

UTOPIA IN PERFORMANCE: RE-IMAGINING A COLOURED IDENTITY
NARRATIVE

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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Abstract

In this study I explore how coloured identity has been historically produced as a monolithic racial category, focussing on how performance offers critically generative ways of addressing and contesting the politics and meanings of colouredness in post-apartheid South Africa. This study explores the politics of naming in so far as its impact both from an intrinsic and extrinsic perspective in relation to a personal identity narrative. It is the interest of this study is to disrupt normative ideological and cultural constraints and investigate the performance of coloured identity through the use of individual and collective memory construed from the established theatrical canon. The desired outcome is to unearth a series of practical reference points towards the performance of a progressive coloured identity narrative within the current socio-cultural and political landscape. The theoretical body through which this practice is located is framed through a critical definition of 'Utopia', in an attempt to mobilise how the narrative of coloured identity could be explored in the realm of theatrical performance. I propose that it is within a utopian performative space; one that is reflexive of the past and that is non-coercive; that a *re-imagining* of a coloured identity narrative is made accessible.

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INTRODUCTION

Within academia, what is well known is from its inception as a racial category under colonial and apartheid rule through to the post-apartheid present, the question of what 'coloured identity' in South Africa is, has always been fraught. On the one hand, coloured identity (and the diverse people and communities who are collected under this broad umbrella) has been historically framed through racist colonial and apartheid tropes that erased the complexity and heterogeneity of coloured communities, and which continue to exert their power over how coloured people are seen. On the other hand, this collective identity has also provided, a historically marginalised community, the means to self-identify and organise politically in response to this epistemic violence. In both cases, the meaning of 'colouredness' is mobilised to particular strategic ends, and is hotly debated: who is coloured, how are they/we identified, and what is at stake in naming a person or people as such?

According to esteemed academic, author and theatre-maker, Professor Mark Fleishman, practice-as-research (PaR) in theatre and performance "... concerns research that is carried out through or by means of performance, using methodologies and specific methods familiar to performance practitioners..." (2012: 28). This mode of research allows for a nuanced approach to pursue the investigation of 'performance' and engage with the above questions by centring performance as both a critical conceptual lens and the practical means through which to contest and reimagine the politics and meanings of coloured identity during and after apartheid. In both my practical work and in this thesis, I have used performance to complicate the view of 'coloured identity' constructions and sought to discover atypical modes of representation through a *re-imagining* of the mainstream understanding concerning the identity. I utilise a permutation of what is known as action research and qualitative research (Kumar, 2005 cited in Gumede, 2015) in order to reflect on both everyday performances of coloured identity, as well as my own practice in performance-making that engages with these issues.

Here, I begin by interrogating the notion of 'coloured identity' and how this concept has been distorted and has altered meaning through time within the South African academic realm together with popular social tropes. I will

strive to capture the multi-dimensional constructions of what is socially understood as the matrix of coloured identity as well as the powerful impact these symbols or tropes hold on the framing and understanding, especially when considered through postcolonial¹ discourse. I strive to find diverse ways of conceptualising, recognising, speaking about and representing a coloured identity narrative rather than a finite positioning.

Once I have interrogated the academic landscape of coloured positionality, I will then investigate the performance of coloured identity through the use of individual and collective memory, realised through the theatrical form. The desired outcome of this interrogation is to posit additional performative reference points for thinking about the coloured identity narrative within our current socio-cultural and political landscape. It will be the intention of my theatrical exploration to find alternative and more productive modes of (re)presenting a more complex coloured identity. To do this, I intend to use the utopian principal of 'potentiality', by experimenting with practical and applicable methods to shift the normative designs of 'coloured' that contend with the continuously shifting matrix of such an identity. I will propose an ethnographic mode of reflection and craft a final production with the intention of proposing a utopic *re-imagining* of the coloured identity narrative, through a layering of both personal and collective memories from those who partake, in different capacities, within a coloured identity narrative.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Politics of Naming: 'Coloured'

At the heart of my thesis is the process of making physically manifest the conceptualisation around more productive notions of coloured identity. But

¹ I rely here on the following definition of 'postcolonialism': "... the term *postcolonialism* refers to phenomena that are much more extensive than the particular time period after independence or imperial occupation. Postcolonialism, therefore, is not substantially a historical date, as in 'post-colonialism' (after colonialism), but rather it represents formations of meanings and practices. Postcolonialism refers to the multiple forms and locations of discourse, performance, politics, value, and the 'everyday' – both past and present – that emanate from the history of colonialism" (Appiah, 1992; Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1989; Loomba, 1998; McClintock, 1994; Young, 2001 cited in Madison, 2012: 55).

before I am able to form any type of experimental frame towards *revised* performative notions of coloured identity, the politics that surround naming and being named, especially racially, is implicated and thus requires examination to begin. The term 'coloured' is used here in a particularly South African context, commonly used to describe a designated group of 'brown' people or those of mixed racial ancestry (Adhikari, 2009). Within the academic milieu, the name or term 'coloured' has been thoroughly interrogated and I will draw on much of that work to preface my particular interest. Scholar and author, Mohamed Adhikari, posits that while racialised notions defined "'colouredness' in the popular mind, it was the marginality of coloured communities that was central to the manner in which the identity manifested itself socially and politically across the subcontinent" (2009: viii). To use racial terms, which ascribe to a 'race science', to define people and their identity, is reminiscent of an out-dated yet weighted apartheid lexicon. While my interrogation seems racially led, my intension is to critique the construction. I lean towards the stance of Zimitri Erasmus, a sociologist and the editor of the seminal book: *Coloured by History, Shaped by Place: New Perspectives on Coloured Identities in Cape Town* (2001); where in her editor's note, she asserts that:

There is no such thing as the Black 'race'. Blackness, whiteness and colouredness exist, but they are cultural, historical and political identities. To talk about 'race mixture', 'miscegenation', 'inter-racial' sex and 'mixed descent' is to use terms and habits of thought inherited from the very 'race science' that was used to justify oppression, brutality and the marginalization of 'bastard peoples'. To remind us of their ignoble origins, these terms have been used in quotation marks throughout. (Erasmus, 2001: 13)

While I do not use quotation marks for the term coloured, nor for any other racial signifiers throughout this essay, unless with intended irony, I do believe that racial categorisation is a major part of the trauma we hold with us as a nation. It is also an idiosyncratic over-hang from apartheid and bears out its legacy in the manner of reference that is so strikingly present in the imaginary of South Africa. This is to say that the definite words of race still hold such potent and striking symbolic power that their mention calls up immediate and particular

meaning. The fact that such language is still so embedded in our vocabulary is testament to how much racial dismantling still needs to be pursued. Over the course of my research, it has appealed to me to avoid racialised language altogether, but the absence of such semantics left me unable to speak about, and thus participate within the subject matter at hand. I now do so, albeit critically, in an attempt to *engage* the language that has been in common use rather than to completely disavow it. I use this way of speaking as a way in, due to its overwhelmingly robust social position and because it is the historical position against which current perceptions of coloured identity are formed. One must confront the dark shadow in proposing a new mode of being.

Adhering to the suggestion made by French scholar, Denis-Constant Martin (2013 cited in Jephta, 2015: 170), the notion of ‘identity configurations’ or ‘identity narratives’ presents the opportunity for a more nuanced conversation around the composite of identity, rather than the simplistic label. I thus refer to a ‘coloured identity narrative’, to both accommodate for the flux in these identity positions as well as to place identity construction on a continuum which further undermines the impulse of fixed limited notions attached to its meaning. In this paper, ‘identity’ as a notion it is not singular, it is malleable and made up of fluctuating factors that include, but are not limited to, one’s self, their community, their upbringing and their society at varying degrees (Richards, 2017), which in the addition of ‘narrative’ I hope to encompass. However, identity constructions are not always in one’s control and most times it is these extrinsic factors that influence the broader scheme of identity politics that have a direct effect on the individual. In accordance with theatre maker Khayelihle Dominique Gumede, “[i]t is through our social identity that we ‘understand’ ourselves as a society, and that determines how we will act politically and socio-economically. If we are to induce a meaningful transformation in South Africa, we need to grapple with and unpack our social identity, or lack thereof, as a nation” (2015: 80). It could thus be argued that there are three layers of identity-making, namely, how one perceives themselves, how one is perceived by others and how society might perceive a set of individuals. I draw this illustration because at an interpersonal level there are ‘inner’ nuances in groupings such as families and communities that are more complex than the external understanding of that particular grouping. It is

where these markers diverge, overlap, contrast, compliment and assimilate that I locate my examination of the coloured identity narrative through theatre and performance.

