained testimony with beginning, middle and end that stands as a totality, secluding all details that he might otherwise remember. Devising and playwriting fixes memory and events into words. The resultant text becomes a particular version of embodied experience. One can say that theatre of testimony valorises and fixes the articulation of experience.

Nkala restricts *The Crossing* to cover his physical journey and sojourn from Kwekwe, via Johannesburg to Cape Town. He presents his testimony in direct audience address in the present, but constructs the testimony from events from his past. Through childhood memory anecdotes and other experiences, Nkala satisfies the Schütze's (1984) second obligation of autobiography. This is understood as the narrator's duty to provide detailed contextual material around emotional constellations. These comprise of the subject's

motivations and drives and serve to connect and foreground the narrative into a coherent whole.

Schütze's third principle for structuring a narrative can be understood as the gestalt principle. Loosely defined, the gestalt principle is the theory of perception that implies that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts (1984:197). Bamberg (2006:69) expands this in autobiography to mean the writer's obligation to 'fit parts into a larger whole that gives some form of closure to the story as a whole'. As *The Crossing* evidences, these principles are a mixture of what makes a story an autobiography, and inform Nkala's construction of *The Crossing* as a one hander testimony from his embodied experience as an asylum seeker travelling across borders without documentation. Bamberg (2006:69) argues that a writer or playwright who does not observe these principles does not narrate a 'story', but instead creates a 'description' or 'argumentation' (2006:69).

According to Bamberg, the use of interviews (examined in more depth in Chapter Five) to collect people's experiences and testimonies, runs the risk of producing prematurely 'fixed' testimonies (2006:75) and perpetuating what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie warns is 'the danger of the single story' narrative (2009). The development and evolution of Nkala's testimony from *The Journey* in 2006, to the expanded *The Crossing* in 2008 can be considered as a case in point. Every story about embodied experience is a matter of complex and creative construction because memory as a process is neither fixed nor stable. Since each retelling omits and includes parts of the experience as they are remembered, added and/or forgotten, it is positivist or misleading at worst to present any telling as absolute.

Nkala draws the audience's attention to the instability of memory on which his testimony draws. In one scene Nkala says:

we were in a group of 15 to 20 people, **if my memory serves me well.**

Temperatures were about 37-40 degrees...**we had four ladies in our group; no rather girls** (2011:8).

This disclaimer further serves to highlight the writer's positioning as somebody sharing his embodied memories rather than sharing fictional figments of imagination. Furthermore as a testimonial device it aids in the construction of the authenticity of the performance.

### *Self-representation*

In devising *The Crossing*, Nkala avoids overt attempts to evoke pity and sympathy by repositioning his testimony to invert stereotypes of seeking asylum and being a refugee. The testimony focusses instead on experiences from the moment to moment encounters on the journey itself; resisting what Baxter calls ‘the lure of tragedy’, characterised by ‘the public witnessing of trauma’ (2013).

Baxter hypothesises that this notion is ‘founded upon the idea that no matter how good life may be, presenting ourselves in tragic mode is more compelling, alluring, makes for better drama, wins more awards, sells more newspapers, makes better headlines. It is what passes, nowadays, for the truth’ (2013). Khumbulani testifies that he travelled to and then decided to relocate to Cape Town where he was able to process and renew his asylum application with relatively more ease than in Johannesburg. The playwright covers this experience, though significant, in silence. Alexandre Dauge-Roth considers such testimonial choices as a ‘refusal to subscribe to the pre-established role of the “generic survivor”’ (2010:65). Our speculation and attempts to read into this choice as audiences adds credence to both the Jeffers (2008) and Balfour (2012:178) observations that as ‘witness audiences, who are not refugees’ we have pre-determined expectations of the refugee body in performance.

Khumbulani’s testimony in *The Crossing* thus stands in contradiction to the conceptions prevalent in trauma studies that seem to conflate refugees and vulnerability. Emma Stewart (2005:502) highlights the incredulous belief that the act of fleeing is somehow often thought to eliminate the emigrant’s agency. Stewart (2005:502) and Antony Richmond (2002:709) point out that there is no clear-cut distinction between ‘proactive’ and ‘reactive’ migrants but, rather, a continuum between those who have some freedom of choice whether, when and where to move, and those who are impelled by circumstances beyond their control.

The correlation in Nkala as a singular being of authorial authority; migrancy and performer agency is effective in politicising the personal experience. According to Jan Cohen-Cruz ‘through the deep meeting place that is personal story, oppression may not only be reframed no longer a secret shame but a political condition’ (2005:143). This reading is especially applicable to the scene where Khumbulani narrates his journey from Johannesburg to Cape Town in a haulage truck covered in the next section.

### *The highway scene and the account*

While commenters have highlighted the absurdity of the abuse Khumbulani experiences at the hands of a truck driver cited earlier, very little has been said of the behaviour of the other two passengers he picks up. These passengers joined the driver in ridiculing Khumbulani who crouches on the haulage truck floor after being informed of his migrant and dire financial status. Findings by Dodson (2004:4); Jonathan Crush et al (2008); Martin Murray (2003) among others show that 'ordinary' South Africans, like the trucker and the passengers long before the escalated violence of 2008, 'targeted foreign born Africans for everything from mockery to murder'.

Dodson concludes that the lives of 'foreign Africans living in South Africa-whether recent arrivals or long established, legally or illegally resident, economic migrants, asylum seekers, or refugees-are marked by discrimination, exclusion, and fear' (2010:4). It is against such a background that one reads and better understands Nkala's comments that although as an individual, he was not physically attacked in the 2008 mass violence, he encounters xenophobes 'every single day' (2011:27).

Current critical literature on *The Crossing* has tended to draw heavily on trauma theory to theorise the manner in which Nkala uses his testimony in devising the play. While this leads to insightful observations on the work, this study suggests that such readings inadequately explore the question of positioning in how playwrights devise testimonial plays. Trauma theory unhelpfully universalises the need to tell, and the assumption that speaking about traumatic events is therapeutic. While this is applicable to some instances, *The Crossing* offers us an array of performance conventions like children and secular song, dance; games in its narrative structure that cannot be adequately accounted for using trauma discourse.

In the scene under discussion, as stated above, Khumbulani heads to Cape Town by hitchhiking in a haulage truck late at night, since he cannot board a bus or any public transportation without legal identity documents. The driver gives Khumbulani a ride because he needs somebody to keep him company so that he does not fall asleep at the wheel. He agrees to carry Khumbulani for fifty Rand. Nkala testifies that after travelling far into the night, the driver pulled up 'in the middle of nowhere' and pulled out a gun and said:

Boy, I've been using this route for many years. And I have helped a lot of foreigners with transport, but not for R50. The price is R80; give me more or your R50 ends here (2011:24).

Khumbulani is shocked at the driver's attitude change; he sees a real gun for the first time, and has it pointed at himself. His pleas for compassion and mercy instigate a verbal tirade.

In the wake of the escalation of mass violence against foreign nationals in May 2008, various explanations were advanced to try to make sense of the violence. The dominant narrative was that the attacks and murders were perpetrated by xenophobes. Flockemann uses this scene in the play to dismiss the notion that the driver and other South Africans who resent Black African nationals suffer from self-hate or negrophobia. He argues that the trucker's behaviour does not exhibit signs of self-hate. Instead the driver establishes his own self-worth, by stressing his indigeneity and difference and distance from Khumbulani. The driver reduces Khumbulani and by extension all foreigners to symbols of poverty, conflating their migrancy to vagrancy. Further, he argues that this is an example of 'the visible enactment of power over one apparently weaker, made possible by the intimacy of being alone 'in the middle of nowhere' (2010:253).

While this interpretation is insightful, it falls short in failing to observe that the taunting did not stop, when in Bloemfontein, the driver picked up two other hitch-hikers. While the truck driver began his abuse in private, he carried on unperturbed by the new witnesses. This demonstration that the dehumanisation was not based on the 'the intimacy of being alone 'in the middle of nowhere' as Flockemann suggests. The new passengers were surprised to see Khumbulani on the floor. According to Nkala the driver, told them:

Whatever you do, don't talk to this thing down there. He has no money, no phone, no ID, no licence, no father, no nothing! (2011:27).

Nkala (2011:27) writes that on realising that he was a foreign national the two joined the driver in taunting him. When the trio engaged in conversation and shared jokes, Khumbulani claims that he was forbidden to listen or laugh. In Nkala's testimony the truck driver said:

Hey, hey, hey, you are forgetting now. You are so broke you can't afford to laugh. In fact, why are you listening to our conversation? You useless, mentally crippled piece of shit. What are you?

Nkala writes that when the driver pulled up at an overnight lorry park for a nap, the driver slept on the bed on the back, the two hikers were allowed to sleep on their seats, while Khumbulani was thrown outside into the freezing night. He was only readmitted into the truck when they resumed the journey three hours later, whereupon 'the abuse started all over again' (Nkala, 2011:27). The driver's continued abuse and the passengers' animated participation can be read as an indicator of how the driver considered his behaviour and actions as acceptable, while the passengers' response confirm that the actions are socially condoned, if not encouraged. Khumbulani was called and collectively treated as the 'thing down there' (Nkala, 2011:24).

This study suggests with the benefit of historical hindsight that Nkala's testimony of events and experiences from 2002 presents us with an opportunity for a structural understanding of the dehumanisation of the migrants. Using Stanton's (1998) 'Eight stages of genocide' model to read Nkala's testimony and this scene in particular, a trend of humiliation and dehumanisation can be discerned that potentially gave rise to the 2008 mass violence.

Stanton (1998) draws on the United Nations Convention on genocide and divides genocide into eight stages, or operational processes. The first stages precede later stages, but they do not represent a rigid chronological order. The stages remain functional throughout the genocidal process. These stages are classification, symbolisation, dehumanisation, organisation, polarisation, preparation, extermination, and denial. These stages can be usefully applied to narrative analysis to deconstruct genocidal patterns in narrative records and testimonies.

The scene detailing Nkala's exploitation on the farm in Limpopo, his encounter with the tomato van driver who dumps him at the car service station and the truck driver present encounters that illustrate the classification; symbolisation and dehumanisation of Khumbulani as a migrant. As highlighted earlier, African migrants like Khumbulani were and are profiled on the basis of physical and linguistic characteristics. This 'looks profiling' is based on imagined conception of distinctions in skin colour, and pigmentation, hair style, customary dress between citizens and foreigners.

Stanton (1998) argues that classification and symbolisation are essential processes in all cultures. They evolve into stages of genocide only when they become the basis for

dehumanisation. In Stanton's (1998) model, dehumanisation becomes the third stage of genocide. At this stage the citizen group denies and refuses to acknowledge in word and deed the humanity of people like Khumbulani who are deemed as 'the other'. Khumbulani's encounters of being used as cheap labour, being abandoned on the road and his experience with the truck driver capture this dehumanisation. This sustained dehumanisation, the study will further suggest enabled the mass killings captured in Shmukler's *The Line*, discussed in the next chapter.

History shows us that incitements to genocide systematically dehumanise the victims, through name calling and using pathology discourses to present the victims as repulsive sub-humans that have to be 'cut down to size' and 'exterminated'. Nazi propaganda called its victims 'rats' or 'vermin'. Victims were forced to wear the infamous concentration badges<sup>4</sup> to identify the reason for their detention. In another scenario in Rwanda, hate radio called baTutsi and baHutu moderates and mixed persons 'cockroaches'. In Nkala's (2011:24) testimony the truck driver calls Khumbulani '*ngiyisidididi*' (useless, mentally crippled piece of shit). Khumbulani was also called a '*mukwerekwere*', a term used among others in South Africa to denote a foreigner of African descent.

Lindner's (1996) work on the role of humiliation in conflict offers potential insights into the dehumanisation of foreigners that *The Crossing* presents<sup>5</sup>. Lindner considers humiliation, or the subjective feeling of being humiliated as a central determinant for violence, and the resolution of conflict (1996:1.) This should not be read to mean that objective factors do not play a role in conflict, nor should be taken to mean that all conflict is negative. It is a claim that using the rational choice theory to make sense of people's actions and violence does not always help. Lindner argues 'that it might often even be the other way round, namely

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<sup>4</sup> The fabric colour and shape coded badges were sewn on jackets and trousers of the prisoners. Guards used the emblems to assign tasks to detainees and symbolised the reason for detention. <http://www.holocaustrevealed.org/domain/holocaustrevealed.org/badges.htm> ; [http://www.historyonthenet.com/Nazi\\_Germany/concentration\\_camps.htm](http://www.historyonthenet.com/Nazi_Germany/concentration_camps.htm); [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi\\_concentration\\_camp\\_badges](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_concentration_camp_badges)

<sup>5</sup> In the psychoanalytic literature we find different definitions of humiliation. Relevant are terms such as self-respect and self-esteem; the notion self-respect provides a bridge to the notion of dignity in the field of philosophy, theology, ethics, and human rights. Honour and shame are relevant notions, too. They are covered in ethnology, anthropology, sociology and psychology. The notion of degradation belongs here, too. Theories of political psychology have to be looked at which address the psycho-dynamics of international relations. There is a larger body of literature which focuses generally on the reasons for violence. <http://www.humiliationstudies.org/documents/evelin/HumiliationProjectDescription.pdf>

that feelings of humiliation feed on objective factors and then create a violent conflict' (1996:1). The study suggests that humiliation underlies acts of victim dehumanisation to which Khumbulani is exposed.

Caroline Fournet argues that 'the dehumanizing intent is the very essence of the crime of genocide as this particular intent contains within itself the destruction of the group: not only does it embody the destruction of the lives of the victims; it also orchestrates the annihilation of the social memory of these victims' (2007:13).

*The Crossing* is an instance where the positionality of subject: playwright and performer are collapsed and converge in one person. The resulting congruence of historical and performing body and narrative voice informs how the asylum testimony is fashioned and used in performance. The embodied experience that Nkala writes and narrates in performance explicitly involves the migrant and asylum voice. Nkala's positioning leads to the emergence of a speaking 'I' narrator.

This study suggests that the play draws its efficacy in part from the positioning of the playwright's narrative self who is positioned through the 'I' in the text. In *The Crossing*, this positionality gives the playwright the political currency to speak to an audience that bestows on him expectations of truth and authenticity in his testimony. Georg Gugelberger and Michael Kearney observe that the 'self cannot be defined in individual terms but only as a collective self-engaged in a collective common struggle' (1991:9). A close reading of *The Crossing* reveals that the playwright does not only speak for the self, but on behalf of the absent bodies like the late Jacob Banda.

## CHAPTER FOUR

Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to say that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems – Theodor W. Adorno (1973/1990:362).

### ***THE LINE***

This chapter uses the critically acclaimed two hander play *The Line*<sup>6</sup> (2012) as a case study to investigate the role of a playwright's positioning in relation to the politics of testimonial textual construction, representation, and authenticity. It also examines the limitations that verbatim theatre as a methodology place before the playwright. *The Line* presents verbatim the marginalised and often overlooked voices that provide diverging first-hand views on the violence and mass murders targeting foreign nationals that swept across South Africa in 2008.

Secondly, the focus of the study on the playwright's 'how to'; inevitably led to the 'what is' content analysis of the testimonies. Drawing on the United Nations Convention on Genocide (adopted on 9 December 1948), Stanton's 'Eight Stages of Genocide' (1998), and Vahram Ayvazyan's 'Genocide: Intent, Motivation and Types' theory (2012), this chapter suggests that the mass violence captured in *The Line* constitutes what can be considered as genocide. This reading is premised on the assumption that the study does not take the material world and its representation as operating on parallel planes. This chapter further suggests that the dehumanisation of foreign nationals captured in *The Crossing* (discussed in Chapter Three) was a prelude to the anti-foreigner sentiments that evolved into the mass violence of 2008 captured in *The Line*.

This might seem like a digression from the study's focus on how playwright positionality informs and influences their interpretation of migrant experiences. I would argue that narrative analysis of play-texts and performances invariably focuses attention to the subject

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<sup>6</sup>NALEDI THEATRE AWARD NOMINATIONS for 2012  
Best Production of a Play  
Best New South African Script  
Best Performance by an Actress in a Lead Role (Play)  
Best Theatre Sound Design

matter and content to in the quest to unravel the playwright's manipulation on the material. In other words this chapter's apparent digression is an effort to interrogate playwright positionality by closely engaging with the choice of subject matter and their manipulation of the same.

