

# **Re-articulating History: Historical Play, Nation, Text**

Candidate: Maurits Michiel van Bever Donker

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## Plagiarism Declaration

I, the undersigned, declare that Re-articulating History: Historical Play, Nationalism, Text is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Maurits van Bever Donker



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## The plays of History

Irony and history seem to be curiously linked to each other.

Paul de Man<sup>1</sup>

In general, I try to distinguish between what one calls the future and "l'avenir." The future is that which - tomorrow, later, next century - will be ... [b]ut there is a future, "l'avenir" (to come) which refers to someone who comes whose arrival is totally unexpected. For me that is the real future ... the coming of the Other when I am completely unable to foresee their arrival.

Jacques Derrida<sup>2</sup>

The writing of history in postapartheid South Africa constitutes a crisis for the discipline of history as, I argue, it requires the discipline to confront its role in contributing towards the constitution of the condition of possibility of the discourse of apartheid. Stated differently, the relationship between the discipline of history and nationalist or identity politics, a relationship that is characterized by history performing the role of alibi, is highlighted as problematic within the question of the postapartheid. It is in this context that I want to broach the concept of the historical play as an antidisciplinary object that works to unsettle the discipline of history and thereby its role as alibi. Such an engagement with the historical play would, I argue, enable a progressive politics of the sort that Michel Foucault calls for.

In his essay 'History, Discourse and Discontinuity' (1972) which he wrote in response to a question posed to him of the possibility of resistance within the corpus of his work, Foucault argues that a progressive politics would be one that takes into account a discourse's conditions of possibility - one that limits the claims of

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<sup>1</sup> Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, in Andrzej Warminski (ed), *Theory and History of Literature*, Vol. 65, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p 184

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Derrida in the opening moments of the film by Kirby Dick and Amy Ziering Kofman, *Derrida*, (Zeitgeist Films Ltd, 2002)

discourses on life through defining their grammars, as it were.<sup>3</sup> While this current study does not seek to, and also does not claim to, subject the discourse of history to such a critique (I am not proposing to investigate the emergence of the discipline), Foucault's understanding of a progressive politics is especially significant to it. Particularly, rather than reading for the grammar of history – this has been done by others such as (but not limited to) Gayatri Spivak, Hayden White and Friederich Nietzsche and will be discussed later – this dissertation starts from the position that the discipline of history played (and plays) a fundamental role in establishing the conditions of possibility of the discourse of apartheid.<sup>4</sup> This is not to argue that apartheid can be reduced to an outworking of nationalist history (apartheid as a discursive field, I would argue, draws much of its condition of possibility from what has been termed the enlightenment project) but rather that all history, not simply nationalist history, works as an alibi for its emergence.

Rather than either accepting the politically untenable position of maintaining the discipline as it is or abandoning the discipline due to its complicity with something like apartheid, I want to argue that in order to have what Foucault terms a progressive politics it is necessary to engage with history in such a way as to problematise its position as alibi. By so doing, I would argue that we might disrupt the very condition of emergence of apartheid. Working with Paul de Man's conceptual link between irony and history, and particularly recalling his understanding of irony as "the permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes"<sup>5</sup> (where parabasis denotes interruption and the allegory of tropes corresponds to disciplinary reason), I want to posit the concept of the Historical Play as an object that works to disrupt the discipline's repressed dynamic while not discarding the discipline as such. Similarly

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<sup>3</sup> Michel Foucault, 'History, Discourse and Discontinuity', in *Salmagundi*, no. 20, (Saratoga Springs: Skidmore College and Saratoga Printing Company, 1972), pp 239 – 241

<sup>4</sup> Leslie Witz's, *Apartheid's Festival: Contesting South Africa's National Pasts*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, David Phillip, 2003), is a pertinent study in this regard as it delineates how the discipline of history emerges as that that might justify a nationalist politics through denoting its arrival.

<sup>5</sup> de Man, (1996: p 179)

to John Mowitt's formulation in his discussion of the socio-genesis of the text, the historical play works as an antidisiplinary object.<sup>6</sup>

The working of the concept of historical play as an antidisiplinary object is useful to the project of writing history after apartheid (a history that would resist its role in supplementing something like apartheid) in that it allows the strategic position of, in Spivak's words, "learning to learn from below" (see Chapter 2). In other words, it operates according to what Spivak has termed a "textual politics."<sup>7</sup> As such, historical plays as antidisiplinary objects work to re-articulate the discipline's relation to the subject. Put differently, it fundamentally impacts on the politics of representation in the discipline of history. This dissertation, then, will seek to engage with the historical play as object so as to elaborate its implications for the discipline of history. Importantly however, it is necessary to note from the outset that not all historical theatre operates as historical play: some theater reinforces the discipline while in other cases disciplinary demands are entirely done away with. Put simply, while the 'historical play' does have to do with theatre it is clearly not merely theatre – this is a distinction that will be developed and explored in the latter part of the dissertation.

This dissertation is divided into two parts. In part one the problems of identity and nation in the discipline of history will be broached through engaging with questions of representation and, subsequently, textuality. The aim of this first part of the dissertation is to argue that the historical play, through making the discipline of history face up to its own textuality, might enable a productive engagement with the question of representation in the discipline and thereby problematising the discipline's relationship to concepts of nation and identity. In the second part of the dissertation, I offer a reading of several historical narratives and plays that deal with

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<sup>6</sup> John Mowitt, *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisiplinary Object*, (Durham and London: Duke University press, 1992)

<sup>7</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak, 'From Haverstock Hill Flat to U.S. Classroom, What's Left of Theory?' in Judith Butler, John Guillory and Kendall Thomas (eds), *What's Left of Theory: New Work on the Politics of Literary Theory*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2000: p 34)

the Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856 – 7. Through this reading I hope to demonstrate the working of historical play as a mode that might allow a productive engagement with the question of representation, especially as it resonates with the problematic of dealing with the prophetic elements of the cattle-killing movement. In the final chapter of part two, I offer readings of Bhekizizwe Peterson and Derek Peterson’s work respectively. In so doing I hope to both distinguish the concept of historical play at work in this dissertation from that which is at work in their arguments, as well as how their arguments might have benefited from an engagement with historical play along the lines argued for here. First, however, it is necessary to situate this dissertation within its present context.

### **A Present Politics**

Recently, Moeletsi Mbeki (the brother of Thabo Mbeki, the President of the Republic of South Africa) delivered a commentary/critique of the current political situation in South Africa at the University of the Witwatersrand.<sup>8</sup> His address sparked an exchange in a number of leading South African newspapers between Achille Mbembe and Xolela Mangcu, amongst others, and lends itself as a pertinent starting point for this dissertation through raising the question of the prophecy of Nongqawuse, a prophecy that many historians argue brought about the destruction of the independent Xhosa polity in the late 1850s, as a political issue of the present. While some might argue that the prophecy that brought about the Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856 – 7 is too painful an event to remember, the recent exchange between Mbembe and Mangcu places it at the heart of the current political discourse in postapartheid South Africa. In addition, the prophecy has been the

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<sup>8</sup> Achille Mbembe, ‘Stirring a dark brew that echoes Nongqawuse’s fatal prophecy’ in Sunday Times, (4 June 2006), [www.sundaytimes.co.za](http://www.sundaytimes.co.za) last accessed, 21/06/2006

subject of much speculation by historians and playwrights alike and therefore provides a substantial body of work with which to engage.

Achille Mbembe, in his article 'Stirring a dark brew that echoes Nongqawuse's fatal prophecy' argues that Moeletsi Mbeki equated the current political situation in South Africa as a whole to the political situation among the Xhosa around the time of Nongqawuse's prophecies. In his reading of Mbeki's speech, Mbembe argues that South Africa is awash with a "populist rhetoric and politics which advocates, uses and legitimises self-destruction, or national suicide, as a means of salvation", in short he argues that South Africa is being engulfed by what he terms "the Nongqawuse syndrome".<sup>9</sup> Such a syndrome, according to Mbembe, is characterized by the presence of a false prophet that justifies their utterances through recourse to culture, tradition or ancestors, and draws on a level of mass hysteria. In addition the prophet always speaks of a new day, a resurrection of sorts, that will see the nation whole.<sup>10</sup>

Mbembe suggests that "the Nongqawuse syndrome" is becoming prevalent in South Africa due to the socio-economic condition of South Africa – one characterized by "purposeless wealth accumulation" and "unfinished transformation"<sup>11</sup> – in other words, due to the failed promise of the new nation after apartheid. Through comparing the poor in South Africa today with the cattle of Nongqawuse's time, Mbembe argues that the HIV/AIDS crisis could be likened to the lung-sickness that devastated Xhosa cattle before and during the Cattle-Killing Movement. Further, he suggests that "white denial of privilege" coupled with continuously high levels of crime and black poverty sets the tone for a return to "nativism", something which he suggests the recent establishment of The Native Club is indicative of. This resurgence of nativism, Mbembe argues, allows the shift away from a rhetoric of non-racialism to one premised on race. He suggests that the end result of this is a "situation where the language of racial destiny again becomes so all-encompassing

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<sup>9</sup> ibid

<sup>10</sup> ibid

<sup>11</sup> ibid

as to render impossible other ways of connecting the various fragments of the new nation.”<sup>12</sup>

Mbembe concludes his response to Moeletsi Mbeki’s speech by positing the dissolution of the tri-partite alliance (between the ANC, COSATU, and the SACP) and a constitutional reform that would make the president elected by the people not a party and MP’s be held accountable to their constituencies.<sup>13</sup> While the tone of Mbembe’s article is favourable towards the current South African government – he characterizes Thabo Mbeki as “the most worldly, cosmopolitan and urbane political [leader] modern Africa has known.”<sup>14</sup> The conclusion of his article clearly suggests that the entire current political order in South Africa needs to be fundamentally adjusted so as to avoid the pitfalls of “the Nongqawuse syndrome”.