Politics surrounding the word 'coloured' in its denotative and connotative formulations has come under much scrutiny from both literary writers and academic scholars. My interest lies in the possible implications or effects such a controversial term/name may have, if naming one's self is a desired aspect of one's identity narrative. Through my praxis, I seek not to locate myself within the normative ideological boundaries or cultural parameters but rather I am interested in what happens when such codes are disrupted and forced to open up to allow the individual to insert themselves freely. This I feel is a more interesting position because it inverts power constructions by allowing individuals and communities to inform broader systems. The question of who has agency within the matrix of power to craft common notions of identity must also be probed. It is unproductive to attempt to give absolute answers to the questions of what identifying as coloured might mean, especially in a post-apartheid, decolonialised, South African setting, as the conclusive approach to reading identity, I suggest, is a fundamental part of the problem. In order to ascertain its complexity, I provide a historical and political contextualisation which is imperative in relation to a postcolonial reference.

Historical and Political Contextualisation of Coloured Identity in South Africa

In order to frame this contextualisation, I use a breakdown from Mohamed Adhikari's chapter titled: 'History from the Margins: Changing Perceptions of Its Past within the Coloured Community' (2005). According to Adhikari (2005), there have been three general historiographical paradigm shifts² within common social perceptions and coloured intellectuals, regarding the coloured identity narrative, during the period of white supremacy. The politics of naming has influenced how coloured people are seen in society as well as within the

² Later in his chapter, Mohamed Adhikari breaks down the three categories and expands on his explanations. For further reading see chapter 2 of Mohamed Adhikari's 'Not White Enough, Not Black Enough' 2005.

communal realm, but more importantly, this has influenced how coloured people see themselves.

Adhikari names the first historiographical paradigm “The Essentialist” school, which he describes as those who think of coloured identity as a direct result of “miscegenation going back to the earliest days of European settlement at the Cape” (2005: 34). In other words, an almost obvious hybridity between native and coloniser. The belief here is based on biological racial essentialist thinking. “For essentialists, there is usually no need to explain the nature or existence of Coloured identity because it is part of an assumed reality that sees South African society as consisting of distinct races, of which the Coloured people is one” (Adhikari, 2005: 34).

An example of a writer/thinker that slants towards this direction would be Richard van der Ross. His book *In Our Own Skin: A Political History of the Coloured People* (2015), offers a genealogical examination of ‘coloured’ people by stating, “the tendency to call the Coloured people San; Khoi or Khoisan [...] is wrong” (2015: 11). Van der Ross offers what he calls a political-historical breakdown and then goes on to assert about coloured people, that “we are a distinct *anthropological* [...] group” (2015: 22. my emphasis). Throughout his writings, Van der Ross continually refers to coloured people as being a group that exists in their own right, purporting that “coloured people have come into being as a reasonably identifiable entity ...” (2015: 6). In my reading of Van der Ross, what he fails to make clear in his writing when referring to ‘coloured people’ is the difference between political categorisation and phenotypical categorisation. It is therefore easy to read him as agreeing with racial-based sciences, even though the title of his book states “A Political History...”. Dr Ruben Richards, facilitator, academic and author of *Bastaards or Humans: The Unspoken Heritage of the Coloured People* (2017) explains that:

The Dutch word – Bastaard – was used to describe such ‘mixed’ offspring during the 17th and 18th centuries. It is this community of Bastaards (and their indigenous ancestors) who, unfortunately, would become one of the most enslaved, despised, rejected and politically abused communities in the history of South Africa. (2017: 6)

In the writings of Richards, the complication of the 'coloured' grouping is made apparent early on and he interrogates the 'marginality' that he writes about. Richards implicates the role the missionaries played from the colonial era, where racial theory played into the idea of 'enlightenment'. He states:

Colonial 'racial' theory assumed that Christian meant white (and vice versa). This in turn meant that white is the same as European which meant civilized, which in turn was equivalent to being human. The rest (i.e. non-whites) were savages and beasts. (Richards, 2017: 50)

Erasmus purports that to suppose that 'coloured' is only but a mix of two parts, assumes the reductionist belief that "blackness and whiteness are themselves given, coherent and homogeneous identities" (2001:15). Joseph Roach, Performance Studies scholar and author, writes in rebuttal to essentialist thinking through his reflections of the politics of memory. He states, "... the relentless search for the purity of origins is a voyage not of discovery but of erasure" (Roach, 1996: 6). In simple terms, Roach points to the contradiction of searching for or claiming an 'essential' identity position within the genealogical frame, in this case of coloured identity, since there is no 'purity' to be had. The notion of memory and its volatile relationship with erasure will be further illustrated later on in the paper.

Adhikari then goes on to name the second school of thought "The Instrumentalists" which he describes as those who "regarded Coloured identity as an artificial concept imposed by the white supremacist state and ruling groups on a weak and vulnerable sector of the population" (2005: 34). This group of 'liberal' thinkers view coloured identity as solely a violent construction, totalising coloured identity as derived from a position of distress with little progressive value placed on reiteration, even under the auspice of critique. If the instrumentalist thinking is to be completely believed, it works to doom all of coloured identity as an extrinsic imposition that successfully removed agency from individuals, thereby refuting the notion that any forms of resistance worked to penetrate white supremacy.

I believe that South Africans do come from a political history of strict socio-cultural definitions that were imposed by the previous regime for the

purpose of achieving segregation and maintaining power. These stringent, and albeit arbitrary, codes of definition were ferociously levied through law, internalised and used by individuals, as well as collectives, to craft a social identity, wrongly or rightly, surpassing their initial intended purpose. Meaning that colouredness became not *only* a composition of white supremacy, but that through this mode, the definitive language of the oppressive forces has become assimilated, embedded and through various methods, undermined in the process of identity construction.

Thiven Reddy, Political Studies academic, eloquently illustrated this through his critique of what he calls the “discourses of classification” (2001: 65). Reddy (2001) asserts that these ‘discourses of classification’ are most prevalent in South Africa’s history and have endured their way into how the state and communities are organised even today. The classification laws of South Africa were created within finite barriers and anyone that did not fit into narrow cataloguing was left to occupy a liminal space of identity/belonging, interpreted as unrooted, made to feel un-pure or dispossessed. This has remained a complex web particularly for those previously branded as ‘Coloured’ under the Population Registration Act of 1950.³ Martin illustrates this belief by purporting that the crisis of ‘coloured culture’ stems from the fact “that it is partly representing the designs of a racist state and partly being the product of a self-invented singularity...” (1998: 524). The apartheid regime had enforced the title of ‘Coloured’ onto a group of people that posed as racial categorisation when, according to Martin, a “[...] designated group invented specific life-styles which gave form, content and substance to otherwise scattered pockets of people” (1998: 524).

According to Adhikari, “the instrumentalist approach was grounded in the growing rejection of Coloured identity that gained impetus from the latter half of the 1970s onward” (2005: 35). Adhikari, in a different chapter titled ‘The Emperor’s New Clothes: Coloured Rejectionism during the Latter Phases of the

³ According to Richards, “The Population Registration Act (Act No 30 of 1950), a South African law, was the cornerstone of Apartheid South Africa’s racial classification system and overall system of governance. It aimed at rigid classification based on appearance, general acceptance and repute. It came into force on 7 July 1950 and was repealed on 29 June 1991 – forty-one years.” For further reading on an overview of the classification laws, refer to chapter 10 “After Mandela: The Ongoing Debate” in *Bastaards or Humans: The Unspoken Heritage of Coloured People*, 2017.

Apartheid Era' (2005), speaks about "a new consciousness of defiance and black solidarity [that formed] within particular sectors of the Coloured population. In the Coloured community, Black Consciousness ideology, with its stress on black unity and self-determination, appealed especially to the better educated, urbanized groups [...]" (2005: 131). 'Coloured rejectionism' was a significant step in altering the conversation of the coloured identity narrative. It demonstrates the power of J L Austin's (1962) "performative utterance" (discussed later on in the paper) as well as depicts language as a protest in the form of social liberation against white supremacy. This adjustment in language and naming was illustrative of Fanon's, and then Steve Biko's, philosophy of liberation. According to Gibson:

Perhaps the most important recreation of Fanon's philosophy of liberation on the African continent was by Steve Biko, whose emphasis on the liberation of the 'mind' of the oppressed became essential to the new stage of revolt against apartheid in the 1970s. For Biko, Black Consciousness constituted a movement away from colonized objectification towards Black subjectivity (mind). Rather than simply a force against apartheid, this new space for subjectivity contrasted political spaces that refused any compromise with, or reform of, the *status quo*. (2011: 1-2)

Highly influenced by this ideology at this time, coloured people began to identify with the notion of being called 'black', which firstly, unhinged the stability of the homogenous category of the then 'coloured'; and secondly, made more political the notion of naming, and found an agency within self-identifying with ideology, rather than 'distinctive' race.