Michael Neocosmos argues that the 2008 mass violence was an expression of 'popular xenophobia' situated in a 'politics of fear'. This xenophobia is captured in three basic components: 'a state discourse of xenophobia', a 'discourse of South African exceptionalism' and a 'conception of citizenship founded exclusively on indigeneity' (2008:587). The point of departure of this study is the suggestion that beyond the xenophobia discourse presented to account for the mass violence, *The Line* captures conditions that can be read as genocide.

### *The play genesis*

*The Line* was created and directed by Georgina (Gina) Shmukler with Charl-Johan Lingenfelder creating the music, and Niall Griffin as production designer. The play was first presented at the Wits Arts and Literature Experience (WALE) Festival in May 2012, before being invited to perform in the Barney Simon Theatre at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg. An earlier version of the work based on an interview with a Mozambican national Eliza, was initially presented at the Wits Theatre. During the attacks, Eliza's spaza<sup>7</sup> shop business was looted, her family brutally tortured, her young niece raped and killed along with her husband and her brother. Eliza's testimony was presented as a work in progress under the title *Nobody's baby* at the Wits Theatre. According to John Nauright (1990) *Nobody's baby* is an earlier nickname of the township of Alexandra where Shmukler gathered her testimonies. Alexandra is infamous for its gang violence and for being the epicentre of the mass violence targeting African foreigners and those profiled as foreign persons in 1994, as well as in May 2008.

*The Line* is one of the eminent works on screen or stage to explore in depth the social and psychological consequences of the mass violence against foreign nationals that swept across South Africa in 2008<sup>8</sup>. *The Line* captures the impressions and testimonies of victims,

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<sup>7</sup> South African term for an informal convenience shop business, usually run from home, also known as a Tuck shop.

<sup>8</sup> According to a 2008 IRIN report ten days after the Alexandra incident, with the death toll estimated to be 23, the then president Thabo Mbeki approved the request to reinforce police operatives with armed military

perpetrators, instigators and media persons who interacted with these parties. The mass violence is often attributed to xenophobes and can be considered as one of the most harrowing episodes of post-apartheid South African history. The 2008 riots were particularly striking not only in scale, but in extent as well in that they involved and implicated the whole country.

The reach and impact of the riots was not confined to a single racial or social community, and this study suggests, with the media coverage and multiple nationalities involved, the riots struck a chord beyond the borders of South Africa for the active participants and for those who watched the violence unfold in the news media. It is arguable that the riots changed perceptions of South Africa from within and from without. According to Shmukler, through the play she sought to explore what Jonathan Shay (1994) calls the 'fragility of goodness'. Shmukler says the play was her exploration of what turned 'neighbour to violent foe and attempts to re-humanise both perpetrator and victim whilst investigating what makes good people do bad things and how one crosses 'the line'' (2013:8).

Shmukler's usage of verbatim theatre to explore definitive historical moments in post-apartheid era is not without precedent. The playwright's efforts echo Jane Taylor and William Kentridge's seminal work *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1996); and regionally Milo Rau's *Hate Radio* (2011), which was a re-enactment of broadcasts by the Radio Télévision Libre Des Mille Collines Station before and during the Rwanda genocide.

### *Synopsis*

*The Line* is set against the backdrop of the mass violent attacks of foreigners in May 2008 and explores the nature of citizen-foreigner interaction during and after the riots. The play is primarily, but not singularly, about the mass violence. The text is a compilation of six of the twelve testimonial monologues of people the playwright interviewed in her five months of fieldwork research towards a Masters of Art in Dramatic Arts in the townships of Johannesburg. The playwright interviewed people who were affected, witnessed and/or carried out the attacks or a combination of these. *The Line* presents and re-stages the

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details on the 21st of May 2008. Figures of displaced persons are hard to ascertain and verify. The death toll went on to rise to 63 according to official figures, before the state regained control.

playwright's encounters and testimonies with the interviewees, who recounted from memory their experiences of the riots.

The playwright writes herself into the play as the researcher character. Shmukler opens the play with a performer playing the playwright stating;

I am starting interviewing tomorrow. In Soweto. I met with Patty-she was referred to me by my supervisor; I'm a Masters student. She has done a lot of work with refugees and I am meeting her to give me advice regarding the interview process (2012:73).

From this placement and through her questions- which are taken out of the performance, but implied in the responses - the playwright provides a narrative link for the testimonies and interviewees. This line of interviewing creates the guiding timeline, and the through line that ties the events. Using a voice over the researcher character, the playwright introduces the interviewees by giving a running biographical commentary of the interviewee's age, gender, occupation and her impressions of the character and meeting place. The playwright, thus positioned as the character in the text, abrogates what Michel Foucault (1972), terms her 'enunciative function' and authority to the other characters that experienced the events first hand. The disembodied voice over enhances the play's authenticity and clinical detachment claims.

The playwright casts the interviewees as the legitimate speakers of the mass violence. The testimonies are played in direct audience address and are interspersed with flashbacks of attack scenes. The playwright juxtaposes the interviews and staggers them together to comment on the other testimonies, where the interviewees touch on a common subject or theme. The playwright as researcher and solicitor of the testimonies does not seek to explain the basis of the mass violence or to fix blame, instead Shmukler attempts to humanise the representation of all the interviewees.

Structurally *The Line* can be understood using the metaphor of water ripples: in the outer ring is the performance, in the present, where the actors embody the playwright who sets up the points of reference of what we are about to witness. In the inner ring, we as the audience are invited to accept and meet the interview subjects through their verbal testimonies which the actors deliver in monologues. In an inner ring to this the playwright sets the monologues in dialogue with each other, by presenting opposing arguments or lines

of thought one after the other with the multiple characters commenting on the same or similar events. In an inner ring the actors presenting the monologues set up a dialogue, or dialogic moments, where the exchanges are shorter, or staccatos of one line, and flashbacks and re-enactments of the attacks.

### *Characters*

Shmukler gives the pseudonym Alfred to the Mozambican man who works as an informal car mechanic that she interviewed. Alfred testifies to having his shack home looted and burnt down while they slept. The family fled and crammed into a South African family home in the neighbourhood. This random family sheltered him, his wife and two children from physical harm in their garage overnight. Alfred testifies that in the four years since the attacks he has never set foot in the township, and vows never to return. Shmukler records Alfred saying:

I don't trust. There can be again; it can repeat again this thing. Ay I don't trust no more. I can't trust on that because I saw it on my eyes.

No, the people bleeding, foreigners bleeding, burning the shacks there- little woman, little shacks.

I just came out from there, go to that house I talking about. From there until today I never put my leg there. Nah- I, I can't. I can't go back there. I don't trust that place. It was very bad on that day (2013:86).

*The Line* is also about the instigators and perpetrators of the attacks whom the playwright interviewed. Shmukler interviewed Bheki, a Ward counsellor aligned with the African National Congress (ANC) in Alexandra Township. Bheki as a member of the political executive admits to actively instigating and mobilising the attacks:

The attacks (pause) yes -we were involved. I'll tell that I was involved not from the negative side of it but from the positive side of it...to say that those who are not born from this country-they need to go back to their own countries... So, my position was to say let's make these people to go back to their countries-we must take away what makes them to stay here (2013:83).

According to Shmukler, Bheki argued that the attacks were a necessary call to the government and employers, whom he perceives as bending backwards for foreign nationals at the expense of citizen:

We need to- to- to do things for ourselves FIRST so that we can be able to do for others. You will see that in Africa- there is a challenge in Africa- and this challenge its making these people to come down to South Africa and when we just allow people to just come in, it's it's gonna be a boomerang. There'll be nobody in Africa-everybody will want to come and belong in South Africa (2013:83-84).

David and Nomsa are the pseudonyms that Shmukler gives to the perpetrators of the attacks whom she interviews. David is an unemployed young man and is part of a car hijacking syndicate who testifies to physically assaulting migrants during the riots. Nomsa is introduced as an unemployed thirty five year old woman, a mother of two who aspires to be a businesswoman. Nomsa confesses to looting foreign owned shops, houses and to witnessing the assault of migrant families including the rape of women and children. Nomsa claims to have had nightmares in the aftermath of the attacks. She says she was disconcerted by flashbacks of the brutality and victims' screams she witnessed whenever she walked past the shops and homes that were looted and where people were attacked.

The play is also about the playwright's encounter with Nadine Hutton. Hutton is a South African photojournalist who covered the attacks while working for *The Mail and Guardian* Newspaper. Nadine and Eliza are the lead characters in the play. Hutton is the only character whose real name is retained and copies of her actual photograph coverage of the 2008 attacks are contained in glass bottles that form the stage backdrop, and serve as a 'message in a bottle' metaphor. They symbolise the memories of the past, lost friends and family for the riot victims. The glass then symbolises the fragility of memory and its articulation. The act of opening the glass jars and taking out the photographs at the close of the play symbolically becomes the sharing of the testimony, and the freeing of the souls of the people who were injured and murdered.

*The Line* play becomes the emotional and psychological journey of the characters from 2008 when the attacks occurred, to the present. Nadine, the photojournalist, moves from being a witness to a victim - suffering from bouts of depression from the brutalities she witnessed.

Nomsa moves from perpetrator to victim, haunted by nightmares of the attacks, while Eliza and Alfred move from victims to survivors. Bheki is the only character who does not articulate a significant change in attitude. While he was an instigator of the attacks, he stayed away from the actual attacks from which he sought to draw political currency. The play ends by hinting at the possibility of repeat attacks.

### *Design elements*

Complementing the testimonies in performance were the play's design elements. Niall Griffin says the visual landscape was inspired by an image of a mayonnaise jar containing family photographs that was knocked over in the attacks. *The Line* uses a minimalist set comprising of a hessian floor cloth, a wooden bench, a Morris chair, a wooden chair with steel legs. Several found objects from a destroyed and fire gutted shack were hung over the set to create an 'installation'. Transparent glass jars containing Nadine's photographs were strung together to make a hanging backdrop suspended from overhead. The set was cluttered with burnt and vandalised found objects, including a vandalised, dilapidated window and door. The scene resembled the layout of a ruined shack maimed by violence and fire. The found domestic objects became mute testaments of the former inhabitants now displaced or dead. As indicated earlier, the suspended glass jars evoke a morose 'message in the bottle' theme.

In performance 'crossing the line' became a metaphor reflected in the play's design and staging. The characters had set playing areas, with Nadine the photo-journalist and the playwright as researcher characters being confined upstage on the wooden chair with steel legs, giving a hint of the characters' economic status. A wooden bench was placed on stage left. This bench demarcated the spatial area for the foreign nationals who were targeted in the attacks. This area served as Eliza and Alfred's respective homes. Completing the triangle was a Morris chair on stage right, which was spatially used by the perpetrators and the politician who instigated the attacks. The performers then navigated these spatial areas as they embodied the different characters, with the exception of the attack and flashback scenes.

Charl Johan Lingenfelder's soundscape combined ambient music with voices and sounds from Shmukler's actual interviews in the flashback and re-enactment of the three 'attack'

scenes. Shmukler says the play's musical score was based on Frans Bak's compositions for the Danish television series, *The Killing*. Eliza's story was linked to the first attack, while attack two was connected to Nadine. Attack three was connected to Alfred and served as the warning of an impending revolution (2013:28). The soundscape was at times sharp and frightening so as to underscore and reinforce each particular attack. For the flashback scenes the soundscape was related to the character's experiences. For instance a sharp disorienting scream accompanies Nomsa's testimony when she says she experienced nightmares of the screams of the victims. Nadine's testimony revealed how burning tyres trigger memories of the attacks. Albert's flashback was triggered by the fire that razed his house down and killed his compatriots.

### *Narrative Analysis*

*The Line* as verbatim play resituates and transforms discourse into spectacle. *The Line* is a significant cultural text from the outset, in remembering and archiving the 2008 attacks. In summoning these testimonies into a play, Shmukler participates in the cultural (re)production of history and memory. This is significant since the materiality of the attacks that the play captures seems to be erased and occluded in discourses that sought to understand the cause of the violence. The testimonies in *The Line* allow us to interrogate and understand the acts and discourse of violence itself as symbolic and literal actions that are insightful in reading mass violence and group crimes.

The task here is to explore how the playwright's positioning potentially informs how *The Line* 'remembers' or using Felman and Laub's (1992) terminology, 'witnesses' the 2008 attacks as a historical moment. Media reports of the 2008 mass violence record massive displacement and unprecedented exodus of migrants from South Africa, crossing borders back to their home countries. The play allows us to imagine the fate of asylum seekers and section 22 permit holders and refugees who could not flee to any place of safety. This study is particularly interested in investigating how the playwright crafts the interview testimonies into testimonial theatre.

The playwright adopts a cubist form of presentation in juxtaposing the testimonies. I coined the word cubist from cubism the 20th century Paris visual arts style, developed by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque between 1907 and 1914. In the visual arts, cubism is

characterised by the reduction and fragmentation of natural pictorial elements of perspective, foreshortening, modelling and chiaroscuro into abstract, often geometric structures by displaying several aspects of the same object simultaneously by fragmenting the form of depicted objects. The principle being the rejection of the confinement of art to being an imitation of nature. Cubists were and are not bound to copying form, texture, colour, and space; instead, they present a new reality in paintings for example that depicts radically fragmented objects, whose several sides are seen simultaneously.

My adoption of the term draws from the same impulse where the playwright fragments the transcribed interviews and testimonies, rearranging them to highlight commonalities and contrasts, and to comment on one another. Testimonial playwrights equally fragment the testimonies and the re-arrangement; editing and sequencing of the testimonies in the text influences and allows for multiple readings of the testimonies.

This use of testimony from the victims and survivors, instigators and perpetrators as well as witnesses does not privilege any position of enunciation as the bastion and singular vantage point with the entire truth and authority to confer meaning on the events. The cubist approach is captured in the poly-vocal use of testimonies that combine and confront complementary and antagonistic perspectives. Shmukler remarks on her methodology 'I spent time in townships doing interviews as part of the research. I felt incredibly loyal to the verbatim structure and to the people who had talked to me. The real work was in the editing — it's how the material is juxtaposed that makes the play' (2013:47).

The play's two female performers move seamlessly from character to character. The actors are racially cast, with Khutjo Bakunzi-Harris playing the characters of Alberto, Bheki, Eliza and David. Gabi Harris plays the character of Nadine as an oafish white liberal, the playwright researcher and the translator for the character, Eliza. Eliza only spoke Zulu and Portuguese having been resident in South Africa since fleeing the civil war in Mozambique with her brother in 1985.

*The Line* does not follow naturalism and the performers are cast across gender. In performance the actresses embody and employ what Martin (1993:45) terms 'hyper naturalistic mimesis' made famous by Anna Deavere Smith, where the performer seeks to mimic and replicate with the best possible exactness the interviewee's speech and vocal

patterns and bodily mannerisms. The cross gender casting was essential as a distancing technique to rid the play of the violent and atavistic black male troupe. According to Shmukler 'the absence of the stereotypical black violent male on the stage not only enabled the play to go beyond representation, but also was a powerful device in the context of a play that could possibly re-traumatize its audience' (2013:49).

Shmukler adds that the choice of two female performers was also entwined with her desire to stress the central, but often overlooked role that women played in instigating and colluding in the 2008 attacks. Shmukler added 'it was difficult to find female perpetrators, but when I did, I left those interviews feeling really conflicted. It's not always men who are responsible for these things, and that has to be said' (personal communication, April 10, 2013). Shmukler says she wanted to explore women complicit in physical attacks and in the rape of women and children in Nomsa's testimony. This gender sensitivity in approach and presentation can be read as a marker of the playwright's positioning herself as researcher, soliciting and interpreting testimonies on stage. In the next section the study will investigate how this positioning informs the play's authenticity, the writer's position of enunciation as well as the testimonial playwriting.

### *Authenticity*

Shmukler underscores the evidentiary basis of the play's construction by selectively sharing the play's supposed construction process in performance, while understating playwright subjectivity and her role as the textual constructor. The claim of what Bottoms (2006:64) calls 'textually reflexive documentary theatre' is sustained throughout the play and is further enhanced by the attention to detail that the playwright-as-researcher character pays to recording time, space, and interviewee biographies. This is complemented by the neutral vocal delivery of the voice-over recordings that accompany each new testimony.