It is the implicit support for Thabo Mbeki and the characterization of Jacob Zuma (the former Deputy-President of South Africa) as the prophet in Mbembe’s article that Xolela Mangcu objects to in his article ‘Nongqause comparison shirks analysis of political differences’. Mangcu suggests that Mbembe’s article is effectively a populist device that seeks to avoid engaging in a discussion of political differences through characterizing those that support Thabo Mbeki (the elite in Mangcu’s argument) as rational and urbane while characterising Jacob Zuma’s supporters as “no longer [being] political agents in a political debate but delusional mobs fitting the description of a millenarian, eschatological movement.”<sup>15</sup> Having characterized Mbembe as a “rationalist scholar” using “populist devices”, Mangcu argues that Moeletsi Mbeki’s target in his speech was not Zuma but rather his older brother, President Thabo Mbeki. According to Mangcu, it is Thabo Mbeki’s failure of leadership on issues such as HIV/AIDS and poverty alleviation that likens the political

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> Xolela Mangcu, ‘Nonqause comparison shirks analysis of political differences’, *Business Day*, (14 July 2006), [www.businesday.co.za](http://www.businesday.co.za), last accessed 21/06/2006

situation in South Africa today to that of the Xhosa polity in the time of Nongqawuse's prophecy.<sup>16</sup>

Following this, Mangcu suggests that Mbembe's call for the dissolution of the tripartite alliance is simply a refusal to view the current divisions as being expressions of political debate, something that Mangcu suggests is perfectly healthy and should be encouraged. As such, he suggests that the challenge facing the ANC is to politically manage this debate so as to limit its potential damage.<sup>17</sup> To conclude his critique of Mbembe's article, Mangcu suggests that Mbembe is writing historical fiction not political analysis and that "public individuals" should "avoid labels and stereotypes, otherwise they become no different from nativist ideologues who silence debate with insults."<sup>18</sup> However, Mangcu ignores the fact that his article is littered with just such stereotypes.

Of course, both writers are doing very different things. On the one hand, Mbembe is using Moeletsi Mbeki's speech as a platform from which to tackle what he views as the growing recourse to racial categories and populist agendas in politics. On the other hand, Mangcu is attempting to hold Mbembe to the original aim of Moeletsi Mbeki's speech, namely the criticism of his older brothers' government, and thereby is attempting to treat Jacob Zuma "fairly".<sup>19</sup> This disagreement is then more about positionality than anything else. However, the recourse to Nongqawuse as an allegory to understand our present raises the question of how else Nongqawuse might be read: this is a question that the present dissertation will seek to engage by way of a discussion of the historical play.

Before moving into part one of this dissertation, however, it will be helpful to first read Friederich Nietzsche's 'On the uses and disadvantages of history for life'

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<sup>16</sup> ibid

<sup>17</sup> ibid

<sup>18</sup> ibid

<sup>19</sup> ibid

(1874)<sup>20</sup> as a meditation that underscores and pre-empts many of the issues and debates surrounding what I have been terming the questions of representation and textuality in the discipline of history. More specifically, Nietzsche's meditation brings into play precisely that which is elided in the disagreement between Mbembe and Mangcu, namely the discipline of history's uses and liabilities. Through bringing to the fore the crisis of history by identifying its political uses and liabilities, Nietzsche's essay necessitates, I would argue, a different engagement with Nongqawuse: one that problematises the uses of history rather than deploying it as an interpretive device. As such, Nietzsche's essay resonates quite strongly with the project of both inhabiting and problematising the foundational concepts of western modernity. In other words, it resonates with much of what has been termed postcolonial criticism.<sup>21</sup>

### **Nietzsche's Uses of History and its Liabilities**



In his essay Nietzsche presents a discussion of history's uses that calls into question and challenges the discipline's political and scientific/empiricist uses. In presenting this argument, Nietzsche posits three different notions of history and how they each in turn may relate 'to the living man': they are the monumental, the antiquarian, and the critical, all of which are, according to Nietzsche, to some degree necessary for life. This argument constitutes something of an untimely meditation in the sense that it works against the dominant mode of the time.<sup>22</sup> Writing against what he terms the excessive saturation of society by history, Nietzsche is asking the question 'what is useful about history', or, to put it in his terms: what are "the uses and disadvantages of history for life?" What is critical for Nietzsche is that, for a being to live, she both

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<sup>20</sup> Friederich Nietzsche, 'On the uses and advantages of history for life' (1874) in Friederich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, tr. R. J. Hollingdale, (Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp 57 – 123

<sup>21</sup> see for example, Leela Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998)

<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche, (1983: 60)

needs to be able to use history and forget the past. On the one hand, the past is necessary as Nietzsche argues that one of the major ways through which we live our lives is through engaging with the past. On the other hand, the ability to forget is necessary for action, otherwise, since everything has been done (by someone) before, there becomes no meaning to action.<sup>23</sup> Considering both the necessity and the danger that is involved in history, Nietzsche's question of 'the uses and disadvantages of history for life' becomes especially pertinent.

In order to effectively engage with this question it is first necessary to discuss what is meant by these historical senses, how they affect life and how, consequently, Nietzsche understands the role of history and the way in which it should be written. It is in this context of the role of history that, I argue, historical play should be viewed as an exceptionally productive manner through which to engage with this question. According to Nietzsche, all these different notions should be determined out of an individual's present need. In other words, these notions are useful in the manner in which they are able to relate to and impact on our present lives.<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche's notion of monumental history operates through a semblance of faith in the sense that it necessitates the preservation of great things in the past in the hope that they may be possible again in the future. A burden of this form of history is that, in focusing on great events, it ignores how these events were constituted; it overlooks the individuals of, and the detail in, history. In this way monumental history effaces the link between cause and effect maintaining only the effect and thereby creating the possibility of establishing the status quo ('great' people/societies laying claim to 'great' histories to maintain their present position).<sup>25</sup>

The antiquarian notion of history, which Nietzsche argues is viewed as the most valid in his time, views only the past as being worth knowing. Nietzsche suggests that for the antiquarian historian, the history of self becomes subsumed

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p 63 and 67

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p 72

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p 69 – 71

within the history of his city. As such the antiquarian notion of history is not able to engender life; it only knows how to preserve it.<sup>26</sup> In addition to this, through the manner in which it preserves the past, it becomes a contributor to the persecution of anything new or evolving and it restricts individuals' ability to forget.

Critical History is, for Nietzsche, a notion of history that allows a revision of the status quo. It maintains the notion that we are free from history and that we can make of it what we need for our current situation. However, Nietzsche does point out that, in his context, critical history was responsible for the destruction of what he termed "German unity" as it destroyed the antithesis between form and content.<sup>27</sup> It is in response to this use of critical history that Nietzsche suggests that those that practice it are always endangered and living in endangered times, not least considering that he argues that critical history is practiced by those who suffer and seek deliverance from it.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, as we shall see later, Michel Foucault's 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (1971)<sup>29</sup> is, in many ways, an attempt to refigure these in the light of Nietzsche's Genealogy of Morals.<sup>30</sup>

Much of what Nietzsche is writing against in 'on the uses and disadvantages of history for life' is that which he defines as a saturation of life with history. He claims that this is the result of a drive towards transforming history into a science that, he argues, has disrupted the link between history and life and perpetuated the prevalence of what he calls the historical sense in society.<sup>31</sup> The consequences of such a move, which for Nietzsche removes the only proper use of history, are manifold. As a science, history emerges as a source of knowing the past in its entirety (history becomes a phenomenon of knowledge, a notion that Nietzsche

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p 73 – 75

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p 82

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p 69 and 76

<sup>29</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (1971) in Paul Rabinow (ed), *The Foucault Reader*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), pp 51 – 100.