The third assemblage identified by Adhikari is labelled "the Social-Constructionists" (2005: 35):

The main concerns of the social constructionist approach have [...] been to demonstrate the complexity of Coloured identity and, most important, to stress the agency of Coloured people in the making of their own identity. Emphasis has also been placed on the ways in which ambiguities in Coloureds' identity and their marginality influenced their social experience and political consciousness. (Adhikari, 2005: 36)

This group, according to Adhikari (2005), reflects on the shortcomings of both the essentialist and the instrumentalist viewpoints for their propensity to assert colouredness as static. Adhikari explains that:

This approach also seeks to demonstrate that far from being the anonymous, inert entities of the essentialist school or the righteous resisters of instrumentalist histories, Coloured people exhibited a much more complex reaction to white supremacy that encompassed resistance as well as collaboration, protest as well as accommodation. By its very nature, social identity is largely and in the first instance the product of its bearers [...] (2005: 36).

I believe that this school of thought has been most prevalent with writers into the early days of democracy and persisted into the discourse around the coloured identity narrative today. It must be noted that I draw on this view as a critical frame for my own thinking around the coloured identity narrative and use the theory of 'utopia' (discussed later on in the paper) to inform the method I have embarked on in my theatrical exploration.

'Speaking' Identity within a Post-Apartheid South Africa

After 1994, it seemed as though there was an opportunity for people to re-evaluate their identity constructions, as well as, renegotiate the implications of 'identity' itself (Ruiters, 2013). Writers, both academic and creative, worked to mark this shift of identity demarcation into what the 'Social-Constructionist' view problematises as the "... fluidities in processes of Coloured self-identification or ambiguities in the expression of the identity (Adhikari, 2005: 35). Martin accurately accounts that "...the dilemma of the new South Africa in general [was/is] how to define and recognize communities without perpetuating apartheid categories, attitudes and behaviours" (1998: 353). At the dawn of democracy, the layers of identity compositions were up for (re)negotiation as the state worked to recreate its national identity while individuals and communities tackled their own constructions against the enforced labels of the previous regime (Ruiters, 2013). Nahla Valji, senior researcher at the Centre

for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, rightly points out that “[r]acial prejudice and violence did not suddenly disappear in 1994, but instead continue to play out throughout this period of political transformation, standing as an obstacle to substantive equality and inclusive citizenship” (2004: 1). There was an attempt made by the newly democratic state to unite its citizens under the omen of ‘being South African’ in an attempt to undo the separation tactics enforced by apartheid. This was unfortunately done while negating the racial prejudice and violence that Valji speaks of.

The ideology at play as a newly democratic country, was that of a ‘Rainbow Nation’ nationalism. According to Valji:

Nation-building is premised upon a sense of belonging to a group which shares a common unifying characteristic. In most cases this requires at a minimum a shared history. In the case of South Africa, the absence of a shared history necessitated the use of other grounds for the construction of a common identity (2004: 3)

I would add to this, a shared history of identities of equal status. While ‘Rainbow Nation’ nationalism became a communal identity, it was still one of unequal status, which shackled the oppressor and the oppressed to a pattern of rehearsed behaviours, in the manner which Fanon describes it in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). While the intention of the ‘Rainbow Nation’ narrative was unity and equality, its ‘We Are One’⁴ declarations did not, firstly, address the power imbalances in oppressive constructions through ideology on individuals and communities and secondly; worked to render identity constructions as essential, negating its complexity, even in its assertion of ‘diversity’ (Erasmus, 2001). Erasmus identifies the problem with the broad ‘unity in diversity’ concepts claiming that it interprets all identities as “merely different” negating the fundamental power relations that each identity narrative was/is constructed within (2001: 20). She asserts that, “rainbow nationalist discourse does not provide a vocabulary with which to renegotiate and process the racial terrain of South African culture and politics in the interests of transformation. By insisting,

⁴ This was a popular slogan that appeared in the media during the 1990s. It was the tag line for SABC 1 at the time.

simplistically, that we should be blind to 'race', it makes it more difficult to name and recognise the importance of articulating and working through antagonisms and conflict" (Erasmus, 2001: 20). To this day, racial naming and thus hierarchy is still embedded in political ideology and more so in economic freedom; and seems etched into the definitive framework of forming identities.

Language then becomes significant here as a means of representation. Stuart Hall explains that representation is vital in the process of meaning-making, especially within a socio-cultural context because "[r]epresentation connects meaning and language to culture" (1997: 15). Literary and cultural critic, Homi K Bhabha pins down this significance relating to my argument of a coloured identity narrative when he states, "[w]e are no longer confronted with an ontological problem of being but with the *discursive strategy* of the moment of interrogation ..." (Bhabha, 1994: 49-50. my emphasis). Language is often the first step in the value chain of cultural production, thus opening up the hegemonic frame of reference which would require an altered way of speaking about a subject matter. Language is not simply a passive symbol of 'representation' but also an act of cultural production and reproduction. J L Austin's conception of a 'performative utterance' or a 'speech-act' works to illustrate speech as (cultural) action. Performance Studies professor D. Soyini Madison explains:

... a *speech-act* is the action that is performed when a word is uttered. For Austin, a performative utterance is not simply a statement that is true or false. To understand language as merely statements that describe, refer, or indicate based on accuracy and truth is much too narrow. Austin describes this view of language as mere statement as *constative* and argues that language has a function beyond the constative. He states that language does more than describe; it also *does something* that makes a material, physical, and situational difference. (2012: 177-178. emphasis in original)

Thus, words also 'do', they do not only describe. This understanding is evident in Judith Butler's notion of 'Performativity' explained by Gill Jagger:

Butler wants to show that identity categories are 'fictional' products of these 'regimes of power/knowledge' or 'power/discourse' (Butler 1990a: xi) rather

than natural effects of the body. They are fictional in the sense that they do not pre-exist the regimes of power/knowledge but are performative products of them. They are performative in the sense that the categories themselves produce the identity they are deemed to be simply representing. (2008: 17)

It may not yet be achievable to eradicate the archaic nature of the racial definitive language around coloured identity immediately, but the continuing power relations embedded within definitive language, as we have been programmed to speak in the past, can no longer be denied; meaning that the attempted 'Rainbow Nation' nationalism has come short of displacing the cultural power of the language of the previous oppressor. It is therefore incumbent on us to continue to devise proactive and destabilising discourses to the point where these discourses are not a subalternate practice but the mainstream experience. 'Discourse' in this instance being understood in the manner which Michel Foucault articulates it:

By 'discourse', Foucault meant 'a group of statements which provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment. ... Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language. But ... since all social practices entail *meaning*, and meanings shape and influence what we do – our conduct – all practices have a discursive aspect' (Hall, 1992 cited in Hall, 1997: 44. emphasis in original)

Foucault maintains that discourse produces knowledge about the world which is inextricably linked to power (Foucault, 1982) where the idea of 'truth' is implicated in the lived experience (Hall, 1997). This understanding, related to the coloured identity narrative, is significant because the fact that the language within the popular imaginary has, for the most part, stayed the same, implies that the power dynamic has, for the most part, also remained in place. So, while there might be a well-established critique of the most delinquent representations of coloured identity within the academy through complicating the homogenous and restricted frame known as 'coloured identity', there has been little proposition of what is to replace these confined notions. One might

argue that this is one of the contributing factors as to why these problematic tropes are then continuously returned to, both from within various coloured communities as well as a means of reading the narrative of coloured identity from outside this community. Quite simply, popular culture has limited reference points as to what could replace these entrenched tropes and stereotypes.

Within the context of the 'speech act' and the power dynamics afforded to critical discourse, one can then marry the work of destabilising the *status quo* with various propositions of what to then fill the vacuum with. I propose the notion of 'utopia' as a frame through which to experiment with the reimagining of the popular coloured identity narrative, in this case, through theatrical performance. This becomes an appropriate mode of enquiry because the theatre is a world of semiotics and in this dense world of representation, theatrical performance not only represents coloured identity as currently understood but also has the ability to actively manufacture different cultural positions. In order to achieve this, I turn to the ideology of the 'Utopian Performance' to attempt to produce alternative cultural gestures hypothesised through the theatre.

On Utopia

In her book *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (2005), Jill Dolan describes 'Utopia in Performance' as a space that encourages people to come together and share moving experiences and participate in meaning-making that sparks imagination. This notion of 'Utopia' can be used as a base from which to move the conversation and representation of the coloured identity narrative forward as it presents an opportunity to reinvent and offer diverse perspectives without being prescriptive.