*The Line* as a testimonial play uses the revelation of names and identities to cement its authenticity claims. Instances where names and identities are withheld or revealed are not problematized to show the playwright's editorial input. Instead such withholding of information is presented as, and becomes a mark of, the ethical conduct of the playwright who supposedly grants anonymity to interviewees in exchange for information. While this is paraded as best practice, it brings us closer to the centrality of playwright positioning in

relation to with whom the playwright is able to speak and interview. The choice of subject also enables us to investigate why the chosen respondents would choose to testify to the playwright.

In Paget's terms *The Line* sits uneasily as an example of the 'recording tradition', while the partial textual reflexivity of the play draws on the 'reporting tradition'. Paget argues that documentary theatre makers in the 'reporting tradition' recognise that records of facts, be they documents or testimony, are value laden and they acknowledge the role of the documentary maker in shaping and influencing the final representation. The 'recording tradition' on the other hand, strives to be read as an objective and exact re-enactment of history and biography by effacing the theatre maker and their subjectivity (1987).

A lot of ink has been spilled to interrogate the capacity of theatre to represent reality, let alone to do so objectively. This in the light of Young's observation that theatre is 'sustained by the unreal and conventions of the unreal make theatre possible'. Young observes that in this era where post-structuralist thinkers like Baudrillard have proclaimed the 'murder of the real and the extermination of reality', by media mediated hyper-reality, which enable 'all aspects of life simulations to substitute for and eventually constitute reality', authenticity is often presented as a dubious or quaint concept (2009:72).

This study suggests that if we are to use post-structuralism notions to interrogate testimonies in *The Line* and elsewhere, we run the risk of not only overlooking, but misunderstanding a text that is informative of a definitive moment in South African contemporary history. This study adopts Young's view that despite theatre's incapacity for 'photographic mimicry' the stage's 'temporal limitations and its mimetic practise' make it an ideal medium for the documentary project to explore representation and reality. The conventions that make theatre possible 'draw explicit attention to the interplay of absence and presence' (Young 2009:72). Young's arguments are based on Heidegger's conception of reality where the truth is what is true for most people rather than what is real (2009:74). Young cites Holmes who argues that the 'possibility of a clear ethical truthfulness through art that can be equal, if not more total, than, the empirical truths of factual reporting' (2009:74).

### *Position of enunciation*

The playwright's positioning informs the playwright's narrative authority and potentially the ability to tell or retell the story. Unlike the autobiographical *The Crossing* (2008) in the previous chapter, the playwright Shmukler established a mediated and indirect relationship with the subject matter of the play, calling to mind Bharucha's concerns about the essence of spectatorship of such positioning to another's pain and suffering.

*The Line* goes against the grain of testimonial productions like *The Crossing* (2008) in juxtaposing the testimonies of the perpetrator alongside the victims. *The Line* attempts to go past the castigating of the evil acts as the domain of irredeemable evil people to examine human capacity to commit atrocities. Shmukler uses the characters' lived experience of violence to initiate dialogue with the audience who are understood to be the macrocosm of the micro groups represented on stage. Shmukler says this was necessary because in her view, as a society and audience 'we are almost numb to both the victim and the perpetrator's story in South Africa and I would need to re-humanise this telling and what better way than through the most human means of expression-language' (2013:6).

### *Testimonial playwriting*

Shmukler says after an unsuccessful staging of Eliza's testimony as *Nobody's Baby* in 2011, she realised that by using 'the interviewee's every utterance, cough and splutter in the penning, the play's 'authenticity' could be enhanced' (2013:7). The play's authenticity claims are drawn out by downplaying its artistry. According to Patrick Duggan, artistry (through well-constructed and 'cleaned' sentence structure) in fact-based playwriting is often frowned upon and is equated with insincerity and at worst with contrivance. The form can be said to enhance its authenticity and distinction from other theatre forms by being anti-art (2013). In a sense Shmukler's use of monologues rather than dialogue for instance, can be read as a trade-off for authenticity by underplaying artistry.

The resultant aesthetic in *The Line* retained the interviewee's 'cough and splutter' and slips of the tongue, and grammar errors. The success of the performance of *The Line* can be read to mean that this presentation and preservation of speech idiosyncrasies was accepted as being more 'authentic'. It was probably read as being less manipulative and aroused more

compassion or identification as testimony than instances where the playwriting finesse is evident. It would follow then in fact-based productions that the less polished the play appears the more it is welcomed as possessing a special level of authenticity. Heddon observes that 'verbatim theatre relies on the authenticating detail' with actors 'making various choices about small gestures and expressions, accent, and articles of clothing as markers of identity' (2009:117). Paget concludes that 'so far from a distancing effect, a kind of proximity is achieved by means of this closeness to the fact of the interview' (2010:173).

In *The Line* different character monologues are introduced by playing back voice-overs that were from the original interviews between the playwright and interview subject. The actors try to mimic the recording's vocal texture and resonance as well as physically embody the speaker's physicality. The recordings serve as a constant reminder of the meta-theatrical origin of the testimonies, capturing the speech patterns, and some comic relief that comes with the actor playing out the lisp and accents of the interviewees in performance.

Theatre maker Alecky Blythe is quoted by Hammond and Steward saying that the use of voice-overs when employed as a way of 'letting the audience in behind the scenes and involving them in a way they aren't used to... helped a great deal with gaining their trust' (2008:89). The pre-recorded voice over is in itself a non-realist device. In *The Line* it is used to authenticate the realist and mimetic based claims of authenticity of the work. The pre-recorded voice-overs help cast the testimonies as a dramatic re-presentation and re-enactment of the original interview. The audience is invited to consider themselves as 'a fly on the wall' observing the re-enactments and at times is positioned as the playwright was supposedly positioned in the original interviews.

Theatre of testimony thrives on giving the audience the autonomy to make sense of the images and scenarios before them, while at the same time underplaying the fact that the scenarios have been carefully selected and structured. In gestalt terms, the whole becomes greater than the sum total of the individual parts. The arrangement of the same parts is as much responsible for the reading as the events themselves. The art and artifice of testimonial playwriting is in, or is couched in, the illusion of devising a performance that pretends to be 'low' on the artifice of presentation.

Shmukler's use of testimony in *The Line* brings into focus the issue of authorship in testimony. Listing herself as the sole playwright of the text while writing from a position of exteriority to the subject matter, runs counter to the common practice of acknowledging other collaborators who contribute their testimonies to the playwright. According to Denzin in its current form the playwright risks looking more like an 'exploiter than a collaborator' (2001:24).

### *Common perceptions of the violence*

Since 2008, an increased number of scholars, think tanks, cultural producers, and state and civil society organisations have devoted attention to the outbreak of violence. Efforts have been made, and are being made, to better understand and explain the attacks and to anticipate and prevent any recurrences. The 2008 attacks upon which *The Line* is based are commonly referred to as the 'xenophobia attacks'. This is in spite of the strong differences of opinion that emerged about the root causes of the 2008 attacks, and whether the label 'xenophobia' was warranted at all. This study suggests that much can be learned from narrative analysis of the testimonies of some of the people involved in the attacks captured in *The Line*, and from examining the acts of violence themselves as described in the text.

Dodson, for example, argues that a 'complex web of economic, political, social, and cultural factors, both contemporary and historical, and the less violent, 'ordinary' experiences of xenophobia (discrimination and resultant dehumanisation) are part of the everyday lives of African immigrants in South Africa'... [He] adds that 'dehumanisation is or was crucial in allowing/ creating an environment conducive for the violent outbursts that we witnessed' (2010:4). Narrative analysis of *The Crossing* (Chapter Three) and *The Line* reveal similar observations; that dehumanisation is a central component of the migrant condition. Dodson concludes that 'the lives of foreign Africans living in South Africa - whether recent arrivals or long established, legally or illegally resident, economic migrants, asylum seekers or refugees - are marked by discrimination, exclusion and fear' (2010:4). Similarly Crush et al. (2008) in their seminal study, describe the 2008 mass violence against African migrants as the 'perfect storm' of multiple elements that were already in place prior to 2008.

The point of departure of this study lies in the reading of the acts of violence that signified the 2008 attacks; on the form and shape in which the attacks manifested and what they

revealed of motive rather than dwelling on what caused the attacks to happen. I will briefly interrogate six related axes of explanation that Dodson (2010) identifies in the commonly suggested possible causes of the violence in order to substantiate this choice.

Economic or material reasons are the first and leading explanations forwarded for the violence. In *The Line*, all perpetrators point to the economic deprivation as one of their main frustrations. Shmukler records the politician Bheki as saying: “Like I say half of this country as we speak right now, it’s the youth and they are not employed -they can’t get jobs - they can’t even drive a taxi - they’re not educated. What options do we give them? It’s it’s a question of South Africans not having options’ (2013:83).

She records Nadine and Nomsa echoing the same sentiments with Nomsa bemoaning the continued failure of central government to deliver on pre-election promises:

We were happy when it was coming - coming ‘94 because they are promising us that everything is going to be okay. Every people are going - their suffering is going out now - we are going to get houses - we are going to get jobs, they are going to create job - but there is no job!... Electricity is what? We are buying electricity we are using cards - now I buy twenty-three rands –it takes me two days - we are suffering - really suffering my sister. ...They must go, vele, they must go. This is not their place they must go. They take our jobs they take our jobs (2013:86).

Dodson observes that in the economic line of argument poor South Africans, the majority of whom happen to be Black, see African immigrants as presenting competition for jobs and other services and resources to which they feel entitled (2010:5). Wealthier South Africans of all races according to John Sharp, resent ‘paying taxes to provide shelter and services to people seen to be pouring into South Africa to escape political incompetence and economic mismanagement further north’ (1998:2).

Thandokuhle Manzi and Patrick Bond (2008) argue that at a community level these tensions produce an ‘ethnicised political economy’, whereby ‘microeconomic friction is displaced into hate-filled nationalism’. Shmukler (2013:84) records Nomsa expressing this saying;

Yes I buy, every day. Every day-I buy bread there-I buy milk. There’s no place that I can buy -because if I buy here, I don’t take a taxi to go to Shoprite or to mall- ja. Pakistan<sup>9</sup>- the shop owners, the shop owners are Pakistan, yes. Plenty plenty.

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<sup>9</sup> In South African parlance, Pakistani/Somali are terms used to refer to nationals who are mainly engaged in small scale trade. They may be nationals of Arabic descend from Somalia, Ethiopia, and or other countries on the North East of the Sahara. In the same way that words like Indian are used to describe any person perceived

South Africans, they have a spaza shop but they never buy anything. If you go and want a 12 ml- you won't find it-woo-they don't have money. They don't have money to buy the good stuff. You want a maybe Stoney cool drink- just a simple thing-they don't have. So the Pakistan, they have everything. Yes they offer, they offer a service- that's that's true (2013:84).

Dodson and Catherine Oelofse observe that at a community level tensions also arise from the fact that more males than females migrate to South Africa. This contributes to the perception and reality of foreign men and local women forming intimate relationships (2000:141). According Shmukler, David, a perpetrator, in *The Line* argues that this is one of the reasons why he resents migrants:

Eh Pen from uh 1st to 4th avenue- ja from 1st to 4th -it's full of ama foreigners you understand-so they do a lot of things-some of them have shops in 4th, they've got taverns in 4th avenue. They take our jobs. They go out with our girlfriends. The Zulu girlfriends, Sotho girlfriends-those we grow up in Alexander and then-what makes me angry (in Zulu) -is that they're always in the streets-in 4th -mm -so I just don't like them. They commit crime (2013:77).

This study suggests that using the economic axis of explanations to read the violent eruptions in mainly poor neighbourhoods while plausible, overlooks other significant and contributing variables like socio-spatial security aspects. It is widely acknowledged and confirmed through statistics that South African crime levels are alarming, even in areas where the police enforce what they code name 'visible policing', deploying mobile units to conduct periodic patrols on the streets. A notable difference between the affluent neighbourhoods and other places on the opposite site of the spectrum lies in the resources devoted and deployed for security. High security walls, razor and electric fences are complemented by a heavy presence of paramilitary-like private security firms patrolling and policing these neighbourhoods.

It is hard to imagine the mobs that attacked the victims in the poor neighbourhoods successfully launching the same headhunt that Shmukler attributes to David:

We didn't give a warning -we just go there. Around a ten o' clock. We went to Pen first ne<sup>10</sup>- where these foreigners were staying. We decided to go there-to FOUR hostel (clicks) and took them out-(clicks) took them out of their rooms and beat them-hit them. We threw water at them and hit them with sjamboks. So that you know ne-if you wanna- it's not just water-it's water with salt you pour. Ja if we hit you they will become a cut ne-so that salt will enter the wound-you'll feel a pain there, you'll feel a pain. And then men's hostel- the very same things-mm- and then hit

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as bearing a physical resemblance to persons from Middle Asia. Chinese being used loosely to refer to persons from the Far East.

<sup>10</sup> Italics indicate connecting non-verbal cues/sounds characteristic of vernacular South African languages.

them-take them out of their rooms and then... (pause) some of them burnt (his voice lowers) but I didn't burn them I was there... (2013:81)

Dodson contends that the second axis of explanation is composed of social and socio-political explanations. This line of argument proposes that under apartheid race was used to mark the oppositional 'other'. The fall of apartheid and the construction of a new, plural racial South African national identity is read as creating a vacuum. This led to the creation of a new 'other', defined as 'non-South African' (2010:6). The African migrant is read as this new scapegoat 'other'. Murray describes the non-South African other as 'the ultimate strangers - the new helots - within the social landscape of South African cities' (2003: 460).

Shmukler points to the incongruence of this explanation in accounting for its racial specificity, at the beginning of *The Line* when as the character of the playwright researcher she discusses her meeting with Patty, an American who debriefs her on how to conduct interviews with migrant communities:

We talk about the project in general and her work- she is an American living in South Africa- she loves it here. It struck me later that I had never questioned her 'foreignness' cos she was White – she told me later she was recently fired from her job -- they don't want foreigners in government institutions she said (2013:73).

Shmukler also records Nadine commenting on the same notion with regards to her work and saying:

Oh ja of course –well you're obviously more afraid when you're shooting perpetrators - cos you never know if they're going to turn on you because what makes you know- a Mozambican a foreigner and a white person not? You know, it's like- nothing (2013:88).

This study suggests that the explanations offered for the inclusion of over a third or 21 South African citizens in the 63 people officially acknowledged as the victims of the 2008 riots demonstrate that the murderers had a set phenotype profile of what constituted the 'other'.

Dodson identifies cultural stereotyping explanations as constituting the third line of arguments presented to account for the attacks. In this line of thought it is argued that the re-integration of South Africa with the rest of the continent with the end of Apartheid, and the resultant increase in migration of persons of African descent decentered the constructions of identity, geography and entitlement that some sections of South African society hold (2010:6). The violence is then understood as a reaction to this perceived dissonance. The argument being that the fall of apartheid has exposed South African citizens

to an unprecedented number and range of people from across the continent than the temporary mine and farm Apartheid labour system allowed. According to Dodson, mutual stereotyping between foreigners and South Africans exists and when cultural differences are essentialised and exaggerated this leads to prejudice and antagonism (2010:6).

To use this notion to account for the spread of the 2008 attacks however is problematic on many fronts. Significantly such explanations fail to explain the racial specificity of the attacks with all recorded victims being Black Africans. Furthermore, to suggest that society and communities can only cordially integrate with individuals whose cultures they interacted with under Apartheid, and are incapable of the same coexistence with diversity in the post-Apartheid era, on one hand resonates with paternalism and imperialism by assuming an infantile simple-mindedness on the general citizenry that is hard to justify.

On the other hand such notions erroneously assume the presence of racially and culturally homogenous societies and countries. This ahistorical view assumes the existence of a particular human phenotype assigned to geographical countries. Such explanations become even more problematic when one considers the actual victims of the attacks. Alfred and Eliza in *The Line* for example, are from Mozambique. Following this logic, attacks would not have targeted citizens from the traditional mine and farm labour source country like Mozambique. Reports show that Mozambique nationals were particularly singled out for attack. Shmukler records Nadine pondering the same:

Ja well. Essentially Mozambique borders on Zululand - you know - you know like these are artificial borders, you know, so ja it's -you know xenophobia doesn't make sense, (laughs) you know - the idea of the foreigner doesn't make sense - you know um ja (2013:38).