<sup>30</sup> Friederich Nietzsche, 'On the Genealogy of Morals' (1887) in Walter Kaufmann (ed. and tr.) *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, (New York: Random House, 1974)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p 77; Hayden White (1982) is very close to Nietzsche's critique of the transformation of History into science, however he swings his critique in a different direction, to a different tune.

refers to as “childish”<sup>32</sup>) and about the construction of laws that govern the past so that we can understand how things unfolded and, consequently, how they will unfold. Effectively, history as a science carries a promise to know life.<sup>33</sup>

The problem of scientific approaches to history is that the notion of objectivity becomes a factor of critical importance. It is the assumption of the ‘objective’ subject position that allows the modern historian to stake out a claim to truth in her writing of history. Consequently, through utilizing the claims of truth within history, society (or a demagogue for that matter) is able to assert its actions as being just within the light of that truth. However, the claim towards objectivity that enables this sense of truth actually, according to Nietzsche, removes the historian’s ability to judge and therefore her claim to being just. Put simply, Nietzsche argues that “objectivity and justice have nothing to do with each other”<sup>34</sup> as justice carries with it an obligation to judge, to decide between, to name one thing as more important than another, which true objectivity denies us the ability to do. He argues that this can be clearly seen in the way that the historian of his time can be identified as being tasteless, as she simply attempts to represent everything as though there were no difference between them.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to this criticism of the place of objectivity within history as science, Nietzsche argues that the promise of a scientific history that we may know life through interacting with the past as a whole phenomenon of knowledge disallows us the possibility of forgetting, and in so doing, denies us the ability to act in the sense of doing anything new. Consequently, Nietzsche calls for this pervading sense of history to be resisted as it removes the possibility of both justice and life. Rather, he argues,

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p 83

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, pp 67, 83 and 92

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p 91: A further criticism of this scientific sense of history includes the notion that science robs man of his foundations and that, in a historical culture of this sense, man becomes a machine and philosophy has no rights if it wants to effect any form of change (pp 84 and 121).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, pp 85 – 98

man should first learn to live and then learn how to use history to the advantage of life.<sup>36</sup>

Nietzsche locates this pervading sense of history as science (what he terms the “historical sense”, which he holds in opposition to the “unhistorical” – the view of life within a bounded horizon – and the “suprahistorical” – the claim that there is no historical process and, as such, the placing of a focus on living rather than the past – both of which he argues are cures to the all pervading “historical sense”<sup>37</sup>) within the domain of Hegel’s understanding of history. He argues that Hegel’s understanding of history leads to an idolatry of facts that in turn leads to an unmitigated submission to power of any form and the celebration of rational success; in short, it leads to the exclusion of life.<sup>38</sup> Rather, Nietzsche posits that the question of the moral (we might say, following Spivak, the ethico-political) is the true realm in which to engage with history.<sup>39</sup>



Recalling the productivity of the historical play through its operation as a textual politics for the writing of history, I argue that through its ethico-political dynamic the historical play provides just such a moral engagement with history that Nietzsche calls for. As such, the historical play as an object that makes available a study of that which history represses through its disciplinarity (particularly in its relation to the prophetic as it is explored in this dissertation), works as a space clearing gesture towards a real future which, as Derrida phrases it, is characterized by the arrival of the other when we least expect them.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, pp 114 – 116

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, pp 66 and 120

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, pp 104 – 105

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p 108

## Brief Chapter Outline

This dissertation will be divided into two parts. In the first part questions of representation and textuality in the discipline of history will be explored with the aim of positing the historical play as productive for the writing of history after apartheid. The first chapter, titled 'On Representation', looks at the problems of identity and nationalism in the discipline of history. Through reading a number of engagements surrounding these questions, particularly interventions by Gayatri Spivak, Michel Foucault and Achille Mbembe, alongside a play by the South African playwright Brett Bailey, called *iMumbo Jumbo*, into a debate between Jeff Peires and Clifton Crais, two notable Eastern Cape historians, in this chapter I posit the argument that Crais and Peires would be better positioned to deal with the question of writing history after apartheid through dealing with the problem of representation in the discipline through the mode of a strategic essentialism rather than simply reducing it to a question of the colonial archive.



Chapter 2 extends this through arguing that the moment in Bailey's *iMumbo Jumbo* that utilizes a strategic essentialism also causes the discipline of history to confront its own textuality. Through offering a critical reading of what have been termed the linguistic and the literary turns in history, in this chapter I argue that the historical play operates a "politics of textuality" that, through dealing with the problem of representation along the lines called for in chapter one, allows the discipline of history to be subjected to an antidisiplinary critique.

In the second part of the dissertation I attempt specify the implications of this critique for the discipline of history through reading a number of historical narratives and plays together. In Chapter 3 I argue, through reading Jeff Peires' *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing of 1856-7*<sup>40</sup>, that the historical

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<sup>40</sup> Jeff Peires, *The Dead will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing of 1856-7*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (Jeppestown: Johnathon Ball Publishers, 2003)

play is already latent within the discipline and I explore the implications of this through reading H. I. E. Dhlomo's 'The Girl Who Killed to Save' and the Community Arts Project's 'Nongqawuse'. The fourth chapter then looks at how something resembling but ultimately not fulfilling a textual politics has been attempted in the writing of history through reading Clifton Crais' *The Making of the Colonial Order: White Supremacy and Black Resistance in the Eastern Cape, 1770 – 1865*.<sup>41</sup> In addition, in the same chapter I attempt to specify the difficulty that historical plays present for the discipline as well as to demonstrate how the historical play might lend itself to a textual politics, as well as the productivity of this. In the final chapter of this dissertation, chapter 5, through reading the work of Bhekizizwe Peterson and Derek Peterson respectively, I will distinguish my argument on the historical play from that which is contained in their work. Finally, I will provide a brief conclusion to the dissertation.



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<sup>41</sup> Clifton C. Crais, *The Making of the Colonial Order: White Supremacy and Black Resistance in the Eastern Cape, 1770 – 1865*, (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1992)

## Part One



## On Representation

History is therefore not a temporal notion, it has nothing to do with temporality, but it is the emergence of a language of power out of a language of cognition.

Paul De Man<sup>1</sup>

The recent debate between Clifton Crais and Jeff Peires in the South African Historical Journal conveys a sense of the crisis in the discipline of History in South Africa.<sup>2</sup> The locus of the disagreement is Peires' recent review of Crais' *The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power and the Political Imagination in South Africa*.<sup>3</sup> In it Peires charges Crais with being both methodologically weak (allegedly Crais did not do enough fieldwork) and empirically unsound.<sup>4</sup> In addition Peires enters into an etymological discussion of a particular word, *umguya*, utilizing it to unsettle the empirical basis of Crais' account. He also faults Crais for not relying totally on the archival – or, at the very least, the oral – record and, rather, reading interpretations into what Peires dismisses as 'mimicry'.<sup>5</sup>

Crais' rebuttal caricatures Peires as "a neurotically jealous and territorial academic egotist," as well as arguing that Peires has emphatically missed the point.<sup>6</sup> According to Crais, the main aim of his book has to do with calling into question notions of "context, culture and rationality, and the politics of South African history" in an effort to "bring into dialogue the issue of meaning with the process of colonial

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<sup>1</sup> Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, in Andrzej Warminski (ed), *Theory and History of Literature*, Vol. 65, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p 133

<sup>2</sup> The two articles in which this disagreement takes place are Jeff Peires, 'Frankenstein Visits the Eastern Cape' in *South African Historical Journal*, vol. 51, 2004; and Clifton Crais, 'Frankenstein Visits the Eastern Cape: A (Brief) Reply', in *South African Historical Journal*, vol. 52, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Clifton Crais, *The Politics of Evil: Magic, State Power and the Political Imagination in South Africa*, (Cambridge: University Press, 2002)

<sup>4</sup> Peires, (2004: p 224)

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*, pp 224 – 228; in fact, towards the end of his review Peires effectively accuses Crais of having an over active imagination and inventing his own history (see p242).

<sup>6</sup> Crais, (2005: pp 243 – 245); the words in quotations have been brought together from across these pages.

state formation.”<sup>7</sup> As such, Crais’ project needs to deal critically with the colonial archive and the concepts of identity and nation that are at work within it, and, subsequently, within much South African historiography. Crais argues that, through relying apparently unquestioningly on this tainted archive as though it speaks the truth of the past, Peires is utilizing an approach that is philosophically and historiographically unsound and that Peires’ approach is “intolerant of difference and ultimately colonialist.”<sup>8</sup> Apart from laying bare the nature of academic bonds in Eastern Cape historiography, this argument between Peires and Crais is useful in that it highlights the highly contentious crisis surrounding problems of identity and nation – and concomitantly that of the colonial archive – within South African history and therefore, as Crais would have it, the discipline globally.<sup>9</sup>

This disagreement between Peires and Crais is not simply a minor disagreement between two leading Eastern Cape historians; rather, intrinsic to it is a crisis of representation about who specifically speaks for South African pasts. It is disheartening to see, in the exchanges between Peires and Crais, how easy it is to resort to concepts of identity and nation in the process of advancing academic critique. This stands in strong contrast to, say, the tenor of the critique that Gayatri Spivak makes of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Not only is this latter critique exemplary as a form of scholarly exchange – because Spivak takes the time to demonstrate the practice of reading deconstructively – but it also holds forth the intricacies of how difficult it would prove to forego the concepts of nation and identity in postcolonial criticism. At stake in Spivak’s critique of Foucault and Deleuze is the difficult question of a postcolonialism that comes after, or at the limit of, the critique of humanism.

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, pp 245 and 247

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p 246

<sup>9</sup> See p 248 where Crais argues that South African history is a microcosm of the discipline globally.

In this chapter I will turn both to the critique of humanism and the elaboration of postcolonial criticism by focusing on writers such as Foucault, Spivak and Mbembe.<sup>10</sup> In the process I want to argue that the debate between Peires and Crais both obscures and reveals the crisis of history. From the outset, the argument is necessarily slow as I wish to highlight the issues that have been avoided in the vitriolic exchange between Peires and Crais. The difference between the exchanges is, I hope to show, only slight if we consider that both ultimately have something to say about the question of representation. But Peires and Crais may be better placed to address the rewriting of South African history if they heed the problem of representation in history raised by Spivak in her critique of Foucault and Deleuze.