Any fixed, static image or structure would be much too finite and exclusionary for the soaring sense of hope, possibility, and desire that imbues utopian performatives. [...] Utopian performatives spring from a complex alchemy of form and content, context and location, which take shape in moments of utopia as doings, as process, as never finished gestures toward a potentially better future. (Dolan, 2005: 7-8)

I intend to use the ideology of utopian performance, not in an attempt to propose a pseudo sense of positivity and paradise upon the interrogation of the coloured identity narrative, but rather as a mode of enquiry through performance that opens up the conversation and creates a space for the individual to insert themselves into the broader narrative. Highly influenced by the writings of the philosopher Ernst Bloch, José Esteban Muñoz conceptualises 'utopia' through queer theory and more importantly in this case, from a minoritarian perspective. Muñoz construes utopia "as both a critical affect and a methodology" (2009: 4) that requires a reference to history in order to contemplate a way forward. This impulse for the need to look back in order to imagine a different future has influenced my interpretation of my own practice drastically. This notion is what I have positioned and refer to as *re-imagining* within the context of the coloured identity narrative, which will be interrogated through a critical discussion of my practice. I begin by unpacking the impulse that necessitates a *re-imagining* and then, utilising the concept of 'utopia', to propose a productive conceptualisation of the coloured identity narrative.

ANALYSIS:

BEYOND THE LIMITATIONS OF THE POPULAR NARRATIVE

With an understanding of the 'utopian space', how then is it possible to further the conversation about the coloured identity narrative without engaging a language that works to reinforce the common and well-established tropes in the current and historical lexicon? Bearing in mind that complete eradication of the name also disavows "newly invented associations with this classification, stripping a sense of self from the people who have claimed the description and absorbed it as part of a distinctive community" (Jephta, 2015: 168-169). The task would be to move "beyond the limitations [of naming] and [...] contest and reimagine these frames", (Reddy, 2001 cited in Jephta, 2015: 170) by creating a space where new meaning-making can be negotiated by the 'speaker', the cultural agent, the individual(s) self-identifying in a productive and progressive manner. Therefore, if one is to see identity as a performance of a series of enacted values, ideas and principles then the academic theatre proposition of a complex coloured identity narrative needs to be applied through language

and action, thereby re-framing the 'coloured' body in performance. For if we are to believe that identity lives in its performed qualities then therein lay the tools of complicating its common conceptions, moving beyond the limitations of the established or fixed socio-cultural position.

As someone who identifies as 'coloured', I have felt the restraints as well as the mutability of the term/construct/name/identity most immediately. Gino Fransman, in his essay *Negotiating Coloured Identity Through Encounters with Performance* (2005), writes about how calling oneself 'Coloured' demands qualification as there are "contradictions implicit in claiming a Coloured identity [...] mired in questions of, amongst others, belonging, status, and power." (2005:18).

The first part of my practice was to interrogate identity constructions from the personal perspective in an attempt to complicate stereotypical notions of colouredness. What can therefore be injected into the narrative is a phenomenological or lived experience that poses contradictions within the popular narrative. The notion of memory as social and cultural narrative informed the question – what would happen if an individual used household objects as symbolic triggers of memories about their childhood (history)? Would this reveal who they are, or at least work to complicate cultural markers within the narrative of identity? By entering into this frame, one might work to disrupt the stereotypical representations associated with a series of cultural flashpoints well-established in popular discourses of coloured identity. Following is a description of a Minor Project,⁵ created with the above questions in mind, in which I will analyse two sections of the production presentation – the first one to illustrate the embeddedness of tropes within the coloured identity narrative and the second to physically explore the politics of one's name, in all its reiterations.

From the Inside/Out

I have always felt a disconnect from the stereotypes that were presented regarding a coloured identity narrative and therefore aimed to represent the

⁵ This was the first practical presentation in the form of a public performance event. A theoretical hunch was to be tested.

fluidity of an individual experience of 'being coloured'. I sought to create a minor project that interrogated a personal identity narrative built from an internal account, which I would then formulate an external experience from. The piece, titled: *From the Inside Out* (2017), was a devised process which I co-created with a single female performer who self-identifies as coloured. As a director/theatre-maker, my intention was to take the performer through a rehearsal process where the content of the piece would come directly from her experience of 'being coloured' by using household objects to evoke memories not only related to the object but also formative relationships for the individual. My objective was to find a theatrical manner to stage various parts of her identity narrative.

At the time of creating this performance, I was highly influenced by semiotic perspectives, such as Roland Barthes' signifying practices. This was the reason for utilising household objects that were treated as signifiers that, according to Barthes' theory (1972 cited in Hall, 1997), operate within a wider cultural context. This understanding was the foundation of my interrogation of an individualised connection to specific objects and the associated meaning that could be derived from these 'cultural' artefacts. This became the basis of the material while generating content. The rehearsal process involved many discussions about family history, childhood memories, freewriting sessions and improvisational tasks with the various objects brought to life through everyday situations. As a preview into my learning, I will share a critique of two of the monologues that appeared in the piece.

A character that was developed through a retelling of the performer's own family story from a neighbour's perspective, emerged through a popular coloured trope of the 'Auntie Character'.⁶ This character reflected on her present life by comparing herself to her neighbours. Her emphasis was on how they fought with each other behind closed doors while 'keeping themselves

⁶ This is a popular character that emerge in theatre plays that explore or portray a version of what could be 'Coloured' people, such as Nadia Davids' *At Her Feet* (2002) in the character of "Auntie Kariema" and Mark Lottering's *From the Cape Flats with Love* (2001) in the character of "Auntie Merle", who then received her own show: *Auntie Merle: The Musical* (2017). Characteristics of this trope could be gossiping; smoking and is often depicted completing domestic duties such as cooking or needle work. This character is always highly opinionated.

white'⁷ in the streets. Her sentences were short and her thoughts unfinished as though in a reflective space; a hard life seeped from her in both the phrasing used as well as in the performance mode. She spoke candidly about abuse, even normalising it. The meaning derived from this was the sense that the character did not have the luxury of emotional space or reverence to the abuse out of the need for sheer survival. In describing a memory she had about the children from the community walking home from school, she acts as a vessel through which the past is brought into the present through the retelling. By the performer telling the audience about her own familial structure, the performer is sharing who she is albeit not overtly. By utilising the "Auntie Character", the judgement of her familial structure is expressed through the popular trope thereby presenting a dialectic narrative to the audience who potentially recognise that she is sharing a part of herself she would rather not remember. The 'Auntie Character' gives the biographical facts while the performer is left to rationalise the experience. Memory as a cultural tool is thus evoked on multiple plains. The following is an extract of the monologue:

*...I just can't take the fighting man, it's a bladdy shame – Dishes this way that way. Ag man, shame –
but outside they want to bladdy think they white!
The girlie is studying hey and the boyjie –
I remember like it was yesterday when
When they used to walk to school in the mornings pass here,
time flies hay, shame...*

The character's constant repetition of the word 'shame' makes apparent the 'invisible' or unnamed quality, subconsciously implied in everything she says. Zoë Wicomb, in her essay *Shame and Identity: The Case of the coloured in South Africa* (1998), writes about the inherent shame experienced by people that form part of the heterogeneous group of 'coloured' in many ways, but especially, in and through language. Wicomb asserts that "it is no coincidence that the very word 'shame' has acquired a peculiar semantic attenuation into

⁷ To 'keep yourself white' is a colloquial expression used to describe someone who thinks that they are better than those around them, as white people denotes superiority.

an utterance of tenderness, sympathy, or empathy...” (1998: 100). Richards brings to attention how easy it is to slip into a “minefield of shame, self-hatred and prejudice” (2017: 56) when dealing with the subject matter and especially the lived experience of coloured people.

Another monologue that I would like to focus on appeared in the last segment of the production. The performer physically threaded herself through an intricate web of red string and stretched out pantyhose, while reciting a monologue about the functions of her actual name and what it means to her to be named. The aesthetic came from the fact that pantyhose was one of the household objects that came alive in an improvisation about ‘preserving’ women’s hair within the coloured community; while the red string became a signifier of bloodlines, i.e. the complex heritage marked by the heterogeneous group, and more significantly, the performer’s mixed heritage of a Latino (Nicaragua) mother and Coloured father. The following is an extract:

*... used it to mark your possessions; your space
It stands in place of you, your signia, symbolizes your ownership
The gift given to you at birth; that you’ve worked to internalize and make your
own; that you give to strangers you meet for the first time; that will remain in
memory
and especially
after you are gone...*

I felt it imperative to have the performer proclaim and thus reclaim her actual name, unapologetically stating her individuality within the mesh of histories and expectations aspersed to her cultural position. This monologue demonstrated my frustration of generalised or narrow naming practices and placed the individual articulation at the forefront of the consideration.