Shmukler records Nadine in another monologue debunking the cultural stereotypes used to explain the attacks by showing her some more images:

This is a Basotho woman whose shack was...There was a whole bunch of Basotho women, Basotho people living in this one section and they got accused of being foreigners but they're Basotho from South Africa not Basotho from Lesotho...you know. The only thing that survived were like small bits of metal (2013:85).

According to Dodson the fourth and fifth axes of explanation for South African xenophobia can be found in the political realm. Dodson observes that some commentators argue that the 2008 attacks were a form of 'jealous protection of those rights and benefits' from

foreign Blacks, who are perceived as threat to 'rights and benefits' (2010:6). Neocosmos (2008:591) calls this the 'politics of indigeneity' (2008:591). According to Neocosmos, the implementation of the government policy of black economic empowerment (BEE) is an example of the idea that 'indigeneity is the only way to acquire resources, jobs, and all other goodies which should be reserved for native peoples only' (2008:591). Such perceptions seem to suggest that anti-foreigner sentiments are the preserve of formally economically disadvantaged members of society who are the target beneficiaries of government economic equity programs.

Dodson (2010:6) and other critics like Robert Mattes (1999) and Crush (2008) point to evidence that suggests that there is widespread confusion about the understanding of universal human rights, asylum and refugee rights, and determining which rights are applicable to all people living in South Africa, or to citizens or those legally entitled to live and work in South Africa. Dodson observes that this line of argument reads the 2008 violence as evidence of such 'confusion' and the attacks are seen as scenarios where all African foreign nationals were confused as 'aliens', who are 'often conflated with being 'illegal' and stereotyped as being dangerous and undesirable, including by the South African media' (2010:6.) Neocosmos argues that such notions lead to 'popular' xenophobia situated within a 'politics of fear' (2008:587).

Such readings conflate anti-foreigner sentiments and xenophobia with uneducated and poor sections of the population who in the South African scenario happen to be the Black majority, who are perceived as being incapable of distinguishing citizen and migrant rights. However, systematic surveys by Afrobarometer<sup>11</sup> (2009), Crush (2008), Mattes (1999) into South African citizens' opinions of foreigners in general and foreign Africans in particular, consistently show deep-seated anti-foreigner feelings and attitudes across race, class and gender lines. Crush concludes that 'xenophobia and hostility to (particularly) other Africans is not the preserve of a lunatic fringe but represents the conviction of the majority of

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<sup>11</sup> [www.afrobarometer.org/Summary%20of%20Results/Round%204/saf\\_R4SOR\\_9apr09\\_final.pdf](http://www.afrobarometer.org/Summary%20of%20Results/Round%204/saf_R4SOR_9apr09_final.pdf)

Afrobarometer (2009) in October and November 2008 established that 33 percent of South Africans were 'likely' or 'very likely' to 'take part in action to prevent people who have come here from other African countries from moving into' their 'neighbourhood'. Similar percentages applied to preventing African immigrants' children from 'sitting in the same classroom' as their 'children' 'operating a business in' their 'area' and 'becoming one of' their co-workers'. 21 percent of the survey sample felt that all people from other countries living in South Africa should be send back.

citizens' and warns that 'the violence could have been-and may yet be more widespread' (2008:7).

Crush (2008), Jonny Steinberg (2008) and Dodson (2010:7) argue that a lack of political leadership should be read as a prime factor in the manifestation and festering of xenophobia attitudes. Shmukler records Bheki demonstrating this when he narrates his actions and inactions when the attacks were underway:

The um-you must know that this is happening not with the protocol of the organization- its certain individuals who want this-so you can't go there because you'd be known there-you'd be seen -as a ANC councillor- so you can't...Of course Ma'am, like I said, it won't just happen from no-where. It has to be orchestrated so that it has to exist-and once it exists it's then that it will take its own direction (2013:91).

Dodson argues that attitudes towards foreign Africans demonstrated by the public and political establishment from the grassroots as indicated by Bheki to all post-apartheid presidents can at best be described as ambivalent. He argues that the scapegoating and 'othering' of African migrants has evolved into a leitmotif that conflates immigrants with not only 'illegality but actual criminality, despite evidence that African immigrants are far likelier to be victims than perpetrators of criminal activity' (2010:7).

Dodson cites as an example former President Nelson Mandela's 1994 speech to commemorate the National Day of Safety and Security. Mandela (1994) is recorded as having said 'the fact that illegal immigrants are involved in violent criminal activity must not tempt us into the dangerous attitude which regards all foreigners with hostility' (2010:7). Mangosuthu Buthelezi, Home Affairs Minister from 1994-2004 is on record for alleging that all Nigerian nationals migrating into South Africa were criminals and drug traffickers and that 'illegal aliens' were costing the South African taxpayers 'billions of Rands' annually. Current President Jacob Zuma (2013) was reported by Carien du Plessis in the *City Press* (and other national newspapers) publicly exhibiting the same sentiments of South African exceptionalism that fuelled the attacks by remarking on the introduction of electronic road polls that 'we can't think like Africans in Africa generally, we're in Johannesburg'.

Dodson makes the case that rather than these being instances of a lack of political leadership, they should be appreciated as 'strong and influential political leadership, but in quite the opposite direction to that which one might expect of a rights-respecting, democratic state' (2010:7). Neocosmos concurs with Dodson (2010) and argues that such

utterances as well as human rights abuses by the police and other public agents constitute what he terms 'a state discourse of xenophobia' (2008:587).

Former President Thabo Mbeki's name has become synonymous with what Dodson (2010) considers as the sixth axis of explanation for xenophobia. This line of argument denies the very existence of xenophobes in the society<sup>12</sup>. Mbeki preferred to call the mass violence 'the unpardonable crime' committed in the 'dark days of May' arguing that 'we allowed criminals in our midst to inflict terrible pain and damage to many in our society, including, and particularly, our foreign guests' (2008). The delays and denials that characterised the state's response and silence give credence to Samantha Power's assertion that politicians will only act to stop mass killings if and when the political cost of inaction outweighs the risk of acting (2002:510-511).

If we are to accept that xenophobia is an attitude, when that attitude becomes embodied and becomes manifest in verbal or physical action as was the case in 2008, those actions need, and are worthy of examination in and for themselves. The 2008 attacks, and those preceding and succeeding them have been acknowledged as criminal acts, but have thus far remained 'crimes without a name' in the words of Winston Churchill (1965). In the following section this study will draw on the UN Convention on genocide, Stanton's 'the eight stages of genocide' and Ayvazyan's (2012) writings in 'Genocide: Intent, Motivation and Types' to examine how the testimonies in *The Line* capture and represent the 'crime without a name' that characterised the attacks.

### *Point of departure: A crime without a name.*

Although this study is not informed by a legal reading of the UN Convention on Genocide, it suggests that the Convention affords us a clearer understanding of the events captured in *The Line* and by extension the 2008 attacks that provided the testimonies captured in the play. The United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of

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<sup>12</sup> Mbeki, Thabo. 2008. Speech at a tribute to the victims of the May 2008 attacks. Pretoria, 2 July 2008. [www.pretorianews.co.za/index.php?fSection=&fArticleId=nw20080703154316518c941351](http://www.pretorianews.co.za/index.php?fSection=&fArticleId=nw20080703154316518c941351).

What happened during those days was not inspired by possessed nationalism, or extreme chauvinism, resulting in our communities violently expressing the hitherto unknown sentiments of mass and mindless hatred of foreigners-xenophobia...I heard it said insistently that my people have turned or become xenophobic...I wondered what the accusers knew about my people which I did not know. And this I must also say- none in our society has any right to encourage or incite xenophobia by trying to explain naked criminal activity by cloaking it in the garb of xenophobia.

Genocide, adopted in 1948 serves as the international framework to identify and recognise genocide.

Stanton observes that the UN Genocide Convention is often misread as requiring the perpetrator's intentions to be the destruction 'in whole' of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group (2007:1). Some historical scenarios of genocide fit this description, the most eminent being the genocide in Europe led by Nazi Germany and the 1994 Rwandan genocides. Many other instances seek or achieve the destruction of the targeted group. Ayvazyan concurs and argues further that genocide is hypothetically possible without the loss of life. This would apply in situations where the perpetrator intends to destroy 'in whole or in part' the targeted group but the plan fails due to any reason, be it the lack of or inadequacy of force to implement the destruction (2012:23).

According to Stanton, genocide is distinguished by the perpetrator's 'intent'. In some instances intent can be proven from statements or orders issued by the perpetrators. It is more often the case that no such records exist, or survive. In such cases a systematic study of the killings, or acts of genocide would reveal a pattern that reveals the intent. He makes the case that motive should be differentiated from intent, arguing that 'intent is determined by the specific purpose of the act'. The perpetrator might have multiple motivations, varying from greed to political domination (2007:2).

Alison Des Forges underscores the multiplicity of motivations that drive people who perpetrate genocide. In her analysis some individuals are driven by virulent hate, some by real fear. Some individuals participate under duress to self-preserve and or protect significant others from being harmed by those who ask them to participate or ambition and greed (1999:770). It is important to highlight that humans are complex and can be driven by multiple motivations, and that such motivations evolve.

The six axes of explanations discussed above under the heading *Common perceptions of the violence* can be understood as constituting possible motives for the 2008 attacks. Motives in and by themselves do not remove genocidal intent. Using the U.N. Convention, genocidal intent can be observed if the choice of victim is made on the basis of the victim's ethnicity, nationality, race, religious or sexual orientation, or any other category the perpetrator chooses to use to categorise the victims. Stanton adds that acts of genocide can

be recognised as such, even in cultures where killing people of the victim group is not considered as murder. According to Stanton, the genocidal process can be broken down into eight stages, with earlier stages preceding the later, but continuing to operate simultaneously. The stages do not however follow rigid sequencing. The stages are classification, symbolisation, dehumanisation, organisation, polarisation, preparation, extermination and with denial marking the last stage of genocide (2007:2-3).

Stanton further defines classification as the 'division of the natural and social world into categories' (2007:2). Classification exists in all cultures to differentiate 'us' and 'them', and to determine the treatment we accord to individuals. In broad terms, *The Line* makes distinctions between South African citizens and foreign nationals. The second stage involves the use of symbols to mark and signify the classification we ascribe to different people. Symbolisation can be imposed on a group internally or externally. Symbols like customary dress, body or facial scarring are examples of internally defined symbols. Historical precedence show genocidal governments, in the preparation stage, forcing target groups to wear distinctive clothes and symbols.

The third stage is dehumanisation. Stanton argues that classification and symbolisation are essential processes in all cultures. They evolve into stages of genocide only when they become the basis for dehumanisation. At this stage one group denies and refuses to acknowledge in word and deed the humanity of people they deem as 'the other'. Dehumanisation allows the perpetrator to kill the target group with impunity. Name calling and the use of pathology discourse marks this stage. Infamous examples include Nazi propaganda calling its victims 'rats' or 'vermin'; while Hutu hate radio called baTutsi 'cockroaches' (2007:2). *The Line* references African foreigners as *amakwerekwere*<sup>13</sup>. Stanton argues that the mutilation of genocide victims is often an expression and extension of this denial of the victims' humanity (2007:3).

The fourth stage of the genocide process is organisation. Stanton argues that the organisation of genocide varies by culture, and need not necessarily be centralised or

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<sup>13</sup> Derogatory term for African foreigners. Other popular terms include *Zizimbane* (Zulu for abstract thing); *boSisi* (Zulu/Suthu mix for the hawkers); *Komverre* (Afrikaans for from far); *baKweena* (seSotho for a mythic figure who rides on the back of a crocodile to cross a river); *Tswakda* (seTswana for the one from a nameless place).

elaborate. He points to the 1984 massacre of Sikhs<sup>14</sup> as such an example. The method of extermination varies from society to society, and can be conducted by amateurs or trained militias or both. In Rwanda machetes were mostly used to kill Tutsi in 1994. In Cambodia<sup>15</sup> hoe-blades were used to strike victims on the back of the neck in 1975-79 massacres (2007:3).

Polarisation is the fifth stage in Stanton's formulation. Polarisation efforts by extremists seek to eliminate moderates who might object to the use of mass violence. Stanton calls the sixth stage preparation. This phase involves the systematic identification of victims, and their places of residence. He uses the case of Rwanda where maps and name lists were drawn up and all people were forced to carry their identity cards. The identity cards showed a person's ethnicity, and all who failed to produce their identity cards were presumed to be Tutsi and executed.

Extermination follows as the seventh step in Stanton's model. The victim group is subjected to attack and killed, often together with the children. According to Stanton 'it is considered extermination, rather than murder, because the victims are not considered human' (2007:4). The killings themselves are often described through euphemisms of purification.

Denial marks the last stage Stanton's genocide model. The extent and methods of denial vary. In some instances it involves the digging up and destruction of mass graves or the destruction of records and testimonies detailing the acts of genocide. Denial can also occur through what Stanton terms 'definitionalism', where deniers make the case that the killings 'do not fit the legal definition of genocide' (2007:4).

### *Testimony of the intention to commit genocide*

This study applies Ayvazyan's (2012:23) theories to read genocide intent in group behaviour captured in *The Line*. Drawing on Ayvazyan, we can assume that David, Nomsa and Bheki as

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<sup>14</sup> 1984 Anti-Sikh Pogroms took place in India after the assassination of Indira Gandhi on October 31, 1984. India's Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated by two of her Sikh guards acting in the aftermath of Operation Bluestar. Over the next four days nearly 3000 Sikhs were massacred in systematic riots planned and led by Congress activists and sympathizers. The then Congress government was widely criticized for doing very little at the time, if not acting as a conspirator, especially since voting lists were used to identify Sikh families. [http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/1984\\_Massacre\\_of\\_Sikhs](http://www.sikhiwiki.org/index.php/1984_Massacre_of_Sikhs).

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.ppu.org.uk/genocide/g\\_cambodia1.html](http://www.ppu.org.uk/genocide/g_cambodia1.html) ; <http://www.ihrc.org.uk/publications/comment/9550-genocide-against-muslims-in-cambodia>

members of the group<sup>16</sup> that is perpetrating (P) the attacks define and centre their sense of societal belonging on the concept of indigeneity and nationality. Through the attacks, the perpetrators (P) aim to achieve happiness (H). From the specificity of targets we can deduce that this group labels happiness within the confines of its membership, while refusing any coexistence with the victim group (V) comprising of Eliza, and Alfred and their families who are foreign nationals within the confines of the Alexandra society (S).

Using this formulation then, we can deduce that P equates to H:

$H=S-V,$

While  $P=S-V$  as well, so is  $H=S-V=P, \Rightarrow H=P.$

Ayvazyan argues that the equation ( $H=S-V=P$ ) is essential in understanding the leading force underlying genocidal intent (2012:23). Applying this equation to the testimonies of perpetrators in *The Line*, we can trace the evolution of Stanton's 'eight stage model'. The meeting held at what the character David calls 'San Kopano' (formally known as the Alexsan Kopano Resource Centre) becomes a defining stage in the organisation of the mass violence. At this meeting, instigators like the politician Bheki gave voice to a shared view where the perpetrators equated their happiness to the emergence of a society comprising of people whose membership could only be drawn from and through indigeneity and nationality. In the play Shmukler (2012:16) records David testifying:

I was involved in ish Gomorrah. I was there actually-I was there. There was a meeting neh at San Kopano- ja, about the foreigners. The council-the Alex council called the meeting. Then we decided to hold a meeting- with them-and then (laughs) whoo.

(The questions are becoming more difficult to answer)

Alright so okay-we have decided to catch this meeting at the San Kopano with our councillor. They ask questions- what are we doing (laughs) so we wanted to address the issues of the foreigner-

Yo yo yo ja almost everyone in Alexandra was at the meeting- (sigh)- ja May 2008.

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<sup>16</sup> The word 'group' is used with trepidation given the fact that no distinct group exists, but it is based on the idea that the persons perpetrating attacks consider themselves as part of what they view as a distinct group separate from the targets, whom they again class into a group.

Calling for a meeting with such an agenda constitutes a breach of Article III of the UN Convention on genocide which make 'conspiracy to commit genocide; direct and public incitement to commit genocide; as well as complicity in genocide' punishable acts.