### **Foucault's Genealogy**



Almost one hundred years after Nietzsche offered his untimely meditation on history Michel Foucault revisited some of these thematics in his 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (1974). Here Foucault explores the question of why Nietzsche utilizes the notion of genealogy to write about morals, rather than plotting it in a single linear series of events. For Foucault, the answer lies in the interplay between Nietzsche's understanding of genealogy and of history: according to Foucault genealogy is not opposed to history but is rather not concerned with a pursuit of origins by which he suggests traditional history – Nietzsche's historical sense – is subsumed.<sup>11</sup> This difference is crucial to Foucault as the pursuit of origins is, in his view – and taking his cue from Nietzsche – problematic in a number of ways: Firstly, the pursuit of

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<sup>10</sup> Following from Michel Foucault's 'What is an Author' these names are not approached in a traditional sense whereby the meaning of the text is derived by an engagement with the writer (envisioned as a unified subject) whose proper name it holds. Rather, these names – as figural indicators – serve to situate various discourses in relation to each other and to the problems being discussed. For an explication of this argument see Michel Foucault, 'What is an Author' in Paul Rabinow (ed), *The Foucault Reader*, (London: Penguin Books, 1991), especially pp 115 – 118.

<sup>11</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History' (1971) in Paul Rabinow (ed), *The Foucault Reader*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), p77

origins is an attempt to capture the true essence of a thing, whereas Nietzsche argues that at the heart of a thing lies only disparity: there is no constituted whole to refer to. Secondly, the notion of the origin is often considered as being an idyllic instance, a time before the fall, whereas Nietzsche argues that beginnings are accidental as well as lowly and that they undo these fallacies of the origin. Finally, Nietzsche and Foucault are both suspicious of the pursuit of the origin as it opens up a whole discourse whose purpose it is to maintain the claim of an originary truth. Foucault seems to argue rather that the true state of the origin is perhaps closer to the Lacanian model of the dislocation of the subject.<sup>12</sup>

If we focus the preceding discussion more explicitly on the problems of writing history in postapartheid South Africa, it becomes clear that this notion of genealogy raises a number of important consequences, epistemological and political, for the writing of that history. While genealogy both utilizes and focuses on notions of race and identity, it does so in such a way as to call into question the very identity of that which is being examined. In this sense, genealogy does not allow the essentialising of identity. Rather, it exposes identity as being internally disassociated and located in “a network that is difficult to unravel”<sup>13</sup> – in other words, genealogy exposes the textured nature of identity.<sup>14</sup> In addition to its effect on identity, genealogy is also not interested in the erection of foundations but rather in tracing descent through time. Through maintaining ‘historical events’ in their proper dispersion (as opposed to a unified form), genealogy unsettles foundations and highlights the effects of history on the body.<sup>15</sup>

While genealogy does not interest itself with the uncovering of origins, it does tackle the problem of the emergence of things. It deals with the questions of when

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, pp 77 – 80

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p 81

<sup>14</sup> For an interesting and I think crucial discussion of the etymological link between text, texture, and textile see John Mowitt, *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1992), especially the introduction and first chapter.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p 82 – 84

things arose, but not in a particularly conventional historical sense. According to Foucault, emergence always takes place in what he calls “the interstice” between different forces that are never equal and, as such, sites of emergence always designate a place of confrontation. So, while on the one hand genealogy is concerned with descent – with tracing “the strength or weakness of an instinct and its inscription on the body”<sup>16</sup> – on the other hand it is concerned with emergence as designating sites of confrontation which allow for either new modes of interpretation or the maintenance of old modes. These moments of emergence then become characterized by what Foucault terms the “relationship of domination” that imposes certain rights and obligations on to those it dominates, which, in turn, are also the marks by which it can be identified on the body.<sup>17</sup>

In short, Foucault is arguing that the history of man is constituted out of a series of interpretations, where interpretation designates the violent appropriation – and then enforcement – of a system of rules (emergence) as opposed to the patient exposure of meaning in the origin (traditional history/metaphysics). This understanding of history moves in opposition to a prevailing sense where events are constituted as having their appropriate place on the stage of historical process. This process whereby history introduces discontinuity into our sense of being, that recognizes that the body and instinctual life are not stable but are rather inscribed by a variety of regimes, is what Foucault refers to as “effective history”. For Foucault, the difference between traditional and effective history can be identified in their respective handling of the event: Traditional history constitutes the event as continuity whereas effective history constitutes the event as the re-alignment of forces that allows for the appearance of the other, though masked.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p 84

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p 85

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, pp 86 – 88; in positing this understanding of history Foucault is quite close to the understanding of history contained in the epigraph with which this chapter began.

Aligning himself with Nietzsche's critique of the objectivity of the historian, Foucault further argues that the modern historian's mistake is lack of taste (the ability to distinguish) which is the mark of objectivity (which is in turn the mark of traditional history) and that, through this objectivity, the historian in fact becomes the mirror image of the demagogue.<sup>19</sup> Having investigated the effect of genealogy on history, he then moves to refigure Nietzsche's three notions of history in the light of this effect. For Foucault, Nietzsche's notion of monumental history becomes figured as the parodic, which works in a similar way to Nietzsche's monumental history except that the parodic multiplies these great moments/identities to such a degree that their validity becomes farcical, thereby exposing its charade. A disassociative history comes in the place of Nietzsche's antiquarian notion of history. In this refiguring, Foucault argues that the disassociative works in an opposite way to the antiquarian in that, instead of persecuting the new, disassociative history – through linking with genealogy – dissipates the foundations of things and affirms why we are not able to speak of identity in the proper sense. Finally, Foucault argues that Nietzsche's critical notion of history comes to be a sacrificial one. He makes this argument by pointing out that history has always operated out of a will to knowledge that actually sacrifices that same subject of knowledge. In this manner, Nietzsche's critical history results in the destruction of the subject that seeks knowledge rather than revealing new unexpected and uncomfortable ordinary truths.<sup>20</sup> What is clear from the above is that Foucault develops the critique of the subject by pursuing the critique of humanism and inviting us to consider the productivity associated with the representational structure of the discourse of history.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp 91 – 92

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, pp 93 – 96

## **But Can the Subaltern Speak: Spivak after Foucault**

Having briefly examined some broader questions of the writing of history – as a way of highlighting Foucault’s critique of the subject through the productivity of historical discourse – it is now necessary to shift our focus more explicitly to the question of identity within historical/intellectual discourse. A useful opening for this discussion, due to its explicit engagement with questions of identity and history, is Gayatri Spivak’s essay ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1988).<sup>21</sup>

In ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ Spivak asks the question of the representation of the subaltern within intellectual discourse. For Spivak, an approach to this problem must first contend with the nature of representation within the western intellectual traditions. Taking her cue from a conversation between Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault<sup>22</sup> she investigates how the intellectual’s role in the pluralisation of the subject in fact entrenches (and unifies) the western subject. Spivak locates the scene of this contradiction in the moment where Foucault and Deleuze valorise the concrete experience of the oppressed while they ignore the role of the intellectual and her responsibility to the institution. In short, this contradiction arises due to a lack of self-reflexivity (and, as we shall see, an apparent misreading of representation) in their discussion.<sup>23</sup> According to Spivak, what accentuates this problem reflected in the conversation between Foucault and Deleuze is the use and reliance on concepts of power, desire, and interest, where interest always follows desire and desire is never deceived (a reliance on an unfractured subject). Spivak argues that this formulation

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<sup>21</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, ‘Can the Subaltern Speak?’ (1988) in Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A reader*, (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, Cambridge University Press, 1993)

<sup>22</sup> See the conversation in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected essays and interviews*, tr. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, (New York, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), pp 205 – 217

<sup>23</sup> Spivak, (1993: p 69)

leads Foucault and Deleuze to posit a highly mechanical opposition between interest and desire, which she finds to be unproductive.<sup>24</sup>

The handling of the concept of representation has, according to Spivak, often been continued on a far too simplistic level by western intellectuals, here typified by Foucault and Deleuze. For Spivak there are two forms of representation that are always at work: the first is *vertreten* and the second is *darstellen*: *Vertreten* corresponds to the rhetoric of the trope; it is located within the political sphere and operates through, what Spivak refers to as, “the law of the father”. On the other hand, *darstellen*, as a form of representation, corresponds to the economic context and is concerned with signification and staging.<sup>25</sup> Criticizing Foucault and Deleuze for, in her reading, conflating these two forms of representation in their invocation of a totalizing power and an undeceivable desire, Spivak argues that a more productive formulation for how the subject is constituted within intellectual discourse can be found in the way that these two forms work on each other: “The staging of the world in representation – its scene of writing, its *darstellung* – dissimulates the choice and need for heroes, paternal proxies, agents of power, *vertretung*.”<sup>26</sup> Here Spivak clearly sets these two forms of representation against each other, the one form of representation, *darstellen*, is liberating while the other, *vertreten*, is associated with that which dominates and speaks for. What these differing notions enable in Spivak’s discourse is precisely what Foucault and Deleuze’s understanding of the subject, and more importantly the intellectual’s role in constituting it, disallows. She argues that in Foucault and Deleuze’s formulation the intellectual’s role in the constitution of the other is elided, or more precisely, made transparent – and, as such, the other can never actually be available to Foucault and Deleuze as subject.<sup>27</sup> In her formulation,

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pp 68 – 69

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pp 71 and 73

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p 74

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp 75 and 78

however, the intellectual is viewed as a bearer of representation, *vertreten*, which must be contended with.<sup>28</sup>