Even though the overall aim of the process was to probe identity constructions from an individual/internal perspective, what emerged from audience feedback was the reading of a self-indulgence rather than the declaration of self-identification in the quagmire of inferred popular cultural meaning. Upon examination, the reason for this, I have come to understand, is that by exclusively using Barthes’ ideas of representation (Hall, 1997), I was

only able to extrapolate information given orally and thus could only decode meaning through basic language⁸ without appropriate context. From a Foucauldian standpoint, language lacked a framed discourse. To simply name is to call upon the known and, to adhere to the rules of language is to partake in the imbalance of power structures that language is steeped in. What I needed to do was use the body as text and a site of extrapolation that allows for a nuanced physical dialogue that “decode and deconstruct the complex narratives of the transient nature of memory and history” (Loots, 2010: 114). Actress, teacher, academic and director Jennie Reznek, in her chapter titled *Magnet Theatre and the Moving Body* (2016), unpacks the relevance and, more importantly, the productivity of seeking content from the moving body. Individual chronicle, especially when obtained from the body, produces “layer upon layer” of texts⁹ that is at no time “neutral” (Loots, 2010: 114). Reznek (2016) argues that placing the body in the position of Subject counters the objectification of a body, especially relevant to the South African context. Reznek states that “... to restore the person’s body to its subject position; [...] the individual body is reconfigured as the primary source of knowledge, identity and creative action in the world” (2016: 153). With this awareness, I created another production that focussed on sourcing material from the body, as well as from a body of work, which I thought of as an ‘established archive’ that contributes to the canon of what a coloured identity narrative looks like ‘on’ a character.

DESTABILISING THE ARCHIVE

My intention was to reimagine a coloured identity narrative, no longer only from the personal perspective, as each individual belongs to a broader spectrum of politics. These macro viewpoints influence narratives pertaining to the coloured identity insofar as memory is concerned. Memories that the body holds, both consciously and unconsciously, acts as a vessel through which history can be brought into the present that may provide an opportunity for (re)negotiation, or

⁸ Contrary to my understanding at the time, Hall broadens Barthes definition of ‘language’. He offers that ‘language’ includes ‘the writing and spoken system’ as well as ‘visual images whether produced by hand, mechanical, electronic, digital or some other means’ are all part of ‘language’. Refer to Hall’s chapter: ‘The Work of Representation’ (1997) for further explanation.

⁹ I use ‘text’ here in the broader sense of the word to include more than just written pages.

for the purposes of this paper, a *re-imagining*. The idea of an established archive of theatrical work translated, for me, into collective memory represented through a theatre canon, which I sought to interrogate through performance. In *Cities of The Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996), Joseph Roach writes about a collective memory that undergirds how history is remembered through performance. Performance brings to light that culture as a fixed notion is fictional and only persists because it is convenient to think so (Roach, 1996). His writing influences how I interpret many of the decisions made in creating a Medium Project.¹⁰ The following is an unpacking of the performance, with a particular focus on my discovery of the difference between ‘re-imagining’ and ‘reproducing’.

Her(I)Story: Evoking Archive

“...[M]emory is a process that depends crucially on forgetting.” (Roach, 1996: 2)

My Medium Project was titled: *Her(I)Story: Evoking Archive* and was performed at UCT in 2017. The piece consisted of three female performers who would all be recognised as ‘coloured’ but who all come from diverse backgrounds and self-identify differently; who together, personify the heterogeneous nature of the ‘coloured’ label. *Her(I)Story: Evoking Archive* (2017) featured monologues from prevalent theatre plays that highlights the plight and subjectivity of coloured female characters, as a framing device. I intended the monologues to serve as a historical preface to the conversation around a female coloured identity narrative and the contemporary representation thereof. This intention is analogous to Roach’s “Genealogies of Performance”¹¹ which he explains attends not only to the interaction of one body with another producing “reciprocal reflections”, but also “to ‘counter-memories,’ or the disparities between history as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences.” (Roach, 1996: 26). It is with

¹⁰ This was the second practical presentation in the form of a public performance event. An opportunity for the theoretical findings to be advanced.

¹¹ Joseph Roach discusses what he means by ‘Genealogies of Performance’ in depth. I have used a simplistic description for the purposes of this essay. For further reading, refer to the section titled ‘Genealogies of Performance’ on page 25 of *Cities of The Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. (Full reference found in the reference page at the end of this essay.)

this understanding that I had conceived the notion of an 'archive' at the time of conceptualising the production. Utilising an archive to begin devising against was important for me because it exemplified a representation of a coloured identity narrative in two spheres: one was the world of the play and the other was the context in which the play itself was made. Roach (1996: 11) refers to Balme when he offers that "one important strategy of performance research today is to juxtapose living memory as restored behaviour against a historical archive of scripted records". Using these works, the process of creating was aimed at uprooting or complicating the 'established memory' i.e. the social norms, tropes, stereotypes and even the counter-narratives they presented within their historical context, from the characters as well as the memories or history of the performers themselves. I endeavoured to investigate memory as a socio-historical archive. Also, an attempt was made to interrogate history and narrative as a transient process or act and thereby making present the baggage of its perceived context. Roach writes in the preface of his book:

The social process of memory and forgetting, familiarly known as culture, may be carried out by a variety of performance events, from stage plays to sacred rites, from carnivals to the invisible rituals of everyday life. To perform in this sense means to bring forth, to make manifest, and to transmit. To perform also means, though often more secretly, to reinvent. (1996: xi)

The monologues from well-known plays, as well as the personal material generated by the cast, provided a base from which to "reinvent", or *reimagine* a coloured identity narrative through/of performance. Gumede reflects upon "... memory as an archive — the very archive that holds not only the composition of an individual's personal identity, but the inscription of social codification (Demaria, 2004 cited in Gumede, 2015: 85)

Therefore, to reimagine the naming monologue from my minor project in a more visceral mode; intrigued by the need to excavate from/through the body, the performers were tasked with 'writing' their actual name with their body, not so much to create recognisable letters, but rather to let each letter flow through their body. The piece opened with each performer on different levels within the performance space, (which was a room and not a typical theatre stage) 'etching

themselves' as a prologue for what the audience was about to experience. Reznek advises that if the Lecoq's notion that 'all is in motion' applies, then the moving body is able to destabilise hegemony inciting that "there can be no single overarching truth or perspective that dominates" (2016: 148-149). By having the performers physically move in and through their name, together celebrating themselves as individuals and inscribing themselves into the space even before a single word was said, I believe, brought us closer to demonstrating the idea of (a utopian) *reimagining* an identity narrative that is both individualistic and while also referring to the macro cultural and political terrain, as the body carries inscribed meaning. Unlike in the minor project where the performers' name was brought to life through linguistic means, here the performers' names were evoked and portrayed through their bodies providing for a more interpretive reading of this marker of their identity.

But not all the attempts at *reimagining* were successful in this piece. One of the major discoveries I made upon reflection of the production, was the difference between 'reproducing' and 're-imagining'. Even though my intention, as director/theatre-maker/collaborator, was to re-imagine – the result was, in some cases, a 're-production' – a repetition of a stereotype. I discovered that while theatre has the potential to interrogate and even alter social constructions, it also, and more easily, has the ability to strengthen or reinforce these social precepts through a constant restaging of stereotypes. Fransman (2005) suggests that a stereotype reinforces the perception of a homogeneous identity, especially when ascribing a very particular identity to the coloured body on stage which assumes that there is only one way to be Coloured. Fransman asserts that stereotypes ascertaining "'familiarity' through repetition [is] perhaps guilty of establishing how many people look at Coloureds, and how many Coloured people thus look at themselves when they see themselves as popularised caricatures, bastardised by performance of a commercial value, rather than valuing their own diversity through performance" (2005: 59). An example of this was the decision to dress all three performers in the same outfit, which came from a want to create neutrality for the performers to begin from. The unintended result was that because the performers looked identical, both in costume and physical features, their presence as strong embodied individuals was not portrayed; instead, they denoted sameness, a homogeneity

that the piece was actually trying to fight against. Each performer could have been replaced by any of the other two performers and thus their individuality, arguably their 'identity', collapsed into one image. However more interestingly, it also illustrated the power of the historical stereotypes and tropes that are socially still at play. The fact these performers could so easily become any other 'coloured woman' went a long way to reaffirm that other coloured women have a frame through which she would immediately be recognised. I use the word 'other' with intended irony as that is the more generalised social position the coloured female occupies, where the label of her identity is still understood in the most grotesquely obvious and problematic manner.

Another aspect of the production that resulted in what I would now deem a 'reproduction', was the treatment of some of the monologues used. All the monologues utilised were kept in their original form, and only the staging was reconceived. The outcome was that these characters seemed to remain in the past, they did not evolve, their narratives were not *reimagined*. An example of this is the monologue taken from Nadia David's *Cissie: The Playtext* (2009). In the scene employed, the character of Cissie makes her first major public speech on the Grand Parade. In *Her(I)Story: Evoking Archive* (2017) the speech adhered to the original text and was delivered directly to the audience. It was a reproduction of a, albeit powerful, monologue/speech. A *reimagining* might have been adorned if merged with references to a current political crisis, such as the Fees Must Fall¹² movement.