Shmukler writes that Bheki and the political leadership made the case that it was essential to eject all foreigners - the 'victim group'- who were residing in the society:

those who are not born from this country-they need to go back to their own countries. We just came out of the same situation as them and they had their own independence before us so WHY are we supposed to carry the burden. We need to to do things for ourselves FIRST so that we can be able to do for others (2013:78).

The ejection plan involved the use of terrorising and confiscating the victim group's assets and belongings. The ejection plan would fall under section 'c' of the UN Convention on genocide where; 'deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part' constitutes an act of genocide.

Shmukler records Bheki as saying:

What we did was we needed to intimidate them-take what they have like I've said-if you've got a, a house or a shack or a spaza shop we, understand-we make sure we take that away from you so that you can be able to go back and come with that mind of a spaza shop in your own area-in where you were born so that you can uplift your own area...This is ours. We on our own we are not okay yet (2013:79).

Bheki is articulating what Neocosmos calls 'state discourse of xenophobia' (2008:587.) According to Neocosmos, Bheki's sentiments echo the 1994 call to take 'physical action' made by the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) when he says in *The Line*:

We've been telling these employees not to hire these people. Now, when when you look at the entire Gauteng province, you will see that you've got more of these people working here, and I can tell that they are working illegally which is not okay.

The language of address confirms the Stanton's 'classification' stage marked by 'them' and 'us' discourse. While confirming Dodson's observation of the widespread conflation of migration and illegality.

Ayvazyan argues that the socio-political motives of mass violence are hard to ascertain and 'different motivations unite in intent and give birth to genocide. Motivations are the rationales of intent' (2012:23). Roger Smith concurs, adding that genocidal violence can broadly be classed as 'institutional; retributive; utilitarian; monopolistic and ideological' (1999:5). Bheki's calls would make the attacks monopolistic and ideologically motivated.

Varied testimonies in *The Line* discussed in earlier sections point to a multiplicity of motivations; showing that genocide is a complex group crime that cannot be easily be categorised.

The character David reveals that at the community meeting it was agreed that the attacks would be carried out after three days, to allow for the perpetrators time to organise and to arm themselves, and identify houses and businesses owned and used by foreign nationals. This three day stage would constitute what Stanton's considers the fourth stage of genocide which he terms the 'organisation' phase (2007:3). David vividly describes the execution of the mob attack, and the last word that closes the testimony is the fact that some people were burned; quickly adding that he did not personally burn anybody.

### *The Burning of Victims*

Shmukler (2013:90-91) records Nadine reflecting on the burning of people that characterised the 2008 mass violence and saying:

I'm very glad that um –when- Ernesto was burnt I wasn't there. I was- I was in the township next door. I'm very glad that I wasn't there. I don't know cos my first instinct is that I wouldn't be able to shoot it.

So many photographers got that image. He burnt for a while before somebody helped him. Ja, I just- I think it's important to use his first name –he's not just a burning man. As soon as things get like, get like a little stressful in this country, people start being burnt you know-um- I really do (2013:90-91).

The burning of people alive as a method of lynching has a long and infamous history in South Africa<sup>17</sup>. In South African parlance this process is called 'necklacing'. Lynda Schuster comments on the symbolic use of 'necklacing' during Apartheid:

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<sup>17</sup> According to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission the first victim of 'necklacing' was Maki Skosana, a young girl lynched in July 1985. The report says:

Moloko said her sister was burned to death with a tire around her neck while attending the funeral of one of the youths.

Her body had been scorched by fire and some broken pieces of glass had been inserted into her vagina, Moloko told the committee.

Moloko added that a big rock had been thrown on her face after she had been killed.

"Truth Commission Looks At First "Necklace" Murder"

<http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/media/1997/9702/s970204c.htm>.

<http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans/duduza/moloko.htm>.

'Necklacing' represented the worst of the excesses committed in the name of the uprising. This was a particularly gruesome form of mob justice, reserved for those thought to be government collaborators, informers and black policemen. The executioners would force a car tire over the head and around the arms of the suspect, drench it in petrol, and set it alight. Immobilized, the victim burned to death (2004:453).

The latent practise resurfaced in the wake of the May 2008 mass violence. The resurgent attacks targeted African foreigners, as well as people profiled as foreigners. Under Section 'a' of the UN Convention on Genocide 'killing members of a group' using 'necklacing' and other means 'committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part' people on the basis of their belonging to a 'national, ethnical, racial or religious group' constitutes acts of genocide.

The late Mozambican Ernesto Alfabeto Nhamuave (1973-2008) commonly known as 'the burning man' is one of such victims whose demise was captured live on camera<sup>18</sup>. The image of his last moments gripped and shocked many people across the world. His image has become what Sontag (2004:68) terms a 'signature picture' and 'shameful souvenirs of communal acts' that mark the 2008 attacks. The reason for Ernesto's recurrent presence in the body of works from and post 2008, is in part due to the fact that of the officially acknowledged sixty three who were murdered, he was identified by name. And in part due to the manner, in which he and his relations were savagely attacked and taunted. His cousin managed to escape before he was 'necklaced' while Ernesto was burnt beyond recognition.

Shmukler says Bheki; one of the instigators of the attacks alleged that:

When you say the attacks (pause)-they had to do with murder, with rape, with all that – same as as power, same as change. They all come like that. You know, to make an omelette you need to break few eggs. And that's what happened-like any war that ever happened-it happened because wrong was done and right had to happen (2013:83).

While David one of the perpetrators told Shmukler:

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<sup>18</sup> According to Tim Porter (2003) photojournalist Kevin Carter was the first person to capture a necklacing lynching in the mid-1980s on camera. Kevin Carter later said of the images:

I was appalled at what they were doing. I was appalled at what I was doing. But then people started talking about those pictures... then I felt that maybe my actions hadn't been at all bad. Being a witness to something this horrible wasn't necessarily such a bad thing to do.

After having seen so many necklacings on the news, it occurs to me that either many others were being performed (off camera as it were) and this was just the tip of the iceberg, or that the presence of the camera completed the last requirement, and acted as a catalyst in this terrible reaction. The strong message that was being sent was only meaningful if it were carried by the media. It was not more about the warning (others) than about causing one person pain. The question that haunts me is 'would those people have been necklaced, if there was no media coverage?'

Tim Porter (18 February 2003). "Covering War in a Free Society". Retrieved 2013-10-04.  
<http://www.timporter.com/firstdraft/archives/000071.html>

so whatever happened in Alexander WE stand up for it. Ja! (2013:90)

David and Bheki's testimonies echo Sontag's observation that 'what is illustrated by these photographs is as much the culture of shamelessness as the reigning admiration for unapologetic brutality' (2004:29). Acts of genocide are not straightforward murders, but are performative acts as well. Perpetrators seem to seek ways of making the torture and killing into a spectacle, and seek to prolong the humiliation and suffering of the victim. Shmukler writes that in David's testimony for example, the victim's actual death seems to be regarded as an 'anti-climax' and perpetrators feel no individual culpability and responsibility:

The time we burn those people-uh-those foreigners at Alexandra ne –umm. Our actual plan was to go and kick them out and beat them you understand-but like within our group-there also one of those people like who were very evil-mm mm-they've got evil hearts JA- evil hearts. They can burn you, they don't mind-they can even kill you rrright now-they don't mind (2013:90).

Stanton considers the destruction of cadavers of victims as an extension of the dehumanisation stage. Burning victims creates anonymous bodies whose existence is stripped of the possibility of being individually mourned by surviving family relations. Fournet concludes that the breaking up of human cadavers into multiple unnameable parts 'destroys both their lives as well as their deaths' (2007:15). The burning of victims then, is an extension of the 'othering' that leads to the dehumanisation and 'thingification' of the victim, whose death is not worthy of being individually symbolised. The killers in their attempt to dehumanise their victims, end up negating their own humanity, becoming victims of their own hatred and lust.

### *Different Types of Perpetrators*

*The Line* reveals the presence of different types of perpetrators. Shmukler through Bheki's testimony infers the presence of 'certain individuals who want this' who potentially form the first category of perpetrators (2013:91). These individuals facilitated and provided the 'command structures' that masterminded, instigated and executed the genocide. In the text, these individuals remain nameless, and mostly faceless. Shmukler records Nadine as saying there were a number of these individuals whom photojournalists covering the attacks were able to identify:

I remember there's this one photograph of this guy wearing ...like a blue cloth around his head. I'm not sure if it was like a sweater-that he's just- kind of like to anonymise himself. He had been spotted at several of the East Rand townships-um by photographers-always edging on the, um the violence- so photographers identified him as one of the ringleaders. He wasn't just at Ramaphosaville- he was at Primrose-he was um at in Boksburg. He was, he was all around so he was definitely and like (sigh) rumour whatever -was that he was um Zulu- but not Inkatha Zulu<sup>19</sup>, ANC Zulu. He had this, um like, m machete you know, panga ja um. I remember, I remember I remember -I forgot who actually got a photograph of him- he's like kind of standing up there on top of a hill-like edging people on (2013:86).

This first category worked closely with and through a second category comprised of David and his peers. The second category of perpetrators was on the fore front of the attacks and comprised of subgroups and personal 'friend' allegiances that coalesced into the marauding mobs. Shmukler records David saying:

On Saturday ne eh-from the morning after just waking up-I went to visit my friends. I ask my friends what's going to happen-ja ja ja- the friends I work with, we are together all the time. So I went to them just to ask them what is happening and if they've got any plans they must put them into action (2013:81).

*The Line* reveals a third type of perpetrator who was complicit with the violence, and whose participation is often overlooked. In Eliza's testimony of her niece's rape and murder along with her husband and brother, this type of perpetrator was present, cheering on the attackers, and led in the looting of material possessions. Shmukler (2013: 83) records Eliza's saying:

The women saw the child being raped. It was them that actually told these rapists...that it's been a long time we warned them they should go- do as you please so they can go. They just took the stock and left (2013: 83).

Nomsa belongs to this category. In her testimony she recounts to Shmukler (2013: 88) how she witnessed multiple attacks where:

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<sup>19</sup> [www.citizenshiprightsinafrica.org/.../2009/CRAISARreport.July2009.pdf](http://www.citizenshiprightsinafrica.org/.../2009/CRAISARreport.July2009.pdf) ; <http://mg.co.za/article/2008-05-21-xenophobia-mbeki-gives-nod-to-army>.

KwaZulu-Natal's safety and security minister, Bheki Cele of the African National Congress (ANC), accused the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) of being behind the attacks, allegedly involving residents from a Dalton Road men's hostel. The road is the site of a number of hostels. "There was a meeting of the IFP branch in Dalton yesterday [Tuesday] and ... I know it was them who went straight from there to the tavern and raided the place and smashed the cars," Cele said.

There is a history of politically motivated violence between the two political movements that stretches into Apartheid and reached an all-time high in the transition of South Africa from Apartheid to multi-party democracy.

The boys beating this man -this man but run away so us we take things there- even me-I DID take –there in Slovo. I take polish, juice, sweets, chocolates-I did take these things -it was really big shop there in Slovo Park. This, this of Pakistan-yes we did hit Pakistan in 2008 so that we want them to go back to his home so that we can run this shop of them (2013: 88).

Unlike Nkala who drew on the 'I' positionality to give currency to the testimony, Shmukler draws on the evidentiary construction of the play to enhance its authenticity claims. By positioning herself as a neutral researcher and observer, the playwright furnishes the testimonies of victims and perpetrators in a dialogic spectacle. The playwright crafts *The Line* into a sensitive portrayal of a historical moment with which contemporary South Africa is still finding the words and language to fully engage. The testimonies in the play also enable us to investigate the nature and motive of the violence that was unleashed on African nationals in 2008. This study suggests that the testimonies capture instances that constitute an unacknowledged genocide.

## CHAPTER FIVE

The exhibition or valorisation of a story has no automatic connection to the liberation of the teller- James Thompson (2005:5).

### ***ASYLUM:SECTION 22***

This chapter examines my attempt to draw on the contemporary writings and practices in devising a production drawing on testimonies, gathered from asylum seekers in Cape Town, in the township of Imizamo Yethu. I conducted weekly interviews in the community for a period of five months. The chapter seeks to offer a critical reflection of the testimonial playwriting from what Riessman (1993:70) terms 'attending to experience', through to the research and the on-going devising of the play text *Asylum:Section 22* (2013) that draws on the testimonies gathered in the fieldwork. The analysis, interrogation, playwriting and reflection are on-going and necessarily subjective: the value of this articulation lies in allowing an embodied reflexive experience of devising testimonial theatre.

In presenting this experience as a case study, I make no claims of best practice and have no intention of providing a model or manifesto for future migrant testimony based work, only a reflection of a particular instance. It must be emphasised that *Asylum:Section 22* has not been a journey undertaken in isolation. The work resulted from close artistic and personal collaboration with the interviewees who invited me into their homes and lives when they were not obligated to.

The chapter presents a general overview of the asylum seeking experiences of the interview subjects. It deconstructs the construction of a play text drawing on the testimonies of asylum seekers to better our understanding of how playwrights devise plays from testimonies. I sought to interrogate the process from the recording of actual interviews to their transmission into a play text. The second concern of the chapter and research as a whole is to explore the ethical dimension of staging asylum seekers' testimony. Through *Asylum:Section 22*, I sought, among other things, to examine how faithful the playwriting efforts would be to the original testimonies, as well as how much of the testimonies would be incorporated into the play script. I was especially keen to observe how and what choices would inform whose testimony to include or exclude from the play script. I also sought to

interrogate the extent to which the conditions in which the testimonies were produced would impact the dramaturgy of the play text.

This chapter expands on the process which can be said to start with a visit to Imizamo Yethu. The participating interviewees recalled from memory events (testimonies) which they related. These were then audio-recorded. The recordings were transcribed, and the testimonies were then translated. The transcriptions were edited into a performance text. A partial draft of the testimonies, delivered by some of the original testifiers had a brief staging on the 24<sup>th</sup> of November 2012 in the Iziko Hall at Hout Bay Christian Community Centre as part of a community day festival.

Due to security concerns about having asylum seekers publicly articulate their experience in a potentially volatile township community, asylum seekers who were non-residents of Imizamo Yethu took to the stage for this showing. This presentation had a cast of three asylum seekers. The performance followed a simple linear structure, was composed of five scenes and ran for half an hour. The performance opened with audiences going through a simulated border post at the entrance of the venue where the performers made the audience members fill in actual Section 22 asylum application forms to familiarise them with the subject matter to be granted leave to enter the performance space.

The performers who were of different nationalities spoke in their mother tongues of Yoruba, Karuni and Shona which none of the audience members could comprehend, to make the border a universal space and to communicate a sense of a new arrival's impression of a foreign land. The performers would randomly grant or deny the audience members entry, or demand that the audience member redo their paperwork. This scene was also meant to communicate the bureaucratic inefficiencies that most asylum seekers testified to.

This scene was relayed by live camera feed onto a projector screen in the auditorium, allowing audiences to observe fellow audience members and to reflect on what they saw as well as their own actions or inactions in a similar situation, where the officious border officials' insistence on using their own vernacular languages made communication impossible, leading to their using crude gestures and signs to communicate.

The second scene had the performers mingling with the now seated audiences as informal vendors at a busy bus and train terminus. Vending and hand flier distribution are common

means of survival for asylum seeking migrants who have to fend for themselves since the government does not offer any subsidy. Irrespective of trade or job qualification asylum seekers struggle to land formal jobs since employers in formal lines of work are hesitant to engage somebody whose leave of stay is yet to be determined. The performers in this scene are rounded up by the police who solicit bribes and confiscate the vendors' wares. This scene led to the arrest of the last performer who has his home raided by the police. In this section a lone performer mimes the harassment of asylum seekers by the police captured on camera. Footage of several such incidents from various South African towns and cities was compiled and projected to sensitise audiences of the widespread nature of this abuse.

The third scene was staged through stylised movement to capture the routine of asylum seekers and undocumented migrants who are arrested and taken into police custody for processing. Through movement the handcuffed performers had their finger prints and mug shots taken, and had to strip to their undergarments before being sent into police holding cells.