Having argued that Foucault and Deleuze employ an unfractured understanding of the subject (the subject's desires are what they are and its interests follow) and that this allows for an elision of the role of the intellectual in the constitution of the other (the intellectual can simply represent how the other chose to act – the other is free to act and therefore speak at will), she then moves to examine how the subaltern might be defined. At this juncture Spivak relies heavily on the work of the Subaltern Studies Collective and, more particularly, on that of Ranajit Guha.<sup>29</sup> Following Guha's argument, Spivak points out that the subaltern becomes defined as difference, or, as she argues in a more recent essay with regard to the term 'subaltern', as "the name of the space of difference inhabited by those who have no access to the lines of mobility within a society."<sup>30</sup> As such, Spivak argues that while in Foucault's discourse the postrepresentational language actually masks an essentialist agenda; in Subaltern Studies the claims to essentialism always denote heterogeneity.<sup>31</sup> Later Spivak will argue that this holding of an essentialist understanding of subaltern consciousness is a strategic, deconstructive move on the part of the Subaltern Studies Collective.<sup>32</sup> In this paper, however, Spivak views this as being somewhat problematic. She argues that a way out of the bind that Foucault,

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p 84

<sup>29</sup> Spivak is specifically drawing on the following: Ranajit Guha (ed), *Subaltern Studies I: Writing on South Asian history and society*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982); Ranajit Guha (ed), *Subaltern Studies II: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983); and Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p 79; see Gayatri C. Spivak 'From Haverstock Hill Flats to U.S. Classroom', in Judith Butler et al, *What's Left of Theory?: new work on the Politics of Literary Theory*, (New York; London: Routledge, 2000)

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p 80

<sup>32</sup> See for example: Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' (1985), in Landry, D. and Maclean G. (eds), *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*, (New York: Routledge, 1996), this will be discussed in more detail later.

Deleuze, and Guha find themselves in (the problem of a unified subject) is a theory of ideology, and, more particularly, a strategy for the reading of “ideological refusals”.<sup>33</sup>

Spivak posits the notion of “measuring silences” as the most useful strategy for reading these refusals. Drawing on Guha’s concept of “the prose of counter insurgency”<sup>34</sup> she argues that insurgency for the subaltern may be construed as a type of articulation as it is implicitly represented within the discourses of the elite, or, in the postcolonial setting, within the colonial archive.<sup>35</sup> In presenting this reading Spivak is not far from Foucault’s notion of the other that becomes apparent, though masked, within a field of emergence. However, rather than pursuing these two notions together, in what in my view would be a productive manner, Spivak joins with what she terms Derrida’s critique of Foucault by declaring that the latter’s project is subsumed within a nostalgia for lost origins.<sup>36</sup> Although Spivak effects this critique in a strategic move to both defend Derrida and posit deconstruction as a useful tool for engaging the subaltern, this critique hinges, in my view, on a misreading of Foucault’s understanding of emergence as denoting origin. Foucault, however, understands it as a conflictual interstitial space in which it may be possible to see a beginning but, and this is crucial, not an origin as origins denote the essence of a thing – which emergence does not. Despite this (strategic) misreading,<sup>37</sup> Spivak’s

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<sup>33</sup> Spivak, (1993: pp 81 and 82); interestingly, both Deleuze and Veyne argue that this lack of ideology is precisely the point. They argue, though differently and with different ends in mind, that Foucault’s notion of power, genealogy, and apparatus allows him to engage with life (and the past) without deferring to ideology and repression: Deleuze supplements Foucault’s refrain of “no ideology, no repression” by positing notions of lines of flight and deterritorialisation in order to account for desire and the possibility of resistance to power while Veyne emphasizes Foucault’s understanding of genealogy in such a way as to argue that Foucault is in fact a typical historian, just more articulate. For these two thought provoking essays see Paul Veyne, ‘Foucault Revolutionizes History’, tr. Catharine Porter, (pp 146 – 182) and Gilles Deleuze, ‘Desire and Pleasure’, tr. Daniel W. Smith, (pp 183 – 192) both in Arnold I. Davidson (ed), Foucault and His Interlocutors, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997)

<sup>34</sup> Ranajit Guha, ‘The Prose of Counter-Insurgency’ in Ranajit Guha (ed), Subaltern Studies II, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) pp 1 – 42

<sup>35</sup> Spivak, (1993: p 82)

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p 87

<sup>37</sup> See Mieke Bal, ‘Three-Way Misreading’, in Joan R. Resina (ed), *Diacritics*, volume 30, no.1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, Spring 2000) for a discussion of how Spivak effects strategic misreadings (and invites them) in order to create effective openings.

argument that Foucault, due to his assertion of the subject as unfractured, slips from the making visible to the making vocal (because we can see the other it can also speak) is, in my view, crucial for postcolonial history in general.

In utilizing Derrida's deconstructive strategies to examine the constitution of the subaltern, Spivak argues that what is necessary is not an ideological demystification but rather the realization that the European subject constitutes its other in an effort to preserve its own subjectivity, its inside. As such, Spivak suggests that while Derrida does not point out how to critique the constitution of the other, he does point out that this is a European problem, not a global one.<sup>38</sup> In this regard Foucault's project remains useful to Spivak in the sense that his analysis of disciplinisation and institutionalization is, in effect, an analysis of the constitution of the colonizer – the European whose problem this supposedly is.<sup>39</sup>

Furthering her discussion of the constitution of the subaltern subject, Spivak asks the question 'what of the subaltern woman?' Engaging with this question, she posits that there is something that occurs in the constituting of the third-world woman as subject that disrupts the dominant western discourses around the history of sexuality. It is not simply about causing the woman to lose her voice, to disappear into silence, but rather that, caught between tradition and modernization, the third-world woman (read subaltern subaltern) faces "a violent aporia between subject and object status."<sup>40</sup> Spivak asserts that the subaltern (especially the third-world woman) cannot speak, and that intellectuals, in order to engage with the subaltern, need to unlearn representation (*vertreten*) and learn to represent (*darstellen*) ourselves to the other.<sup>41</sup> In other words, we are being urged to learn to make our interests known in a politically scrupulous sense.

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<sup>38</sup> Spivak, (1993: p 89)

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p 90

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p 102

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p 104

Along these lines, the recent play *iMumbo Jumbo* by Brett Bailey<sup>42</sup> provides an interesting return – which will be threaded through the rest of this chapter – to the Crais/Peires affair with which this chapter opened. In this play a characterization of Jeff Peires – who it appears is here possibly representative of historians in general – is kept in the background for the first three introductory scenes of the play. However, as the play begins to gain momentum, Peires is removed to the side of the stage and kept hidden under a red shroud.

The contestatory nature of this particular historical enactment becomes even clearer when Peires interrupts the proceedings of the play in defence of an empirical history.<sup>43</sup> This is an interruption in which the character of Peires is made to argue, effectively, that the “facts” of history, which are plain to anyone that can read, are what makes history – not the writer who in this case would be the character of Gcaleka. This intrusion is allowed but simultaneously rejected through the removal of Peires from stage in an act that, I would argue, strategically situates this historical enactment along the lines of what Spivak calls for above and therefore at the heart of what is missing in the Crais/Peires affair. Of course, this needs to be argued further and, as such, will be returned to later in this chapter and the next.

### **The Crisis of History and the Postcolonial Question**

In positing her critique of Deleuze and Foucault and in extending her discussion of subalternity to that of the third-world woman, Spivak drew strategically from the work of the Subaltern Studies collective, particularly that of Ranajit Guha. In order to extend our discussion of the problem of identity and the writing of history to include that of the question of nationalism, it is necessary to return to the work of the

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<sup>42</sup> The play forms part of a trilogy that can be found in Brett Bailey, *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder: bewitching visions and primal high-jinx from the South African stage*, (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2003)

<sup>43</sup> See Bailey, (2003: p 117)

Subaltern Studies collective, particularly an interlocutor and contributor to the collective's work, Qadri Ismail. In 'Constituting Nation, Contesting Nationalism' (2000)<sup>44</sup> Ismail is attempting to posit a critique that may assist in transcending something like nationalism or the larger national question. Ismail is synthesizing and taking further the work of Guha, Chatterjee, and Spivak, amongst others. While his critique of nationalism, and particularly the nine claims that he makes with regard to it, is especially pertinent to our current discussion, it is also necessary to place it within a slightly wider intellectual framework – in other words, to momentarily digress.

Here, Frederic Jameson's arguably unfortunate essay 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism' (1986) is particularly useful. In this paper, Jameson is engaging – at least on the surface – with the question of the re-formulation/re-working of the Cultural Studies curriculum. Arguing that rethinking Cultural Studies necessitates an engagement with the West's Other, namely the Third-World, Jameson posits the notion that this engagement should be conducted on the level of literature as, according to him, the very question of something like World Literature arises out of the breakdown of Cultural Studies.<sup>45</sup> Importantly, Jameson also views the settling of this question as an opening that may allow the rescuing of Cultural Studies from Postmodernism. While this move allows Jameson to remain within the confines of his discipline, he employs a highly essentialist understanding of the Third-World, where Africa is "tribal" and Asia is "bureaucratic", to create this opening.<sup>46</sup> This move, however, is not all that makes his contribution unfortunate.

Having posited the above theory, it then becomes necessary for Jameson to ask the question 'what constitutes Third-World Literature?' His response is that the

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<sup>44</sup> Qadri Ismail, 'Constituting Nation, Contesting Nationalism: The Southern Tamil (Woman) and Separatist Tamil Nationalism in Sri Lanka', in Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jeganathan (eds), *Subaltern Studies XI: Community, Gender and Violence*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000)

<sup>45</sup> Frederic Jameson, 'Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism' in *Social Text*, No. 15, Autumn, (Duke University Press, 1986), pp 67 – 68

<sup>46</sup> Jameson, (1986: 66 and 68)

Third-World (and therefore Third-World literature?) is distinct from the West in a number of ways. One of the major distinctions is what Jameson identifies as the blurring between the public and private spheres, by which he means that all acts/writings/thinking are public and therefore political, whereas in the West this is apparently not the case.<sup>47</sup> Jameson then suggests that psychology (libidinal investment) in the Third-World must therefore not be understood in subjective terms but rather in political ones.