Indeed, I could not ignore that at the time of rehearsal, the Fees Must Fall movement had begun to gain momentum again on campus and tensions were high as everyone remembered what happened at the height of the movement the year before in 2016. Outside the UCT Michaelis Campus, students wove different colours of wool to barricade the entrances in protest, so that no one could enter the campus, and thus work was at a halt. To echo this in the setting the play was made in, I wove the same colours all over the performance room. There was a tight webbing of colourful wool that framed the performance so that while watching the production, what was happening

¹² Student lead protest movement against the fee hikes and lack of inclusion within the University structure that began mid-October 2015 at Wits University. The movement grew to a national level seeing student protesters and police clashes all over South Africa.

outside could not be disregarded. It was important for me to have the current political climate sewn into a performance about destabilising an archive and serve as an actual backdrop to a reimagining of a coloured identity narrative through performance.

With this in mind, had Cissie's monologue been interspliced with a speech made by Shaera Kalla,¹³ for example, in addition to the gesture that I had made aesthetically in the design of the play, the production would have made commentary on a past and present that would be lifted, through performance, into a space that provided an opportunity for negotiation. If the question was asked what would Cissie's reaction be within the context of the Fees Must Fall movement, a concurrent reflection on past and present would determine options for a future. These considerations would have complicated the narrative and probed current socio-political questions, arguably, moving a coloured identity narrative forward in some way.

One segment of *Her(I)Story: Evoking Archive* (2017) that came closest to a *reimagining* was the rendition of a monologue by the character of Lena from Athol Fugard's *Boesman and Lena* (1973). Here the three performers stood side-by-side and performed the monologue as though a chorus piece, which allowed for a multiplicity to emanate from the monologue. Even though they performed the monologue together, there was a distinct purpose and backstory in each performers' tone. It could be argued that there was an amplification that made interesting the dynamic of many women speaking of their personal ills and experiences within an abusive relationship. This took the monologue out the realm of the individual without making innocuous or general the perspective. In other words, it created a utopian experience, in the sense imagined by Muñoz and Dolan. In this way, I am forced to think of the social media narrative around the passing of Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and how overarching the sentiment was that she did not die, she multiplied. Through the ownership taken by all who chose to be involved within the #IamWinnieMandela¹⁴ narrative, women across the country eroded the

¹³ Former SRC president at Wits University and one of the main leaders of the #FeesMustFall movement.

¹⁴ Nomzamo Winifred Madikizela, more commonly known as Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela passed away on the 2nd of April 2018. Her passing triggered conversations around her role within the ANC and the role she played in bringing down the apartheid regime. The

ambivalence around Winnie Madikizela-Mandela's legacy and engaged in a multifarious conversation around her identity, its complexities, the dualism of its history and the multiplicity of roles she played. Within the public space this made more relevant the manner in which I had attempted to understand the 'wearing' of a historical figure such as Cissie Gool in a fast-moving contemporary setting.

For something to be *reimagined*, it is not enough to simply place something old into a new context. It is my contention that the entire form needs to be shifted for a genuine revelation to take place and for a concerted *reimagining* to be achieved. It must be noted that an attempt to *reimagine* is not about finding a distinctive 'new' condition that is all-encompassing. That would perpetuate an essentialist way of thinking. Rather, it is about working towards a new practice that opens up progressive ways of engagement about the coloured identity narrative.

METHODOLOGY:

TOWARDS A UTOPIAN PERFORMANCE

Given the learning reflected upon in my minor and medium projects, it is now the work of the remaining component of this paper to assess and propose more appropriate theatrical methodologies towards the production of alternative reference points to complicate the representation of a coloured identity narrative. Fanon, when writing about what we now deem postcolonialism, argued that the creation of new concepts is imperative by those marginalised and disenfranchised while working towards social change. Gibson, deconstructing and explaining Fanon's position, asserts that "new concepts emerge by shifting the very ground upon which reason is constructed" (2011: xi).

In an effort to rationalise and realise a *reimagining* of components of a coloured identity narrative, and to loosen the constructs upon which these traditional socio-cultural and racial precepts were created, José Esteban

particular narrative to which I refer to is a Twitter thread that depicts women from around the country standing in solidarity with her legacy as a powerful woman in an attempt to undo the propaganda slurs that emanated during the negotiations in the country's transition period.

Muñoz's framing of 'utopia' presents as the most cogent tool through which I will now base my interrogation on. While 'utopia' is not, in the broader sense, a new theoretical concept as Fanon requires, I believe that it has the potential to destabilise or at least create questions around the manner in which coloured identity, in a broad sense, is performed, defined and explored socio-culturally. Dolan describes utopia as "literally meaning 'no-place'" (2001: 457) and asserts that utopia should be thought of as a space beholden with possibility. Muñoz explains that:

... utopia is an ideal, something that should mobilize us, push us forward. Utopia is not prescriptive; it renders potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility, not a fixed schema. It is productive to think about utopia as flux, a temporal disorganization, as a moment when the here and the now is transcended by a *then* and a *there* that could be and indeed should be. [emphasis in original] (2009: 97)

Here, Muñoz portrays utopia as a negotiable realm that constantly moves between 'what is' and 'what could be'. Dolan (2001) posits that the theatre is the perfect space where utopia can best be realised as it is in the theatre where culture is portrayed. In this way, the theatrical space becomes not only a place where well-established cultural paradigms can be negotiated, but also a place of imagination. Hence my interest is in developing a theatrical utopian method that works towards a productive *reimagining* of a coloured identity narrative in an attempt to find a progressive way of conceptualising and loosen the reign of its current appearance through performance. Madison hypothesises a similar space but calls it 'performance of possibility' which she suggests "...functions as a politically engaged pedagogy..." (2003: 471) which is most significant in the context of South Africa. Madison explains:

In a performance of possibilities, I see the "possible" as suggesting a movement culminating in creation and change. It is the active, creative work that weaves the life of the mind with being mindful of life, of "merging text and

world,”¹⁵ of critically traversing the margin and the centre, and of opening more and different paths for enlivening relations and spaces. (2003: 471)

Pursuing utopia, according to Muñoz, Dolan and Madison’s conceptualisations of the expression, provides an opportunity to keep working towards a newness of the coloured narrative, beyond the definitive framework of self-identity/identifying, beyond a reproduction of stereotype and beyond a blatant hybridity. And in so doing, does not propose a fixed frame against which identity is rigidly measured, but rather proposes a position of agency, malleability and agility that can take forward the rich dynamics of cultural nuance while shrugging off the least desirable aspects as the narrative proliferates. It is important to understand that utopia is not a destination, for its overt ambition is not to define or describe what the ‘correct’ portrayal should entail; rather it encourages a theatrical perspective that is continually probing at and navigating through the narrative. Dolan (2001) suggests that even the notion of a ‘real’ utopia is an oxymoron.

Dolan explores utopianism through affect in live performance claiming that “utopia can be imagined or experienced affectively, through feelings, in small, incremental moments that performance can provide”. In an effort to merge the idea of theatre with the notion of utopia, Dolan quotes cultural studies academic Richard Dyer: “Entertainment does not ... present models of utopian worlds ... Rather the utopianism is contained in the feelings it embodies.” (Dyer, 1992 cited in Dolan, 2001: 461).¹⁶ The emanating affect in performance is what Dolan (2001: 461) calls the ‘utopian performative’. Muñoz (2000) writes about the inability of minoritarian groups to perform racialised normativity because it is constantly pitted against the hegemonic class of whiteness that has become the national and aspirational image of social performance. “Whiteness is a cultural logic which can be understood as an affective code that positions itself as the law” (Muñoz, 2000: 69) This is no truer than for coloured identity constructions within the popular imagery in South Africa, where coloured folk will not only self-critique against a yardstick of white identity, but will also be

¹⁵ Madison quotes Edward Said’s notion that “the text and the world” must be intimately tied (1983).

¹⁶ Richard Dyer, *Only Entertainment* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 18.

viewed in popular terms through defamatory articulations of tropes, as Richards rightly states: “What comes to mind when anyone thinks about coloured people? What we have been exposed to are the stereotypes – the proverbial congenial, humorous, smiling and hospitable people who entertain tourists. What we are not exposed to is the counterpoint ...” (2017: 31). Some of the theatre made in the vain of ‘representing colouredness’ has not resulted in moving the needle forward of the performance of this socio-cultural and political narrative. Wicomb, writing about the popular ‘District Six: The Musical’ (David Kramer & Taliep Petersen, 1987) says that this “popular attempt at inventing an authentic colouredness illustrates how representation does not simply express, but rather plays a formative role in social and political life” (1998: 95). According to Fransman (2005), the play exemplifies stereotypical images, and demonstrates (re)presentations of coloured people on stage. This is indicative of the fact that utopian theatre is not just theatre, but a mode of cultural production and storytelling that requires and engenders active awareness and constant negotiation. In agreement with Dolan (2001), live performance is a compelling site at which culture can come to navigate images of itself. Fransman cites Amkapa who echoes this stance claiming that it is the work of theatre practitioners to evolve “theatre as a forum of engagement within which external and internal dimensions of culture and society are articulated” (Amkapa, 2000 cited in Fransman, 2005: 33). Utopian theatre is not a perfect narrative depicted, rather it is narrative depicted with all its seeming imperfections, inclusive of unrest and tensions, but that also leaves gaps of breath, chasms where one can imagine a less ridged domain of self-identifying. Dolan posits that “theatre can move us toward understanding the possibility of something better, can train our imaginations, inspire our dreams and fuel our desires in ways that might lead to incremental cultural change” (2001: 460).