The fourth scene explored the plight of detained asylum seekers in holding cells where gang activity is rampant. Two of the performers played the criminal boss and his side kick. The two took turns to individually and collectively harass the new arrival, who does not have any gang affiliation to offer him protection. It is in the cell that the asylum seekers reflect and share their testimony with the audience. The criminal boss amuses himself by acting as a self-appointed asylum determination officer and commands the asylum seeker to tell and repeat his testimony over and over again, and exposing various commonly held assumptions about migrants and asylum seekers.

The play closes with no hint of the real asylum determination officer in sight to grant the arrested asylum seekers their liberty. The prison stay becomes a no end in sight Beckett-like *Waiting for Godot* scenario, occasionally punctuated by the asylum seekers increasingly inaudible screams and shouts to be treated with human decency. These scenes served as an ironic prelude and reminder of former President Thabo Mbeki's pan Africanist call through a speech titled '*I am an African*'<sup>20</sup> delivered on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1996 in Cape Town on the

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lmKFTadTk8>. <http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=4322>.

Thabo Mbeki speech to parliament on 8 May 1996, at the adoption of the Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill, considered as one of his finest public deliveries on Pan Africanism.

adoption of the Republic of South Africa Constitution Bill. In the speech President Mbeki articulates the vision of a shared African cooperation and coexistence on the continent and the constitutional vision of a South Africa that 'belongs to all who live in it' based on the spirit of *ubuntu* (humanism).

### *Playtext- Asylum:Section 22*

The play title was inspired by Section 22 of the 1998 Refugees Act in the South African constitution. This constitutional clause provides six months temporary leave of stay to persons seeking protection and recognition as refugees in the country pending the finalisation of their applications. Holders of Section 22 permits are legally protected against deportation, and are granted the right of mobility, study and work.

*Asylum:Section 22* is a work-in-progress; testimonial, two-hander, multimedia text where narrative time and story times are conflated. The storied sequences do not follow a defined path of progression. The text events are set in the future, in a public forum where the present time is remembered and reconfigured through the testimonies. The testimonies are set as narrative collages, fracturing time, and with actors cast across gender and sex. The narration and actors are set in the future and leap back and forth in time. The text flattens out the characters in terms of time and space. It is an attempt to imagine how the future will remember the now, and the history we may or not become.

The characters testify in the past and the present and the future. Characters at times speak in harmony or more than one voice at a time. The play-text forms a collage, and montage composed of photographs, blank spaces, visual materials of violent police brutality of migrants, and possible asylum seekers. The theatrical frame holds monologues, dialogues, videography, voice-overs, drawings and interior streams of consciousness. The play media visuals draw on William Kentridge's pencil drawing and filming technique to render the photographs of mass violence, which are often very graphic and upsetting. Rendering these images as drawings was deemed to create the kind of distancing that would allow audience to get past the shock, and pay attention to the testimonies.

The theatrical framework that was devised for *Asylum:Section 22* built on the public play presentation and sought to estrange the testimonies and create artistic distance. This was

achieved by taking the action beyond the confines of the conventional stage and making it an immersive experience where the audiences entering the auditorium are subjected to a simulated 'border' search by actors in role. As mentioned earlier, in the initial showing this sequence was filmed and projected on stage by a live feed to enable the audience to watch other persons' reactions and reflect on their own reactions and inaction or actions in the face of sustained dehumanisation and harassment by actors in role.

The actors in role use languages that the majority of audiences cannot comprehend. This choice was made in the hope that it would force the audience to be estranged from the ordinary frame of reference. The futurist presentation frame and use of multiple role casting was meant to move the testimonies away from having a single protagonist, and create a text where the testimonies form a communal voice. The actors thus presented become mere vessels for the testimonies, rather than actors who can be conflated with the characters they play. The lecture framework was crafted to stage the act of testifying, rather than foreground the dramatization of the contents of the testimonies. This was to allow the audiences to actively listen to the testimony, and potentially learn from the content of the testimony.

### *The Case Study*

#### *Settlement and location*

Imizamo Yethu is an informal poverty stricken Cape Town settlement, described in one tourism brochure as a place 'situated in the picturesque seaside suburb of Hout Bay and rich in South African culture'<sup>21</sup>. To the North of the township, stretching its entire length lies the Table Mountain range while the Disa River runs through the Hout Bay valley. According to Michael Bardouleau (2010) of Water Rhapsody, the river Disa holds the unenviable record of containing the highest level of e-coli bacteria ever recorded in South Africa. Though migrants and asylum seekers reside in many areas of Cape Town and across the country, I discovered that for the township's relative small size, Imizamo Yethu had a prominent migrant community. While many factors affect the choice (or lack) of location for settlement, this study suggests that socio-economic position was the lead determinant. This results in the

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.citysightseeing.co.za/imizamo-yethu-township>.

dense and concentrated migrant population, which in turn makes it popular with new arrivals who find an existent support network that assists in accessing accommodation, employment through contacts and informal work gangs, communication and information on regularising their stay.

### *Sampling*

The research respondents were picked for relevance to the topic of study rather than representativeness of the community. Schatzman and Strauss (1973) cited by Imelda T. Coyne, observe that sampling is a practical necessity given the impossibility of including every potential candidate in a research. Sampling is 'shaped by the time the researcher has available to him, by his framework, by his starting and developing interests, and by any restrictions placed upon his observations by his hosts' (1997:624). The sampling in this study was premised on time, location, events and people. The field visits were spread over five months, and in the late afternoons to enable migrant community members to join the discussions after the normal working hours. The study was indiscriminate in terms of gender, status, age, function or profession of interview subjects.

I met with a former resident of Imizamo Yethu now a community liaison officer for an organisation that assists persons seeking asylum. This contact took me on a fieldtrip of the community and introduced me to potential interviewees. The selection snowballed as those who had been interviewed were asked to nominate and facilitate introductions to other asylum seekers. Tapping into these social networks and contacts was essential since the study was interested in learning about the legal status of migrants as asylum seekers, a subject that people would not ordinarily discuss with strangers. The downside of this referral system was that in the end there was no equal gender representational balance in the research pool. The liaison officer introduced me (a young, male student researcher), to persons who in the majority of cases were within my age group and male. This can be read as a marker of the influence of researcher and playwright's positionality in creating testimonial work.

## *Reflexive Interviews*

I conducted open ended, in-depth interviews with the respondents which were audio recorded with their permission. The interviews were conducted in English and Shona. These languages may not be representative of the migrant population in Imizamo Yethu. Their use in this study was prompted by my own the bilingual ability. The choice and use of language as a marker of playwright positionalality is often understated and not subjected to critical reflection. Some testimonial playwrights like Shmukler in *The Line* (2012) report using interpreters to reach across the language divide. Using an interpreter in this study might potentially have enlarged the scope of the study, but was vetoed on two accounts: Firstly given the sensitive nature of the research subject, interviewees might find the presence of a third person invasive and discourage full disclosure.

Secondly as the research focus is to interrogate how playwright positionalality influences the use of testimony, little was to be gained in using testimonies sourced and mediated through an interpreter. I was interested in soliciting a comprehensive view of people's lived experience, in knowing about the interviewees' experience in their home countries, during their migration, and in the country of asylum. I also found out that most respondents were keen to speak of their experiences in the country of refuge, rather than their home countries.

Wake reminds us of the irony of playmakers who insist on using verbatim techniques on interviews conducted in languages with which their interviewees are not comfortable. She comments that there is 'something particularly poignant about listening to these testimonies, in all of their clumsy glory' (2006:8). In plays like *The Line* this 'clumsy glory' is used to bolster the play's claims of authenticity; in the same breath it exposes the influence of playwright's positionalality in the interview. In the performance script, the playwright can manipulate fluency and articulation to serve as markers not for only social class, but for intelligence as well.

Annette Wieviorka highlights the fact that in testimony the choices of language are essential as they affect the testifiers' ability to access and draw on memory. And more fundamentally, language determines where one testifies from, as well as to what one testifies to (2006:46). Wake cites Rachel Ertel who writes on the effect of language on Elie Wiesel, a Nazi genocide

survivor. Elie Wiesel initially wrote his memoir in Yiddish, and rewrote the memoir in French. Ertel argues that 'it gave him back his voice, but a different voice ...For this he had to traverse death twice: he is a survivor of physical death and a survivor of the death of the language' (Ertel in Wake 2006:9).

I embraced Denzin's notion that the interview is not merely a method for information gathering, but is a dialogic platform for creating 'performance texts and performance ethnographies about self and society' (2001:24). Testimonial playwriting becomes part of the performative sensibility that transforms interviews into performance texts. I was interested in investigating how my own positionality would influence the manner in which the interviewees' words and narratives would be transformed into a play script.

The experience of conducting the interviews in Imizamo Yethu led me to question the apparent neutrality that some testimonial playwrights ascribe to their interview process. As a playwright, I had the autonomy to source and select interviewees. The power of commission and omission that this ascribes to the playwright runs counter to the mainstream claims that uncritically describe fact-based theatre as a democratic practice that empowers those on the margins of society like asylum seekers.

For instance, playwrights who work from prepared questions shape and influence the testimonies that they elicit while understating and in most cases eliminating the questions from the play text. Furthermore, the playwright controls which interviews to present in the final script, and determines how the testimony is represented. This study suggests that since testimonial plays lift speech out of context and repositions it in a difference context, the playwright positioning potentially offers clues as to what and how these choices are made.

The study also suggests that some testimonial playwrights actively try to mask their power in the devising process. Ryan Claycomb argues that this can be done 'through rhetorical appeals to "fairness"' (2003:112). These devices according to Jay Baglia and Elissa Foster (are applied to testimonies to mask the play text's construction as an artistic representation 2005:134-5). Play texts that mask the playwright's mediation and pass off as anti-art are positioned and read as being more authentic. Carolyn Baker suggests that testimonial interviews should be understood not as mere data collection exercises, but as 'data making' or 'data generation' processes (2010:163). Baker proposes that ethnographic interviews can

be better appreciated as 'inter-views' where participants 'see each other' (2010:167). In the light of this, the fieldwork for this study suggests that testimonial playwrights who mask their positionality as neutral in the crafting of the testimonies in Paget's (1987) 'recording tradition' are disingenuous.

It is problematic in post-structuralist terms to try to attach any universal truth claims to testimonial theatre apart from opinions and points of view. According to Baker, 'letting go the presumption that (good) interviews give us some kind of privileged insight into what people really think, believe or do, is the first step to seeing interview data as the production of situated 'accountings-for' whatever is the topic the interviewer presents' (2010:169).

This study suggests that testimonial playwrights embrace their positionalities in creating and interpreting work, instead of conflating 'anti-art' or talking head delivery with 'truth'. As Robin Soans argues:

Just because I write about real people and seek to portray them honestly, is there an embargo on editing creatively? Would you say to photographers that they have no right to interpret or to crop? That all their subjects should be filmed straight on, in nothing other than flat light? To declare that, because subjects are real, they have to be portrayed in a way that fictional characters are not, is to undermine the power of the verbatim playwright. It prevents the tailoring of the material to make it political, emotional or even theatrical (2008:35).

### *Ethics of praxis*

Playwrights and critics working on and from testimonies often highlight the importance of ethical conduct in engaging with interviewees. In this study and in the fieldwork, I was guided by Fleishman's (2012:19) formulation of ethics informed by Badiou (1993/2001:32). This study borrows the notion that ethical conduct should not be driven solely by the desire to protect the human rights of those we perceive to be weaker than ourselves, or about managing difference. Such a positioning is less than ideal for it restricts capacity to one's limitations, and is shaped by the impossibility of accepting difference. For the purposes of this study, ethics of praxis 'does not mean adopting an approach based on a set of ethical rules or *a priori* principles that determine the 'correct' way of dealing with sensitive sites' (Fleishman 2012:20). Instead it refers to 'our capacity to act, to create, to think affirmatively and co-operatively. It is not about preventing evil but about doing good'.

## *Informed consent*

Testimonial and other forms of fact-based playwriting anchor ethical practice on the notion of obtaining informed consent from research participants. This is variously articulated by scholars. Obtaining signed consent forms seems to be in line with international best practice in this regard. This position is also adopted by the University of Cape Town which makes this a prerequisite for all research involving human subjects. Clough et al observe that informed consent is not only a cornerstone of research involving human subjects, but in some countries is a legal and ethical requirement as well (2013:2). Testimonial playwrights seem to agree on and accept the ethical need to obtain consent. However, unlike clinicians and other social workers, they operate outside the confines of overarching regulatory boards, with the exception of exceptionally overbearing censorship authorities and thus seem exempt from the legal imperative to obtain written consent. Brian Phillips (2010:5) makes a similar observation about the creative freedom that playwrights enjoy in their field practice:

Human rights investigators working with victims and witnesses in this vein are now expected to follow strict protocols with regard to interviewing and making use of their testimony in publications and campaigns. Playwrights may not be professionally bound by these same standards, but if their work is beginning to take them into a similar realm of human rights practice, should not the same rules governing conduct and process apply?

Janet Gibson (2009:13) observes that the need to protect those perceived to be weaker and marginalised like children, women and asylum seekers seems to be readily accepted. She however prompts playwrights to consider how their positionality with regards to people who may be villains or whose actions the playwright finds morally objectionable informs their choice of representation of such persons. Gibson (2009:13) queries at what point playwrights decide to dispense with ethical concerns in order to make a political point. To illustrate her point, she uses David Hare's *The Power of Yes* (2009). The Playwright Hare used testimonies from the bankers, financiers and politicians to investigate the cause of the 2007-2008 global financial recessions.

Gibson problematises the Hare's ethical responsibility to the interviewees many of whom attended the show's premiere at the National Theatre in London. As part of the audience

they heard lines from the play text where Hare retorts: 'at least playwrights don't make a living out of fucking up people's lives' (2009:62), implying that the financial meltdown was caused by what he saw as the unbridled greed of bankers (Gibson 2009:13). This case illustrates the potential for abuse of the interviewees by the playwright and highlights the importance of investigating the playwright's positioning when testimonies are transposed to the stage.

In this study, informed consent entails furnishing prospective participants with sufficient understanding of any potential risks, benefits and processes associated with the research. Siddharth Ashvin Shah (2012) maintains that informed consent comprises of two parts: meaningful understanding and free choice. The fieldwork revealed that both stages are fraught with ethical challenges.

### *Documenting Consent*

The field work revealed that documenting consent is a challenge for playwrights. I observed that for research respondents who had verbally expressed their desire to be part of the research project, the notion of having to append their signatures to a piece of paper seemed alienating. They were of the opinion that their spoken word carries more weight than the written text, and was adequate.

This could have been due to a number of reasons, and in the context of playwright positionality, suggests that the academy's notion of documenting consent does not carry universal sway. Some respondents pointed to the paradox of being given and exercising the right to use pseudonyms in the research and then being asked to sign a consent form under their actual or randomly generated identity. While they appreciated the measure and need to keep their identities private, and to share their testimonies orally, the notion of signing a testimony, in the words of one respondent, felt like being asked to sign a confession by the police.

The study suggests that playwrights working with the testimonies of asylum seekers and other vulnerable groups, consider carefully the possible readings, memories, and concerns such processes may raise. Some respondents' testimonies highlighted a high level of 'disease' and one might say distrust of documents and document bearers. As a researcher

coming from a literary background, I realised the extent to which some asylum seekers' unease with documentation is underestimated. In seeking to protect the interviewees' identities and to establish a relationship based on trust and promote full disclosure, I discovered that such efforts can in fact trigger the opposite effect in subaltern subjects.

Some respondents were comfortable with using their given names on the basis that since their testimonies were to be used in a play text, audiences would conceive of their names as character names. The stage would therefore grant them sufficient anonymity. These individuals had the strongest misgivings with the notion of signing a consent form highlighting that their signatures were the only signifiers that would link and tie them to testimonies. They worried that should the interviews land in the 'wrong hands' or persons implicated in their testimonies, their anonymity would be compromised.

The study suggests that playwrights working with asylum seekers consult with each research subject as to how they would like to express their consent to participate in the testimony gathering. The researcher needs to be sensitive to cultural differences that inform obtaining and documenting consent. For this study I made a decision not to prescribe the use of the consent form in documenting consent, but to exclude those testimonies from the playwriting efforts bearing in mind that the research was conducted within the confines of the academy where signed consent is a prerequisite.