By positing the notion that all life, even unconscious life, is political, Jameson concludes that all politics in the Third-World are nationalist as a result of what he refers to as “the poisoned gift of independence.”<sup>48</sup> As such, nationalism is something that we cannot escape in the Third-World and, according to Jameson; literature (as an expression of the self?) in this context becomes a form of political medicine. In short, Jameson argues that Third-World literature is always a form of nationalist (political) allegory (medicine). The insertion of allegory here, alongside nationalism, is important for Jameson as he contends that allegory is inherently discontinuous which corresponds to the reality of our “fractured selves” – a theoretical posturing that places him quite close to Spivak, at least briefly for the purposes of this exposition.<sup>49</sup> Jameson doesn’t argue that no Western literature can be marked as national allegory, rather, he argues that Third-World literature is overtly and consciously nationalist allegory whereas that within the West is unconsciously so, if ever, as according to Jameson the West has largely done away with nationalism.<sup>50</sup>

What is important in this formulation for the purposes of this discussion is that it is clear that the national question is something that needs to be contended with (both from within and without the postcolonial third-world) in any engagement with the postcolonial subject. Jameson’s claim that all Third-World literature is national

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p 69

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pp 69, 72, 81

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, pp 69 and 73

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p 65

allegory, although severely critiqued by scholars such as Aijaz Ahmed, may yet prove useful in highlighting a common view of the Third-World and its nationalisms (as well as the difficulties inherent in disciplinary reason when it comes to contending with the West's other). The implications of this may best be understood by reading Jameson alongside Ismail's critique.

Ismail situates his essay explicitly along the trajectory of critical history by citing Guha's notion that any critical history should include the history of the subaltern as the basis for the type of history being written.<sup>51</sup> Ismail is attempting to posit a critique that might assist in transcending what has been termed the national question. The reality of the role that nationalism has played and does play in the Third-World is something that, I think, both Jameson and Ismail agree upon. However, whereas Jameson contends that this is essentially so and that the Third-World should therefore be viewed in these terms, Ismail argues that nationalism, always but particularly in the postcolonial Third-World<sup>52</sup>, is marked by a failure of promise and needs to be contended with. He thus commences by arguing that while it is generally accepted, after Anderson, that nations – and thereby nationalisms – are imagined, they are largely viewed as being constant once imagined. This is the notion that he is attempting to critique.<sup>53</sup>

For Ismail there are nine precepts or theoretical observations about nationalism that need to be realized as part of a critique that contends with the national question, a number of which will be examined here. The first, according to Ismail, is that nationalism is a “conservative ideology and politics”. This is not to say that nationalism (by which he means the process through which a citizen becomes a

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<sup>51</sup> Ismail, (2000: p 212)

<sup>52</sup> Importantly, drawing from Partha Chatterjee, Ismail argues that both postcolonial and anticolonial nationalisms share the need to emerge under serious opposition and that, as such, they are markedly different from European nationalisms, see pp 244 – 245 in the paper under discussion for more on this.

<sup>53</sup> Ismail, (2000: p 214)

national<sup>54</sup>) is constant but that – following from Chatterjee and Guha – nationalism is being constantly imagined and is in fact a “tissue of contradictions.”<sup>55</sup>

Alongside his argument that nationalism is always a conservative ideology and politics, Ismail suggests that nationalism can never (and never does) take its subjects for granted and, following from this, that the appearance of nationalism changes from conjuncture to conjuncture. Simply put, Ismail’s second proposition is that all those who are to become nationals (or who have been interpellated as such) are never plainly known; they must first be specified as such. Remaining within the logic of nationalism, considering that specifying one group must imply the non-specification of another group, those that are specified as belonging to the nation can be changed according to political necessity: those that were included could be excluded and those that were excluded could be included. In other words, not all groups within a nation are equal and those outside a nation may, according to political necessity, be granted equality within it.<sup>56</sup> This logic of nationalism, outlined in the three precepts above, leads Ismail to state that “nation be read situationally [because at different moments/conjunctures nations will take on different appearances] and dynamically [nation can only be understood as those mobilized by nationalism]”.<sup>57</sup> A key element of this situational and dynamic reading that Ismail calls for is Edward Said’s notion of contrapuntal reading – where opposite texts are read against each other and texts of a similar texture.<sup>58</sup>

What this understanding of the working of nationalism allows, according to Ismail, is the possibility of its subversion. If the logic of nationalism can be identified as a process of specification, inclusion, and exclusion, working at various conjunctures (in other words, as a disciplinary logic), then by focusing on how

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p 230

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p 214; for a further discussion of this see Ranajit Guha, ‘Discipline and Mobilise’ in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds), *Subaltern Studies VII*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992)

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p 215

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p 216

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p 244

excluded groups intersect with the nation or, alternatively, how included groups become excluded allows the unraveling of something like nationalism and the enabling of a critique of nation.<sup>59</sup> In this vein the inability of women to find a home in the nation (although Spivak disagrees with Ismail on this point)<sup>60</sup> and the inability of nationalism to fulfil its promise (of freedom and equality to all) due to the fact that this would mean an end to exclusion and thereby an end to nationalism itself,<sup>61</sup> both become key areas in which the concept of nation can be unsettled.

A crucial aspect of Ismail's critique for our discussion of the writing of history is the link that he draws between nationalism and narrative, not simply as a formative relationship but crucially as one that is continually at work on past events. According to Ismail, narrative forms an integral part in the outworking of nationalism as it is through narrative that nationalism manages to establish its story as truth (nationalism always narrativizes its existence – narrative is not, however, always nationalist).<sup>62</sup> Importantly, Ismail argues, nationalisms always seek to legitimate themselves through their age – as opposed to their youth – and as such History as narrative becomes an integral part of the working of nationalism. It is at this point that it becomes possible to speak of History as nationalist alibi, as the foundational narrative on which nations are premised. In the words of Ismail, “nationalism, and here it is no different to disciplinary history, continuously renarrativizes the past to suit the present.”<sup>63</sup> This linking of the operation of nationalism with that of history where we find that history becomes one of the key vehicles whereby the above

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p 216 – 217; this possibility becomes particularly interesting in our discussion as it shares with what John Mowitt (1992) terms an antidisciplinary critique founded on the notion of the working of text, which we will touch on briefly later.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p 218; Spivak's disagreement is, in my view, more semantic than anything else. She argues that the nation is precisely too much like a home and that it is too enabling, see Gayatri C. Spivak, 'Discussion: An Afterword on the Subaltern', in Partha Chatterjee and Pradeep Jeganathan (eds), *Subaltern Studies XI: Community, Gender and Violence*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000)

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p 219; in keeping with this line of thought, Ismail later argues that, in fact, nationalisms can never be taken at their word, including the word of their archival record, see p 243

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p 221

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p 257 emphasis added; within this understanding all history – not just nationalist histories – becomes complicit, in some way, with nationalism.

processes of nationalism are affected, is of crucial significance for the writing of history. According to Ismail nationalism cannot take its hegemony over its nationals for granted, they continually need to be interpellated by its ideology. One of the chief ways in which this continued hegemony (re-interpellation) is achieved is through the continuous narrativization of events. This constant narrativization is, importantly, not the rewriting of the events themselves but, rather, the rewriting of the meaning of the events, which Ismail argues is always done within ideological parameters.<sup>64</sup> The importance of history in this scenario is simply that it becomes the ideological vehicle through which events are given their meanings; in short, History becomes the tool of domination. When Ismail is referring to history in this scenario he links it together with nationalism, making them complicit with each other in their mobilization of a sense of nostalgia, a sense which he argues no nationalism is able to escape.<sup>65</sup>

If we return to Nietzsche's breakdown of the types and uses of history, it is only the monumental and the antiquarian modes of history that mobilize a sense of nostalgia, while the critical mode seeks to challenge this nostalgia in an attempt to unsettle the status quo. The strategic alignment with critical history effected by Ismail allows us to argue that the critical use of history – and this would include Foucault's understanding of genealogy and emergence as they dissipate any quest for the origin – is the most useful for writing postcolonial histories as it lends itself to the critique of nationalism.

Finally, in positing this notion of history being utilized to continuously re-interpellate citizens into the nation, Ismail steers clear of establishing this process as a totalizing power against which there can be no resistance. Rather, he argues that there are always multiple interpellations at work, not simply the re-interpellation of citizens as nationals, but the interpellation of citizens/people as resistant to becoming nationals. According to Ismail, a notion of performativity (role playing/darstellen) is

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid, pp 254 and 257

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, pp 251 and 280 – 282

useful for engaging with these multiple interpellations as, he argues, performativity flouts nationalism.<sup>66</sup>

In the argument thus far I have looked at both the broader implications of how history runs up against a problem of representation and, more specifically, on the problems of identity and nationalism. It is perhaps necessary to briefly present an overview of this argument before we move on. In Foucault's reworking of Nietzsche's argument in the light of his *Genealogy of Morals*, we saw that Foucault argues that genealogy is the type of history that allows for tracing the effects of power on the body and for tracking the emergence of regimes – a process through which one could observe, though masked, the presence of the other.