But the question remains as to how notions of utopian theatre can be employed towards a *reimagining* of a coloured identity narrative. To this end, I will focus mainly on two aspects. Firstly, the need to look back into the past and re-negotiate the pejorative power dynamics that still pervade and; secondly, the need for agency that seeps from performer to the audience as they navigate ‘what could be’.

One of the components of utopian performativity, is that it requires one to look upon history in order to conceptualise a future. The process of analysis and critique within cultural representation is usually a retrospective practice, thereby more often than not being reliant on dissecting history and bringing it into a realm that is more malleable. Muñoz states, “Utopian performativity is often fuelled by the past. The past, or at least narratives of the past, enable utopian imaginings of another time and place that is not yet here but nonetheless functions as a doing for futurity, a conjuring of both future and past to critique presentness” (2009: 106). I agree with the sentiment that imagining a possible future can predominantly emanate from bringing the past in the present, allowing one’s agency to speak back to the historical precept. In so doing, the agent now has the ability to navigate identity rather than simply react to it. Erasmus, when writing about coloured identity reiterates this: “A progressive, transformative politics cannot be based on a denial of the past” (2001: 26). This adheres to the Foucauldian premise that a society should look to their history in order to analyse and learn as to what they are able to create in the future. I quote, “We have to know the historical conditions which motivate our conceptualization. We need a historical awareness of our present circumstance” (Foucault, 1982: 778). Richards explains this when he conceives what is necessary for healing to take place in a traumatised nation:

The successful future of South Africa will depend on the extent and the speed with which we facilitate the healing of the deeply embedded trauma within the soul of our emerging new nation. We, the citizens, must grapple with and make meaning with a most searing narrative of our past, try to deal with a contradictory and volatile present and attempt to craft a future that will be inclusive, viable and sustainable. We must decisively address the injustice of our disturbing past and re-author an inclusive and restorative narrative [...] (Richards, 2017: 7)

The theatre then becomes the potential site of utopic transformation in the healing process of a nation, but more critically, for a people dispossessed by

and through history: the heterogeneous grouping of coloured people, grappling on a slippery slope of 'custom'.¹⁷

Utopian theatre allows the dispossessed body, the coloured theatre-maker in this instance, to move, both literally and conceptually, which I argue is vital for systematic change. "The contemporary body is nothing less than a battlefield where, as Sally Banes, appropriating a Foucauldian perspective, points out that "culture wreaks utter tyranny on individual bodies (Loots, 1994: 45-46 cited in Loots, 2010: 107). Reznek infers the essential use of the body in motion that aids liberation from static notions of identity construction and embedded trauma stating that "[t]he body as a subject has a 'performative power' (Lepechi, 2006: 8); it has the ability to move into a space, to create action and to effect one's own becomings [...] which are fundamental to establishing the status of a free, empowered subject" (2016: 154). It is the movement of the body in space, the movement of the body through time – past, present and future (Reznek, 2016), and more crucially the ability of theatre as a vehicle that enables the body to traverse and thereby re-negotiate its state of being or perception, that a utopic *reimagining* is able to undermine the superstructure of single narratives. Therefore, allowing individuals to insert themselves into the narrative and create a possible future that recognises and includes them, a "futurity" as Muñoz, citing Miranda Joseph, suggests about utopian performance:

Joseph, [...] suggests that performance's temporality is not one of simple presence but instead of futurity. In Joseph's lucid critique we see that performance is the kernel of a potentiality that is transmitted to audiences and witnesses and that the real force of performance is its ability to generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitate modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging. If we consider performance under such a lens, we can see the temporality of what I describe as a utopian performativity, which is to say a manifestation of a "doing" that is

¹⁷ Here I use the word 'custom' in the way that Fanon, according to Gilbert's understanding, differentiates between 'culture' and 'custom': "When Fanon speaks of culture he maintains that it is opposed to custom. Culture is living and changing, while custom is reified, formal and rigid. And it is culture, not custom, Fanon argues, that the damned of the earth hang on to even in the most extreme conditions." (Gilbert, 2011: 54).

in the horizon, a model of possibility. Performance, seen as utopian performativity, is imbued with a sense of potentiality. (2009, 98-99)

This potentiality that performance offers means that the narrative opening that the play offers can transcend the confines of its life on stage and continue into the bar, the parking lot and hopefully thereafter the work and social spaces of those who have now engaged with the narrative. Thus, utopian performance is able to impact both the general or macro position of society, as well as the intimate position of the individual. This understanding provides theatre with the potential to forward the coloured identity narrative through stories, plays, characters, plots and staging that seeks to interrupt the problematic essentialist thinking that continually reproduces, rehashes and recycles a fixed coloured identity, as opposed to allowing for the transience and fluidity of the pursuit of an ideal future narrative that unshackles the constraints of a limiting definitive framework. In order to do so productively, the audience must be empowered and not manipulated. This means that through the agency of the performer, the audience therefore gains agency, empowering them to become active socio-cultural and political agents within the pockets of society they exist in. Gumede, in his essay *When We Are Naked* (2015) examines catharsis within the framework of social performance in post-apartheid South Africa. Gumede (2015) unpacks Aristotle's Coercive Model of storytelling; claiming that this notion presents a range of contradictions within a South African context because it firstly does not hold the state accountable (which in our context is an important part of understanding the project of apartheid and its process of socio-political engineering) and secondly that it does not provide the audiences/witnesses with agency, but rather employs an emotional coercion.

Boal (1979) claims that Aristotle's Coercive Model, as he calls it, has been utilized for socio-political control for hundreds of years, asserting that theatre as a mechanism has been central to the agenda of governing institutions since the ancient Greeks (notwithstanding the fact that it has been the life's work of theatre makers such as Brecht and Grotowski to use theatre as an act of political critique and "transgression," shaping the way in which theatre is viewed and utilized within the socio-political realm. (Gumede, 2015: 83)

When considering utopic theatre, it is vital that audiences are able to negotiate their own being, which aligns with the Brechtian ideology of non-coerciveness. As Dolan suggests, “Storytelling, in fact, lends [...] power and works structurally to draw the audience closer and to offer them models for agency, for transformation and change” (Dolan, 2001: 477).

In reflection, one of the ways I could have exercised a utopic *reimagining* within my medium project, would have been to empower the performers to use our agency as theatre-makers to break open the curated historical texts, allowing them to insert themselves into the narrative and devour it from the inside out. To illustrate this using the earlier example of Lena’s monologue: by simply ending the scene when the monologue was complete was, in hindsight, a missed opportunity to give her character a ‘future’. The utopian theatre-maker might have given her character more text, more movement, one final moment of life, because in so doing, the play continues without Boesman, and Lena is liberated from his violent retort “That’s what you think!” which disqualifies her revolt.

MOVING FORWARD

It seems to me that the pitfalls I have experience in my minor and medium projects are indicative of the cultural difficulty of presenting alternative socio-cultural methods of piercing the fixed notions that surround the coloured identity narrative. In the macro-cultural sense, it begs the question how would we expect individuals within this social grouping to traverse their own historical interpretation when the key to this can so frequently be mercurial, ephemeral and difficult to penetrate? This speaks volumes as to why, willing or unwilling cultural agents, within and outside of the coloured identity narrative, have been forced to continuously return to the historical position of trope and stereotype in an attempt to find a cultural reading and meaning through which to frame this narrative.

Moving forward, with my previous enquiries in mind, I will offer a theatrical interpretation that is illustrative of a more complete utopic *reimagining* of various aspects of the common coloured identity narrative. I now have the

ability to expunge my own ambivalence as to how to attack the historical cultural position as a starting point. One would now enter with certainty within the historical frame in order to *reimagine* a future. Another manner in which a dialectic theatrical position can be developed is through escaping the enticement of reacting to a singular narrative. The task would be to break open the narrative by exposing a diversity of lived experiences within the heterogeneous coloured frame that call up the contradictions of a fixed position; and allowing their irrefutable presence to carry the function of penetrative discourse rather than attempting to neatly draw lines of logic in rebuttal of the single narrative of the cultural superstructure. With this understanding, I suggest a working methodology that might achieve this.

The overall process would involve interviewing people about memories pertaining to their lived experience of being coloured while framing the overarching perception. I then intend to use the content gathered from the interviews and the recorded interviews themselves as part of the source material in the production; as well as monologues featured in *Her(I)Story: Evoking Archive* (2017) and other monologues within the 'coloured' theatrical canon as a way in. I can then generate alternative positions having dealt with a richer context and having closed the vacuum which previously dominated my experimentation. This will form part of the future facing view that sits in contradiction to the current and past position. I will then create a working script collated from this source material and take it into a rehearsal process that performers will use as a base from which to devise their responses. I have broken up the intended working process into four broad stages below, in which I will explain the relevance of each stage.