### *Meaningful Understanding and Free choice*

Clough et al (2013:3) and Dunn, Candilis & Roberts (2006) argue that an individual's ability to fully comprehend the possible consequences, in terms of risks and benefits of their participation in a research project is fundamental in obtaining informed consent. No formal working framework exists as yet to compel playwrights who work with asylum seekers or other vulnerable population groups who may not be very familiar with research processes, to demonstrate that their interview subjects had the decisional capacity to grant informed consent. The study suggests that playwrights working with testimonies drawn from asylum seekers be mindful of using consent materials that may leave participants vulnerable or feeling vulnerable.

Robert Barrett and Parker (2003); Lomelino (2009) cited by Clough et al observe that the conventional understanding of obtaining written informed consent relies on the Western principle of autonomy. This conceptualisation of an independent self, capable of making independent decisions from controlling influences cannot be universalised. They emphasise that the fundamental cultural philosophies of a society inform how members conceptualise the self, others and their interconnectedness (2013:3). Hazel Markus and Shinobu Kitayama (1991) maintain that the individual's unique attributes that separate the being from the larger context form the basis of independent conceptualisations of self. Interdependent conceptualisations of the self by contrast, focus on the relation of the self in relation to others.

The playwright's appreciation of these dynamics and their positioning in this continuum affects how the testimonies they obtain would be used in performance. In my fieldwork in Imizamo Yethu, this was expressed through invitations by the interviewees to meet asylum seekers' families. Three research respondents introduced me to their elder siblings. In one such case I met two of the participant's brothers. One of these brothers also took part in the research. Four respondents introduced me to their partners.

The fieldwork revealed what Clough et al observe to be the case in many cultures. The self in such cultures is understood in terms of the person's kin relations and place within the greater community (2013:3). This adds impetus to the observation that testimonies should not be narrowly interpreted as signifying the individual testifier's embodied experience, but can be a source to access community memory as well the multiple conceptualisations of the self that a single being carries.

Theatre of testimony and more so verbatim theatre tends to blur the conception of self and community memory and at times borders on fetishizing what respondents say, while underscoring societal and contextual influences on the utterances. I observed that asylum seeking processes make migrants the de-facto representatives of their countries of origin, alongside the self. According to the respondents, asylum is granted for successfully formulating a personal narrative of trauma. The notion of autonomy that underlies this personal narrative may in some cases not be considered as important as upholding community values and duties.

Negotiating for the consent of interview respondents led me to appreciate the family introductions and meetings as being informed by what Lomelino (2009) and Clough et al argue is the need for researchers to focus ‘around community risk and benefit as opposed to consequences for the individual’ (2013:3). Playwrights seeking to elicit testimonies from asylum seekers then, have to be cognisant of the limitations of Western-derived consent practices, as well as the potential for individual vulnerability community informed consent may place on the interviewee. The field work experience highlighted the potential for playwrights who operate from a position of exteriority to inaccurately judge the capacity of asylum seekers to make choices that are free from social relationships. Obtaining informed consent in the Imizamo Yethu fieldwork was in many cases a negotiation between community members and the researcher, rather than solely between the researcher and the participant.

### *Gathering the Material*

#### *Producing Asylum Testimony: The Significance of the Site of Production*

I introduced the interviewees to the concept of documentary theatre in general and theatre of testimony as I understand it. Most respondents had limited understanding of theatre, and the testimonial form of theatre was for many a new concept. I explained that the process would entail the respondents telling me, in their own words, about their experience of seeking asylum in South Africa. I indicated that I would record this ‘telling’, transcribe and in some instances translate the words and use the material to devise a written play text, which actors or interview subjects would enact. The notion of testimony and discussion of the asylum experience elicited different responses from the interview subjects. There was general enthusiasm for the project. Most respondents felt that their experience might help other persons seeking asylum, and most saw the project as an opportunity ‘to speak truth to power’. Some respondents were concerned as to whether anybody would be interested in hearing about their stories and experiences.

A further concern that emerged was with regards to the interviewees’ privacy. Respondents wanted assurances of anonymity in cases where their testimonies implicated others. I observed that the testimonial playwriting process is to a large extent hinged on trust, and

the quality of rapport the playwright establishes with interviewees. Bourdieu captures my trepidation with engaging with the testimonial form for the first time when he writes:

How can we not feel anxious about making private words public, revealing statements made in the context of a relationship based on a trust that can only be established between two individuals? True, everyone we talked to agreed to let us use their statements as we saw fit. But no contract carries as many unspoken conditions as one based on trust. In the first place, we had to protect the people who confided in us, in particular, by changing the names of places and individuals to prevent identification. Above all, we had to protect them from the dangers of misinterpretation (1999:1).

As Sangster argues; 'It is important to acknowledge how our own culture, class position and political worldview shapes the oral histories we collect, for the interview is a historical document created by the agency of both the interviewer and the interviewee' (1994:10). *Asylum:Section 22* then became an experiment which examines how the researcher as playwright's positioning in relation to the subject matter would inform and determine the play script's dramaturgy.

I adopted Enright's approach to testimony gathering. This approach blends oral history with the life story interview (2011:107). Lawrence Craig Watson and Maria-Barbara Watson-Franke define the life story interview as 'any retrospective account by the individual of his life in whole or in part, in written or in oral form that has been elicited or prompted by another person' (1985:2). Oral history on the other hand, records and preserves historical information by drawing on the experiences and opinions of ordinary people. In the fieldwork in Imizamo Yethu, I was interested in recording the personal experience and opinion of migrants seeking asylum. The interviews served as a platform for the interviewees to furnish me with an oral retrospective account of their lives.

### *Transcription*

After recording the testimonies, I was faced with the challenge of mastering transcription. Theatre of testimony as a genre is sustained by parallel dichotomies. While testimony in performance valorises what is or what was said, that is the verbal, devising the text, and seeking to create a word text valorises the written word. In this regard Dwight Conquergood comments that the act of 'transcription is not a transparent or politically innocent model for conceptualizing or engaging the world' (2002:147).

My efforts at transcription were an attempt to render from the recorded voices a written trace of the fieldwork which could be performed by actors. In terms of positionality, these efforts reflect the influence of Western knowledge systems that foreground the primacy of text on the researcher as playwright. Playwrights and critics of testimony seem to accept without question the need to reduce the researcher's encounter in gathering the testimonies thereby 'erasing the vast realm of human knowledge and meaningful action that is unlettered' (Conquergood, 2002:147).

My struggle to capture and preserve the interview encounters in the transcripts led to more reflection on the process. The transcription process was a challenge as to how to capture and preserve features like speech errors, volume, pitch, habitual gestures, body tension, pauses, arched eyebrows and silence-what de Certeau (2000:133) and Conquergood (2000/2002:146) call 'the elocutionary experience of a fugitive communication'. I felt that these were also essential in understanding how the testimonies were delivered, especially in appreciating the difficulty and delicacy of some of the testimonies.

The transcription process exposed my assumption that theatre of testimony could lead us to access the unmediated reality of asylum seekers' experiences of existence. I was drawn to theatre of testimony by the assumption that it was a form where the speaker's voice could be preserved without being opined by the playwright. This motivated the study's focus on understanding how positionality informs how testimonies are staged. Reducing the interviews into word text proved thought-provoking as I recollected the use of irony and other non-verbal means of expression the interviewees used to share their testimonies. According to Conquergood my research experiences are not unique since;

Oppressed people everywhere must watch their backs, cover their tracks, suck up their feelings, and veil their meanings. The state of emergency under which many people live demands that we pay attention to messages that are coded and encrypted; to indirect, nonverbal, and extra linguistic modes of communication where subversive meanings and utopian yearnings can be sheltered and shielded from surveillance (2002:148).

This study suggests that testimonial theatre-makers pay more attention to subaltern concerns about documentation when devising work from the testimonies of asylum seekers. Paul Gilroy (1994:77) cited by Conquergood among others, calls for a move beyond the 'idea and ideology of the text and of textuality as a mode of communicative practice which provides a model for all other forms of cognitive exchange and social interaction' (2002:148).

Conquergood argues that researchers should be aware of the possibility that subaltern bodies 'do not have the privilege of explicitness, the luxury of transparency, the presumptive norm of clear and direct communication, free and open debate on a level playing field that the privileged classes take for granted' (2002:146).

As the transcription progressed, I had to accept that not all nuances of personal narrative could be transcribed. This was due to the fact that the effort to transcribe sought to decipher embodied communication textually. In Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1964) words the efforts at transcribing could only produce a coherent deformation imposed on the visible. I started to wonder about how to create a theatrical framework that would contain as many testimonies gathered as possible. Drawing from the work of other testimonial playwrights, like Emily Mann, Hellena Enright and Gina Shmukler, I tried to create a framework that enables the audience to experience something akin to the experience of listening to the asylum seekers testify. I looked for a framework that would border on mimesis and not be restricted by realist or naturalist conventions of representation, and capture the critical moments of the fieldwork.

I turned my gaze towards how to decide what to include and what to exclude. Making these decisions and reflecting on the process highlighted the centrality of the playwright's positioning in shaping testimony theatre. I developed a three pronged approach to edit the transcriptions. The first condition was that the testimony had to capture the interviewee's ideas and views regarding asylum seeking. The second condition was that the testimony be representative of many stories rather than be an exception. The selected testimonies had to provide a sample of the experience of an asylum seekers' existence. This was shaped by my impressions that there has been little effort in articulating not only the presence of asylum seekers in the republic, but also their legal status.

I felt that the criminalisation of movement and migration in the public discourse commented on by Neocosmos (2008) among others was unfortunate and had to be challenged. The perpetration of such discourses resulted in the dehumanisation of the 'other' captured in Nkala's *The Crossing* and led to the mass violence captured in Shmukler's *The Line*. I therefore selected testimonies that helped articulate the differences between an undocumented person, and persons seeking asylum. The third criterion was that the

testimony had to be the interviewee's embodied experience, rather than stories they had heard and shared in some of the community. This was meant to put a face on the experiences of the many individuals seeking asylum. The process of making these arbitrary but necessary decisions on how to use the testimonies in performance led me to reflect on the effects of my positionality and problematize the consent granted.

### *Reflections on the Release form*

Like most testimonial playwrights whose work I studied, I did not have specific ideas of how testimonies gathered through the fieldwork interviews would ultimately look like. During the course of the fieldwork and through the transcription, I did not know how I would shape the material. The theatrical framework could not be decided before hand, since such a decision could only be made in view of the material gathered. Together with possibly many others working from the same premise, I could do no more than tell the subjects that I am a playwright; divulge the research topic and then ask for an interview. This being the case, I am inclined to suggest that the consent granted is not complete, since the request is made on incomplete grounds. In other words, if the playwright does not have any idea in advance, of what would be on the tapes or how they will subsequently use the recordings, the interviewee cannot really know to what they are consenting. Making the call on what to include and exclude led me to wonder whether, if they had known, would interviewees have agreed and would they have given the details they did.

I suggest that there are inherent dichotomies in promising somebody complete anonymity in the finished product, and asking for consent to use the testimonies in unspecified ways. Testimonial playwriting in a manner of speaking, asks for people who agree to participate in the research to sign 'blank confessional' pieces of paper, and trust the playwright to fill in the blanks in their absence. As the case of David Hare and the bankers in *The Power of Yes* illustrates, the playwright may ask for consent and manipulate the signed consent. It is contradictory then to ask for complete cooperation and then ask somebody to sign away all and every right to the material. It is not often that a playwright produces a second copy of the interview for the interview subject.

In any case, this may not necessarily be possible given the fact that pseudonyms are used, and in the case of my work, no details that would tie or allow for people to tie the

interviewees to their testimonies were captured. If one was to suggest consent given initially in part, or in stages, then anonymity should it be desired, would be compromised. If asylum seekers use their real or legal identities, they further subject themselves to the mercy and integrity of the playwright which cannot always be relied on. In the case of political asylum seekers, security of persons overrides such a possibility.

This study further suggests that there is a difference between being granted an interview or an audience by a person who has no prior knowledge of theatre or testimonial theatre in particular; who may take the playwright researcher as a confidante, and interpreting this rapport as consent to restructure their testimony through performance. There seems to be a tendency for playwrights in general and in the case of this study in particular, to mistake the interview process for an intimate connection between the two parties. While it is true that the interviews lead to intimate disclosures, testimonial playwrights and critics alike valorise this as a necessary bond of trust. This study suggests that the intimate disclosures happen because people find it easier to disclose such detail to strangers. The strangers in turn ought to be responsible in how they handle the material.

As highlighted in earlier sections, the prevailing use of consent forms is hardly adequate. If for instance, the interviewees sign the release forms with an alias, the legitimacy of documents become suspect. This leaves the process open to manipulation by the playwright, who can then solicit for interviews and switch on tape recorders on unsuspecting individuals and capture sentiments and stories which may be 'true' but trample on ethical or even legal rights. This study suggests that the current formulation of testimonial theatre presents a problematic working frame that valorises disclosure, but sits on uneasy ethical and methodological grounds. Testimonial theatre in a sense is constructed on the commodification of 'otherness'. Through this commodification, Thompson asks theatre makers who solicit for testimonies 'by asking to hear, must we retell?' (2005:25).

Finally, the study suggests that the granting of permission is not, in itself, evidence of due ethical process. For instance it is possible that interview subjects might be motivated to help out of a sense of obligation or parental duty. In the case of this study project, the fact that in a foreign land I spoke the home language of some of the interviewees, and was a student at a reputable institution probably helped in ways that cannot be quantified and constitute

part of the researcher's positionality. Playwright positionality becomes crucial as Alcoff warns, the desire to protect those perceived as weak might be, 'born of a desire for mastery, to privilege oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about another's situation or one who can champion a just cause and thus achieve glory and praise' (1992:29).

### *Finding a Theatrical Framework*

The next stage in devising *Asylum:Section 22* was to develop a theatrical framework that would transform the asylum testimonies into a piece of theatre. The main challenge was finding an appropriate theatrical framework that could capture the complexity and contradictory elements that testimony contains, while simultaneously respecting the integrity of the original testifiers. The devising became a process of finding a theatrical framework that served multiple ends. I wanted a framework that firstly could hold the multiple testimonies gathered from the fieldwork. Secondly, the theatrical structure had to ensure the privacy and anonymity of the asylum seekers. Thirdly, the framework had to avoid what Enright terms the 'stool and chair' aesthetic (2011:112). This is when individual monologues are presented one after the other. I was also keen to find a framework that would contain and illuminate the testimonies without overlaying my personal opinions on them.

The general recommendation offered when working from testimony, is to transcribe all interview material first before deciding on the structure and theatrical frame. I discovered that transcribing from the standard voice recorder used meant replaying and re-listening to sections several times. The transcription was long, arduous and demanding in terms of time: time for which the structure of the study did not necessarily allow. The option of using professional transcribers was a possible way out. I felt however, that this fell outside the consent obtained from the testifiers in the beginning of the process to treat the testimonies with confidentiality.

There was also the risk that in the original recordings, some asylum seekers who had asked to use pseudonyms had used names and identities that when we replayed the recordings they wanted edited out. The research revealed that some playwrights take the liberty to engage professional transcribers without clarifying whether they inform and explain this step of testimonial playwriting to the research subjects when they solicit for testimonies. To

proceed, the study took Enright's advice to transcribe the first twenty minutes of each interview (2012:115). This part by part transcription gives an idea of the themes and ideas that the individual testimonies contained.

### *Authorial ownership*

While acknowledging the social and political significance of fact based theatre, Heddon emphasises how playwrights and theatre-makers constructing the work, often understate the potential material or other gains which might result from the work (2008:137). In a world where the production becomes a commodity or in the case of this study where academic merit is to be gained, the co-authorship of the text should be highlighted. This study suggests that where testimonies are used, the resultant text becomes a collaborative effort. To this end, I suggest that playwrights acknowledge and credit their efforts as compilers rather than singular originators of the work.

Embodying the devising of a performance enabled me to better reflect and appreciate playwright positionality in devising testimonial work. I was able to consider how positionality informs the challenging task of reducing lived experience into a text. The study suggests that verbatim and testimonial playwriting is not a format, but a technique that playwrights adopt and develop in their work. Martin observes that 'documentary theatre creates its own aesthetic imaginaries while claiming a special factual legitimacy' (2010:10). Textualisation removes the testimony from the original context, and resituates it usually without providing the full context of the initial interview. As a result, the validity of these imaginaries is derived from the consensus among the audiences regarding the narrative.