Spivak's response to Foucault's position was then highlighted by engaging with her argument that the nature of representation in Western intellectual traditions is responsible for the inability of these same traditions to access the other as such. Focusing on a discussion between Deleuze and Foucault, Spivak argued that through their reliance on an unfractured subject, they conflate the difference between *vertreten* and *darstellen* and claim that since the other/subaltern can be seen, it can also speak. Spivak contests this notion arguing that it is a misunderstanding of representation and the nature of the subject and suggests that a theory of ideology and, specifically, a strategy for reading ideological refusals could be a possible solution to Foucault, Deleuze, and Guha's dilemma. Shifting focus slightly, Jameson's view of the third-world, and particularly his essentialised understanding of third-world literature as nationalist allegory, was brought into play with Ismail's understanding of nationalism, recently outlined above. In his article Ismail examined the logic of nationalism, presented a number of intriguing insights/precepts for understanding and critiquing nationalism, and then presented a number of strategies for reading nation – namely, contrapuntal reading and paying attention to what he terms "performativity".

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid, pp 239 and 279

It is now necessary to turn to some strategies for writing history that attempt to approach the process in such a way as to contend with these problems outlined above. A strategy of writing the history of specifically postcolonial Africa that I would argue, through the utilization of the concept of a self-styling subject, is located between Ismail and Jameson, is that of Achille Mbembe.<sup>67</sup> His strategy sets itself up in opposition to much poststructural work for ignoring the materiality of discourse and thereby reducing the majority of struggles in Africa to problems/struggles over representation. In setting out his argument Mbembe begins by positing the notion that Africa represents the problem of the other for the west and that, as such, it is the foil through which the west's identity is constituted. According to Mbembe, Africa fulfils this role of 'the foil' through embodying everything that the west is not, in other words, through becoming the negative of the west – what he terms the embodiment of its fascination with nothingness – and thereby being equated with nothingness itself.<sup>68</sup> In situating his argument in this way Mbembe argues that the real problem for writing history, specifically in postcolonial Africa, is that Africa is entrapped within this web of nothingness, which first needs to be contended with before any fruitful work on postcolonial Africa can be done.<sup>69</sup>

A crucial factor in contending with this web of nothingness, according to Mbembe, is that African subjects must be recognized as both performing meaningful acts and as constituting the social relations that attribute meaning to them. As such, a key factor in his project – and indeed in his book – is the identification of sites where meaning is imbued and identifying where/how meaning is constituted.<sup>70</sup> Although an integral part of his project is the contestation of the way in which many disciplines write Africa, disciplines which he argues mainly arose out of Western Modernism, Mbembe does not view Western Modernism as the focus of his dispute

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<sup>67</sup> Achille Mbembe, *On The Postcolony*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), pp 5 – 6

<sup>68</sup> Mbembe, (2001: pp 3 – 4)

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid*, p 4 – 6

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, p 7

but, rather, he argues that the dispute must lie with the promises of the Enlightenment and what it claims to give us, an argument that places him quite close to much poststructural theory and specifically to Foucault.<sup>71</sup>

In order to tackle these problems (of the Enlightenment and nothingness), and so as not to act as though the 19<sup>th</sup> century hasn't taken place, Mbembe argues that, firstly, Africa needs to be approached within a global perspective and that a critical reading of western history is required and, secondly, that one must not ask the question of what it means to be African – as this immediately sets one outside of the dominant discourses. Finally, Mbembe argues that “Africa must be viewed as an entanglement” (caught in a web of times, disciplines, philosophies, and differing metaphysical understandings) which forms the time in which the African subject lives.<sup>72</sup> Having posited this theory of entanglement – which immediately makes it impossible to speak of anything like an essentialised African subject – Mbembe then continues to argue for a different understanding of time within this entanglement, where time itself is entangled in a web that may allow for its own reversal. Interesting and productive as these questions are, Mbembe's reliance on a self-styling subject (a subject that exists in this web of entanglement but as separate to it) places his argument in close proximity to that of Deleuze and Foucault earlier and therefore susceptible to Spivak's critique that was brought into play above.

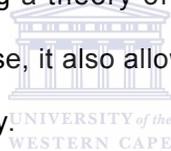
Furthering this discussion it is useful to turn once again to Spivak's interventions, specifically her engagement with the work of the Subaltern Studies collective, as it will allow us to both specify a different strategy for writing history as well as to provide a strategic reading of Bailey's play that was briefly discussed above. In her highly influential paper 'Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography' (1985) Spivak reflects on the work of the Subaltern Studies collective in an effort to demonstrate its deconstructive nature and to thereby open up a

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid, pp 9 and 11; on his proximity to Foucault on this point see Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment' in Paul Rabinow (ed), *The Foucault Reader*, (London: Penguin Books, 1984)

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, pp 9 and 14

possible strategy for, in a sense, righting the place of women in dominant historical discourse – a move that, according to Spivak, the collective falls short of.<sup>73</sup> In staging this reading of the collective’s work, Spivak first discusses the collective’s reading strategy. According to Spivak the collective’s project could be defined as being “a theory of reading in the strictest sense”, where history or the social-text – which Spivak argues does not amount to the reduction of life to a leaf in a book – is viewed as a continuous sign chain that, as such, can therefore be broken.<sup>74</sup> In other words, a theory of reading that utilizes a concept of text and parabasis.<sup>75</sup> Although the collective do not articulate their work in this manner – they state that they are working on a theory of subaltern consciousness – Spivak argues that this is a useful way to think of the “discursive displacements” which the group focus on in their reading (for example, Guha’s prose of counter insurgency) as it allows one to view the Collective’s work as constituting a theory of change that brings “hegemonic historiography to crisis.”<sup>76</sup> Of course, it also allows Spivak to situate the collective within a poststructural vein of theory.



Aligning the collective with poststructuralism becomes especially useful to Spivak when she focuses on the collective’s deployment of subaltern consciousness. Although the collective claims to simply use subaltern consciousness (it is there, it is not fractured), Spivak argues that there are elements in their work that indicate otherwise. One of these elements, according to Spivak, is the collective’s engagement with subaltern consciousness as a “political species of consciousness”, one that is only available as a trace – as a negative consciousness that is always

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<sup>73</sup> Spivak, (1985: 227)

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, pp 206 – 207

<sup>75</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak’s, ‘From Haverstock Hill Flat to U.S. Classroom, What’s Left of Theory?’ in Judith Butler, John Guillory and Kendall Thomas (eds), *What’s Left of Theory: New Work on the Politics of Literary Theory*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2000) and John Mowitt’s, *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object*, (Durham and London: Duke University press, 1992) are useful engagements with reading within these and will form a central line of argument for the following chapter.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, pp 206 – 208

skewed and partially unavailable.<sup>77</sup> As such, Spivak argues, subaltern consciousness is only available through the text of elite consciousness, in other words, the tracking of subaltern consciousness becomes the tracking of a subaltern subject effect (as opposed to a wholly constituted subaltern consciousness) within the narratives of the elite. The alignment that Spivak proposes is not simply of strategic importance to her; rather, she argues that if the collective's use of subaltern consciousness is not deconstructive then, through deploying the notion of subaltern consciousness literally, the collective is merely replicating the dominant hegemonic historiography by objectifying the subaltern.<sup>78</sup>

Spivak suggests that the collective draws much of its energy from the European critique of humanism and, especially, from the work of Foucault, Nietzsche, and Barthes – although she argues that the subaltern studies collective departs from this movement by strategically relying on a whole subject, which the European critique challenges.<sup>79</sup> Focusing specifically on Foucault's work, she argues that although it is limited to the European subject, and in fact insulates it, his work is useful in opening up possibilities for postcolonial, feminist, subaltern studies when we realize that a form of the powers that Foucault identifies are also at work in the postcolonial world.<sup>80</sup> Having made this argument, Spivak argues that through refusing to effect an abdication in terms of representing the subaltern through remaining “committed to the subaltern as the subject of his history”, the Subaltern Studies Collective manages to reveal the limit of the European critique of humanism.<sup>81</sup>

Operating strategically then, it becomes possible to re-read Bailey's iMumbo Jumbo in a more interesting and political light than viewing it as simply effecting a

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, p 211

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, pp 210 and 217

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, p 210; this despite the fact that earlier in 'Can the Subaltern Speak' Spivak criticized Foucault for relying on a whole subject.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p 219 – 221

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, p 218

refusal/rejection of history that uses essentialist depictions of Africans and African pasts.<sup>82</sup> Rather, reading the treatment and ultimate removal of Peires in the play as a kind of self-conscious internal parabasis – in other words, as a deliberate interruption of the form by the meaning – it is possible to view the play as operating a strategic essentialism of the kind that Spivak calls for above which may allow an alternate rendering of history that deals with subjects as fractured (the subjects in the play are not unified, there are competing interpellations taking place) and thereby offers a resistance to the dominant modes of writing history. This reading will be taken further in the following chapter, particularly in relation to Mowitz's understanding of the text and with a further reading of the concept of parabasis.

Coming back to what I have termed the Peires/Crais affair in the light of the above, it is possible to argue that the debate is symptomatic of the crisis within the discipline of history on a number of levels. One level at which this debate is symptomatic is in the reduction of the problem of writing history in postapartheid South Africa that is guided by the authority of the archive. Through attempting to reduce the problem in this way, as opposed to engaging with it as Spivak does, both Crais and Peires fail to recognize and contend with the politics of representation. A further level on which this debate is symptomatic – although on a more implicit level – is the manner in which it perpetuates the pervasive notions of South African exceptionalism, a perspective that is reinforced through Crais' notion that the discipline of history in South Africa is a microcosm of the discipline globally.