Intended Process of Creation for Final Production

It must be noted that the following is only a blueprint and stages may alter, slightly or significantly, based on research findings and what may emerge from the rehearsal process.

Stage 1: Interview Prep

My first step would be to identify interviewees. Due to the subject matter at hand, I would like to interview people who currently self-identify, or would have historically been identified as 'Coloured'. People who make up the heterogeneous group involved in the coloured identity narrative. For the duration of this project, I will be located in the City of Cape Town and will therefore interview people who reside within Cape Town and the surrounding areas. I intend to target people of different ages and diverse class groups. In order to probe the complexities of naming and being named, I will create a questionnaire that interrogates opinions regarding popular stereotypes pertaining to the group. The interviews will also focus on memory as a form of oral history.

(Attached to this thesis is an addendum of the questions asked to each interviewee, added after the interviews were conducted)

Stage 2: Conducting Interviews

Each interview, with the written permission of every interviewee, will be video or audio recorded. This is an important element as both the content sourced from the interviewee as well as the vocabulary/dialogue emanating from physical gesture present in the interview situations will be utilised. This will most likely inform some of the physicality employed in the production. Madison, in her book: *Critical Ethnography: Method, Ethics, and Performance* (2012), cites Richard Bauman who makes this division clear when he defines the 'narrated event' and the 'narrative event':

Richard Bauman's distinction (1977) of the *narrated event* (the particular historical moment being told) and the *narrative event* (the embodied or immediate telling) are helpful terms as they mark the enlivening dynamics of a telling and a told in framing oral history as performance. This notion of a narrated event and a narrative event is not so much a separation between form and content as a recognition of the subjective and phenomenological creation of a teller in the process of constructing and crafting a *memory* of the past. (Madison, 2010 cited in Madison, 2012: 34. emphasis in original)

Stage 3: Collating Material

From the information collected, I will collate all the material into a working script. This script will be comprised of three main sources, namely the narrative event, the narrated event and the monologues used both in the medium project and additional plays within the canon of theatrical works pertaining to the subject matter. The inclusion of the former scripts as well as the interviews is important to this project because it allows the presence of ‘the archive’, as defined earlier, as well as ‘the repertoire’ defined as “... embodied memory; performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing – in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge” (Taylor, 2003: 19 cited in Madison, 2012: 183) of people contributing to the coloured identity narrative. Also significant is the relationship memory has with place/location/setting. Physical location is so often inextricably linked to the manner in which we locate memory, whether through metaphoric or inferred meaning, or through the use of synecdochal elements. The manifestation of all these elements I suggest, serve the function of painting a multiplicative utopian performance ideology, while also presenting the opportunity for dynamic theatricality.

Stage 4: Rehearsal Process and Staging

The final stage of this working process would be devising a production with a cast. I would choose to work with performers who self-identify as being coloured as their lived experience would contribute to the devised process. The performers will have the opportunity to insert themselves into the work through a sharing of their own personal memories and experiences. They will be asked to physically respond to the source materials. In the staging, the work will consider the linearity of theme before concerning itself with linear timelines, layering identity narratives that are diverse and that portray images that are non-static in their representation.

CONCLUSION

As a self-identifying coloured woman, my brownness and femaleness have for the most part framed a particular lived experience. In many ways, I have felt the very active tension of being limited and boxed in by the pejorative reading of stereotype. I think about how normal the comparative standard against whiteness was within my social and cultural circle to the point where 'white' became an adjective in my life. My journey of self-identification began with an endeavour to discover an essential truth, then shifted to an instrumentalist approach and lastly to social-constructionist mode. Each time I hit an intellectual or cultural barrier it forced me to contemplate the historical position of coloured identity, and the obsessive manner in which apartheid framed every sect of society. What interested me was the inherent problems that colouredness presented for this system, and how violent the retort from the system back onto colouredness was.

I felt it imperative to seek out an informed understanding of my position of marginality and equip myself with an analytic frame that would produce a discourse I could understand and use, in cogent terms; unpacking the process of cultural production and reproduction and what informed my socio-cultural and political identity. What my interrogation has made manifest, is the vital need for the historical frame of the singularity of coloured identity to be disrupted. Intellectually there is a large scale understanding that coloured identity is framed through radical trope, stereotype and myth. Even with the applicable tools and considerations from within knowledge economy or the academy, the struggle to pierce the cultural veil remains immense. This is what leaves few choices for those within the coloured identity narrative, by default, to remain complicit in the process of the hegemonic cultural framing.

However, by creating new gestures that are visible and enactable, it empowers individuals to become cultural agents with a variety of options. Through a meaning making process that follows the theatrical utopian performative mode, there would be a matrix of enhanced cultural signs, symbols, gestures and other performative tools that begin to provide those within the frame of coloured identity, with an active agency. Through introducing the utopian mode with the hope that it would work to influence the coloured identity narrative more broadly, the opportunity exists to permeate societal

normative values as the historic symbol and future cultural gestures constantly traverse; opening the prospect of self-cultural authorship. This utopian space not only rationalises the problematic nature of the overarching cultural experience of marginalised people, but also provides a practical and visibly identifiable gestural language that might work to dismantle the cultural hegemonic position.

For my final production, I would like to exercise the utopian ideology to convert audience into active and engaged agents. Striving towards the 'horizon of possibility' as a means of *re-imagining* or influencing critical aspects of the coloured identity narrative.

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ADDENDUM

The following is a list of the questions that each interviewee was asked. Even though some of the questions were prepared beforehand, follow up questions kept with the conversation being had in the moment. Interviews progressed based on answered given by the interviewee.

Questions asked to interviewee 1

- What is your full name and surname?
- Where do you come from?
- Where do you live?
- Do you identify as 'Coloured'?
- Can you define 'Coloured'?
- Are there any aspects of the 'Coloured' label that you do not identify with?
- What is your occupation?
- Can you tell me about Coloured Female Representation within your job area?
- How does being a coloured female make you more sensitive to your job?
- Have you ever experienced racism?
- Was there a time in your life where you 'discovered' your race?

Questions asked to Interviewee 2

- What is your full name and surname?
- Where did you grow up?
- What was your childhood like?
- Who were your parents? What were they like?
- Do you identify as 'Coloured'?
- What does 'Coloured' mean for you?
- Where you active during the struggle?
- What period?
- Did you take part in any protests?
- What were you protesting?
- What apartheid laws affected you mostly?

- Do you have any memories under apartheid where you felt that you were coloured?
- What were some of your childhood games that you used to play?

Questions asked to interviewee 3

- What is your full name and surname?
- Where did you grow up?
- Do you identify as Coloured?
- What does that mean for you?
- When you say 'mixture' do you think that that takes away from some sort of purity?
- Do you think that it is more difficult to be a Coloured female in your industry or does it not make a difference?
- What was it like growing up in your household?
- What are some of your childhood memories?
- How many siblings do you have?
- What sort of games did you used to play when you were younger?
- What is your first language?
- You say that you needed to learn English, why did you think that was?
- How did you go about learning English?
- You said that you learned English when you started collage, what was it like going back home? Did your friends and family say anything about the way you speak?

Questions asked to interviewee 4

- What is your name and surname?
- What is your job?
- Why is that question so weighted for you?
- What is your passion?
- When someone asks 'what are you' how do you respond?
- Do you always guard your answer to that question?
- How do you think language works as a tool for resistance?
- As a scientist, a film-maker and an activist, what role does the colour of your skin play in your daily life?

- When you say 'spiritual brownness' what do you mean and how did you explore it?
- At what point did your physical aesthetic change?
- What was your process of 'de-robing' the look of this blackness that you speak of?
- What are some of the games you used to play as a child?

Questions asked to interviewee 5

- What is your name and surname?
- What year were you born?
- Where did you grow up?
- What was it like growing up in the time that you did?
- How did you earn money when you were younger?
- Where did you sell fruit?
- Growing up during the height of Apartheid, what were some of the challenges that you faced being brown?
- Why do you say that growing up in District 6 at the height of Apartheid was the 'good days'?
- Can you speak about what it was like being forcefully removed from your home in District 6?
- How old were you when your family was moved to Manenberg?
- So, you sold fruit, you were a fisherman, a taxi driver and now you are a tour guide. How did you move from one occupation to another?
- Did you get married during Apartheid?
- How many children do you have?
- What are some of your happiest memories?
- How severely did the laws of the time affect your daily life?
- Paging through all your books, documents and countless photographs that you have of your days in District 6, why is documentation/archive so important to you?
- What were you classified as under Apartheid?
- What was the process you went through to get classified?
- As a child, what were some of the games you played with your friends?