Given the impact and overarching nature of the edits that are necessary to devise a performance text, this study suggests that it is problematic to ascribe the word verbatim to interview based theatre. The word verbatim is usually used to imply a word for word rendering. In a way, some playwrights present testimonial text as something akin to the act of ventriloquism. Applying the gestalt principle to the transcribing and editing, we observe that the total is not equal to the sum of the constituent parts. Testimonial theatre uses various techniques to present the illusion that the total is actually the sum of the constituent parts.

It is perhaps on this basis of that accusations of mis-representation often levelled against the form accrue. The testimonial playwright works with a methodology that can be manipulated to literally put words into people's mouths. As Martin aptly observes:

the manner in which events are solicited, remembered, written, and remembered in and through performance and archived shape the history they become (2006:9).

Interrogating the question of playwright positionality then becomes an essential part of deconstructing play-texts and performance since it helps us comprehend the possible motivations informing the furnishing of the text.

## CHAPTER SIX

It nonetheless appears that, once committed, crimes of genocide are too rapidly forgotten and soon fall into oblivion - Caroline Fournet (2007:xxx).

## CONCLUSION

Using narrative analysis, this study examined in what manner playwright positionalality potentially informs how testimonies drawn from asylum seekers are used in performance. Along the course of the investigation which sought to focus on the 'how to' of theatre and testimony, the study also drew attention to the content of the testimonies themselves. The study was premised on the assumption that performance, and the 'world' do not necessarily exist independently of each other. The representation of the world then was read against the backdrop of the context of the material world on which the production is based. The study focused on exploring the testimonial form with regards to the manner in which it necessitates the appropriation of the 'other' for artistic means. The study suggests that in some cases, this other is to varying extents unable to resist or challenge this representation and embodiment.

The study contended that contemporary South African theatre of testimony performances contain historical events and the experiences of the testifiers. The study drew on a body of work that dwelt on the experiences of migrant communities, and paid particular attention to the representation of a class of migrant who seek asylum. The study suggests that representation and lack of representation of persons seeking asylum, can be better understood by investigating how playwrights make use of testimony in their work. In post-structuralist terms, such a query has been dubbed the 'crisis of representation'. The research aimed at furthering an understanding of how playwright positionalality, (in as much as it is not a consistent and fixed entity), among other variables, potentially informs the use of asylum testimony. The research queried notions of 'speaking for others' - that set up binaries between speaking about the 'other' and speaking for the 'self'. In *The Line* the study examines speaking for the 'other', while speaking for 'self' was the subject of inquiry in *The Crossing*.

The focus on the migrant community was premised on what the study suggests is a new and wide spread trend in contemporary performances that is tied to the migrant experience in South Africa. The study also argued that the body of work can be read in retrospect as an index of the migrant existence, especially in relation to the mass violence that was, and continues to be directed at migrant communities, and other persons perceived as foreign. The case study plays reveal how the concept of indigeneity seems to underlie and set the tone for community relations. The study further suggested that the mass violence that the plays present should be understood as acts of genocide.

The study's reading of Nkala's *The Crossing* (2008) discussed in Chapter Three reveals how Nkala's positioning in relation to the subject matter led to the creation of an autobiographical performance. In this instance the play was anchored on the correlation of Nkala's embodied experiences, his authorial voice as well as the performance self. The embodied experience that Nkala writes and narrates in performance explicitly involves the migrant and asylum voice. Nkala's positioning leads to the emergence of a speaking 'I' narrator. From this positioning, the performance becomes a refusal to be dehumanised by the experiences he claims to have encountered and which he narrates.

This auto-diegetic narrative positioning offers subjectivity to his objectification as an undocumented migrant. Nkala's positionality in writing and performing the encounters inverts the dehumanising gaze and turns the self into a public spectacle that declares and reaffirms its agency. The study suggested that by essentialising the self, Nkala and other similar theatre makers verify their experiences. Through performance the 'endangered body' that had been held up for vilification, is reclaimed from the discourses that sought to marginalise it. Those who sought to dehumanise him are presented as dehumanising themselves in their attempts to objectify and contain him.

The study argued that poststructuralist discourse recognises speaking for and speaking about the other as problematic and having a bearing on the legitimacy that is ascribed to the speakers' claims. The research further extended this problematic to instances where the playwright represents the self as is the case in Nkala's *The Crossing*. The study argued that in speaking for the self, speaking for the other entails representing the self in a particular way, and calls for the playwright to occupy a particular and defined subject position. This self-

ascribed 'I' positionality, according to Young (2008:22) is marked and defined by the choice of characteristics the playwright picks ahead of others. The study suggested that representation occurs in all instances of speaking 'for' be it the 'self' or the 'other'. The study argued that understanding this positionality offers us potential gateways to appreciate how playwrights use testimony in performance. It can be argued that what is heard is largely dependent on who says it, where they say it, their choice of language and style and when they say it.

The study suggests that the performances of such texts draw their effectiveness in part from the positioning of the narrative self who is positioned through the 'I' in the text. In testimonial work, this positionality gives the playwright and theatre maker the political currency to speak to an audience that bestows expectations of truth and authenticity on the testimony. *The Crossing* is an instance where the positionality of subject, playwright, and performer are collapsed and converge in one person. The resulting congruence of historical and performing body and narrative voice potentially informs how the asylum testimony is fashioned and used in performance.

In contrast, Shmukler's *The Line* (2012); discussed in Chapter Four does not draw on a similar congruence. The playwright does however fashion the text as a verbatim rendering of a biographical inquiry. The playwright wrote herself into the story as a researcher, and brought to the fore the facts that most of the victims of the mass violence are either dead, deported, left the country, or have chosen not to speak. The play then became a platform that attempts to better understand the root cause of the 2008 violence.

The playwright fashioned the testimonies into a collage of perspectives. The text brought the often absent voice of the perpetrator, survivor and witness into a dialectic dialogue. The study suggested that the playwright highlighted the verbatim nature of the text to raise the audience's expectation of veracity with historical events and experiences. The study argued that the playwright used the testimonies to emphasise that there was a one to one correspondence with the persons who inform the characters. Testimonial theatre then, draws its currency by representing events and people not as only as plausible, but as historically verifiable.

In Chapter Five, I embodied the playwriting to better appreciate the process of turning asylum testimony into text. Devising *Asylum:Section 22* (2013) became an investigation of the potential influence of the writer's positioning in relation to the subject matter. This was meant to better our understanding of the playwright's often invisible and masked hand in testimonial work.

The study suggests that the broad spectrum of playwright positioning and resultant play forms to which this leads, can be insightful in understanding how the playwrights fashion testimony into performance. The study further suggests that conventional notions of authorship do not readily apply to testimonial playwriting. The notions of the 'real self' and the 'performance self' are areas that need further study in appreciating testimonial work.

Unlike the verbatim stance in *The Line*, *Asylum:Section 22* uses testimonies beyond their verbatim value. The playwright created a theatrical framework that would hold the testimonies together in performance. This framework would also serve as a distancing device for the audiences who engage with the testimonies. *Asylum:Section 22* used a futurist framework that constructs and casts the present conditions that produce the asylum testimonies as a dystopia. The play falls under what Duggan (2013:149) terms proto-verbatim theatre. The 'proto' underlines the fact that although the play makes use of actual testimonies, or 'real words', the play does not make any claims for exact truthfulness in the representations. Duggan (2013) argues that such a conceptualisation is pinned on Heidegger's notion of authenticity. In Heidegger's proposition, authenticity is not moored on factual accuracy but is marked instead by correspondence to the conditions of human existence.

The study as a whole avoided making overt use of the trauma discourse in engaging with violence. This was because I felt that this might lead to a too easy conflation of terms between violence and trauma. As Anna Harpin demonstrates, violence and cruelty in and of themselves should not be understood as being synonymous with trauma (2011:106). While the study recognises that *The Crossing* details attempt to dehumanise the person of the playwright as a migrant, and *The Line* details acts of mass violence that are potentially traumatic, the study suggests that it is inappropriate to conflate these events and

experiences as trauma since this collapses the experience of all persons who witnessed and survived the historical events into a singular interpretative frame.

The study proposes that the body of work under review indicates that in addition to bearing testimony to historical events and memory, testimonial theatre as a form is also proof of the impracticality of ever capturing and textualising embodied experience. This is due to the various limitations, and conventions that make the medium of theatre and its practice possible. Given the fictive and theatre's reliance on convention, testimonial playwrights find various ways to formulate render and represent the asylum experience as closely as possible. According to Mbembe this requires the development of 'an aesthetic of opening and encounter' (2002:640).

Theatre of testimony foregrounds or fetishizes what is enunciated over what is committed to silence. According to Passerini in the light of genocide, keeping silent should not be conflated with complacency, and can be understood as 'buoyant defiance' (2003:242). Passerini argues that the 'art of forgetting' and remaining silent at times can be acts of strength on the part of genocide survivors. This silence becomes an act of testimony in so far as it is connected with 'remembering, and not forgetting' (2003:248). This decision by survivors and asylum seekers to actively choose to remain silent; to negotiate; aspire and pursue happiness in the face of gross violation and the threat of mass violence, this study would submit marks the aftermath of the 2008 violence. The difficulty of representing this silence as well as the need to capture the 'brilliance of the ordinary' rather than the fatalist and melancholy necessitated the futurist framework adopted in *Asylum:Section 22*.

The study proposes that asylum seekers and survivors of mass violence actively refuse to be defined by what Baxter (2013) terms the 'lure of tragedy'. Baxter argues that the lure of tragedy if reinforced through the media mantra 'if it bleeds, it leads' seems to frame and inform how testimony is used in highlighting trauma. Testimonial playwrights in choosing to interview persons or groups of persons perceived as vulnerable and at risk, seem motivated by what Baxter argues is the belief that the 'tragic mode is more compelling, alluring, makes for better drama, wins more awards, sells more newspapers, makes better headlines. It is what passes, nowadays, for the truth'. The study would further suggest that the semantic slide of asylum seeking with illegality seems to imply that migrant presence can only be

legitimised through tragic testimonies. The asylum and refugee determination process seem skewed to treat tragedy as truth. Representations of asylum seekers seem to assume and suggest that only tales of suffering have enough gravitas to warrant theatrical representation.

Lastly the study argued that the scriptocentrism that marks testimonial playwriting might be disorientating for subaltern groups. Drawing on Conquergood's (2002:147) work the study made the case that consent forms as a marker of this scriptocentrism can be perceived as what Conquergood calls 'instruments of control and displacement' (2002:147). Asylum seekers and migrants whose material condition and being is largely governed through 'texts and the bureaucracy of literacy' through passports, Section 22 permits, arrest warrants, and deportation orders may experience and be disoriented by papers which they may read to be inaccessible, and charged with regulatory powers of the state.

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**APPENDIX**

***The Crossing (2008)***



Figure 2. Jonathan Khumbulani Nkala in the 'truck scene' from *The Crossing*.



Figure 3. Jonathan K. Nkala in *The Crossing*



Figure 4. Jonathan Nkala playing the Preacher in a scene from *The Crossing*.



Figure 5. Jonathan K. Nkala crossing the Limpopo in a scene where he uses his clothes to pay the people smugglers.

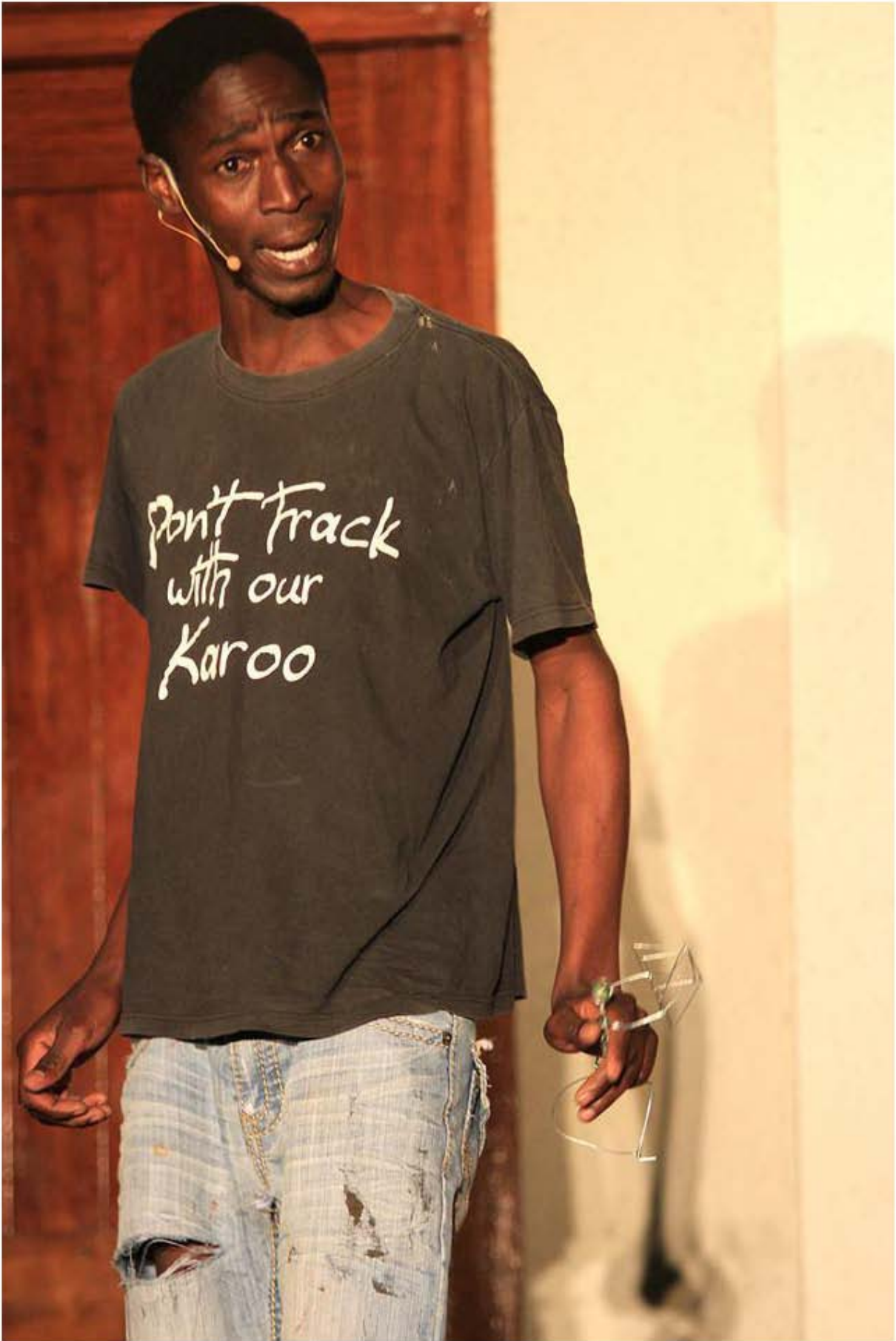


Figure 6. Jonathan K.Nkala in a scene from *The Crossing*.



Figure 7. Jonathan K. Nkala on the road enroute to Cape Town, scene from *The Crossing*.

***The Line* (2012)**



Figure 8. Khutjo Green as a perpetrator, scene from *The Line*.



Figure 9. Gabi Harris as Nadine in a scene from *The Line*.



Figure 10. Gabi Harris as interpreter, Khutjo Green as Eliza from *The Line*.



Figure 11. Khutjo Green as Nomsa in *The Line*.



Figure 12 a and b Set design from *The Line*.





Figure 13. Unidentified perpetrators. Images from Nadine Hutton





Figure 14. Unidentified victim by Nadine Hutton.



Figure 15. Identified displaced baSotho women by Nadine Hutton.



Figure 16. Ernesto Nhamuave.



Figure 17. Displaced migrants looking for sanctuary.



Figure 18. Make shift camps for displaced migrants.



Figure 19. Displaced migrants. Image by Nadine Hutton.

Asylum: Section 22



Figure 20. Audiences going through a 'border checkpoint' in Asylum:Section 22.



*Figure 21. Scene from Asylum:Section 22*



*Figure 22. Performer enacting the projected multimedia footage of migrant arrest and police brutality.*



Figure 23. a and b. Migrant being interrogated by detained criminals in police detention.