More importantly, through neglecting the politics of representation both Crais and Peires serve to simultaneously entrench the unified subject of the intellectual as well as the disciplinary mode of writing history whereby the subaltern is maintained and excluded as such. In other words, by attempting to reduce the problems to

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<sup>82</sup> This was argued by Helen Bradford, 'Review', in Andrew Bank (ed), *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, vol. 30, November 2004, Special Issue: Eastern Cape

simply that of the archive both Peires and Crais can be said to (in Crais' words) "miss the point".



## On Textuality

Academic discourse ... possesses an extraordinary ability to absorb, digest, and neutralise all of the key, radical, or dramatic moments of thought, particularly, a fortiori, of contemporary thought.

Julia Kristeva<sup>1</sup>

Irony is not just an interruption, it is ... the 'permanent parabasis' .... irony is the permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes.

Paul de Man<sup>2</sup>

The removal of a proxy of the historian Jeff Peires in Brett Bailey's widely acclaimed iMumbo Jumbo sparked a heated review of Bailey's collection of plays by another historian, Helen Bradford.<sup>3</sup> Bradford expresses disdain at the treatment of Peires and reads this as an example of Bailey's at best indifference if not outright hostility to what she terms "professional historians".<sup>4</sup> What is intriguing in this review is the way in which Bradford clearly feels obliged to read *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder* as constituting an attack on or, perhaps more pointedly, a dismissal of the discipline of history as such. However, if we place this review in the context of an earlier critique that Bradford levelled at a plethora of Eastern Cape historians, particularly Jeff Peires,<sup>5</sup> then we might be able to offer a different reading. It would require us to ask why Bradford characterises Bailey's plays in this particular way rather than reading them into her own critique. Bradford's earlier critique is both relevant to the current

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<sup>1</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Psychoanalysis and the Polis' tr. Margaret Waller, in W. J. T. Mitchell (ed), *The Politics of Interpretation*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), p 83

<sup>2</sup> Paul de Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, in Andrzej Warminski (ed), *Theory and History of Literature*, Vol. 65, (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp 178 – 179

<sup>3</sup> Helen Bradford, 'Review', in Andrew Bank (ed), *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, vol. 30, November 2004, Special Issue: Eastern Cape, pp 230 – 234

<sup>4</sup> Bradford, (2004: p 230)

<sup>5</sup> This critique can be found in Helen Bradford, 'Women, Gender, and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and Its Frontier Zones, C. 1806 – 70' in *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (1996), 351 – 370.

discussion and pertinent to the following chapters and therefore needs to be looked at more seriously before an answer to the above question can be suggested.

In 'Women, Gender, and Colonialism: Rethinking the History of the British Cape Colony and Its Frontier Zones, C. 1806 – 70' Bradford argues for a "rethinking" of history that incorporates the broadly ignored or knowingly elided (through a conceptual denial) category of women. She argues that this should be done not simply through an inclusion (writing about women) but rather through a process of utilising gender as a key concept for understanding history – a process that she argues could have great potential in altering our view of the past.<sup>6</sup> The works of Jeff Peires, Clifton Crais and Noel Mostert form the basis of Bradford's critique as it pertains to Eastern Cape history in general. But she treats Peires' work on the so-named "great Xhosa cattle-killing" (which both Jeff Guy and Bradford argue is a particularly androcentric and misleading term<sup>7</sup>) as symptomatic of 'androcentric' tendencies in South African historiography.<sup>8</sup> In these histories Bradford argues that "men are largely [represented as] gender neutral, conceptualised not as men but as people, linked with categories like economics, politics or race. On the other hand, women are [represented as] gendered beings, with an implicit or explicit emphasis on their sexual attributes and their familial relations with men."<sup>9</sup> In other words, women are not absent as figures; they are absent as agents.

Utilising *The Dead will Arise* to set to work, Bradford embarks on her critique through offering a re-reading of the role of Nongqawuse in the 'cattle-killing' episode. In her reading Bradford argues that Nongqawuse's prophecies need to be

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<sup>6</sup> Bradford, (1996: pp 351 – 353)

<sup>7</sup> See Jeff Guy, 'A landmark not a Breakthrough' in *South African Historical Journal*, 25, (1991), pp 229 - 231

<sup>8</sup> Bradford, (1996: p 353 and pp 360 – 368); the key texts that Bradford critiques are Jeff Peires, *The Dead will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing of 1856-7*, (Johannesburg: Raven Press, 1989); Clifton Crais, *The Making of the Colonial Order: White Supremacy and Black Resistance in the Eastern Cape, 1770 – 1865*, (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1992); and Noel Mostert, *Frontiers*, (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1992)

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, p 356

understood as gendered entries into an “era of gender and generational turmoil”.<sup>10</sup> In other words, Nongqawuse’s prophecies are significant in that they mark the nature of relations between genders and generations at that time and in that they could be read as constituting an entry, an enactment, of women’s perspectives on these issues. According to Bradford, however, Peires deliberately removes gender as a basis for analysing this history and thereby makes the story into one of “a black man’s oppression by the colonial order.”<sup>11</sup> The key to Peires’ move is his understanding of Nongqawuse’s uncle Mhlakaza as being one of the central actors in the ‘cattle-killing’, which is, according to Bradford, premised on Peires’ assertion that Mhlakaza and a certain William Goliath (an Anglican convert who worked with the Archdeacon Merriman) are in fact the very same person. This assertion, which Peires presents as incontrovertible, is in Bradford’s view based on unsubstantiated conjecture – even though it is uncritically replicated in the work of Mostert and Crais.<sup>12</sup> More than this, Bradford argues that the manner in which Peires (and Crais does not escape this criticism) does characterise Nongqawuse amounts to what she terms a reproduction of “rape myth in scholarly form”.<sup>13</sup>

Jeff Peires added an ‘afterword’ to the reissue of *The Dead will Arise* in 2003 in which he addresses some of the criticisms levelled at it. Responding to Bradford’s critique, Peires argues that the sources which Bradford utilises are not that reliable – either being oral evidence collected 30 years after the event or having been recorded in official depositions that had explicit political ends – and he argues that she is not interested in the facts, which he claims the historian should interpret objectively, but rather in applying a modern ideological perspective – that of feminism – to the past.

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<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, p 362

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, p 365; Jeff Guy argues a similar point to that of Bradford, see Guy, (1991: p 230)

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, p 365; importantly, Bradford is not alone in her critique of Peires on this point. See N. C. Tisani, ‘Peires, Pathbreaker’, p 235 and Andrew Manson, ‘An Imaginative Exploration of the World of the Xhosa’, p 241, both in *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 25, (1991). See FN 100 on p 367 in Bradford’s essay for her argument that Crais and Mostert uncritically assimilate this link.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p 367; in FN 101 on this same page Bradford implicitly implicates Crais alongside Peires in reproducing these myths.

In short, Peires makes light of her critique by dismissing it as being historically weak and, somewhat unqualified, as feminist.<sup>14</sup>

Returning to Bradford's critique of Bailey's plays, it is noteworthy that Bradford chooses to read the removal of Peires from stage as an act of dismissing the discipline of history rather than as an act of removing that very notion of history that she so vehemently critiqued and which she made Peires representative of only a few years earlier. While the source of this may well lie with Bradford's broader reading of the anti-woman overtones in the first of Bailey's plays in this trilogy, I would like to argue that there may be more to it. Particularly, I would argue that what occurs in these plays – in part through the dismissal of Peires – is that the difference between the disciplines of history and literature is being made indeterminate while simultaneously denying the reduction of the one to the other. In other words, what is occurring in these historical plays is that the discipline of history is being made to contend with its own textuality. It is this unsettling effect that Bradford responds to so vehemently as, I would argue; it threatens history's very disciplinarity.

In the previous chapter, the possible productivity of the theory of the text was broached in relation to questions of the representation of the subject and the crisis of history. Here the textuality of history has been brought into focus as something that, at least to Bradford, constitutes a problem for the discipline. Considering that the question of representation has been dealt with at length in the first chapter, I will here focus particularly on history's relation to textuality, later affecting a return to discuss the productivity of the theory of text for the question of representation. This is not a new question for the discipline of history – it has manifested in what I would call history's linguistic and literary turns. However, both these lines of inquiry have

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<sup>14</sup> see Jeff Peires, 'Afterword' in *The Dead will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing movement of 1856-7*, (Jeppestown: Jonathon Ball, 2003) pp362 – 363; Peires in fact refers to Bradford as "the feminist" in his response to her. Interestingly in the light of the disagreement between Crais and Peires discussed in the previous chapter, Peires finds it bizarre that Bradford would take him to task on an etymological point with regard to the Xhosa language – a move that he clearly considers to be petty and pointless.

faltered on the question of representation through their respective withdrawals into disciplinarity. As such, I will first examine these two and their critiques before posing what I think to be a more productive understanding of text for the question of representation.

### **History's Linguistic Turn**

According to John Toews the 'linguistic turn' in history occurred during a shift from 'ideas' to 'meaning' in the domain of intellectual history.<sup>15</sup> Toews argues, drawing heavily on Bowsma, that this shift was made necessary as rational consciousness was no longer viewed as the pinnacle of human thought. It was also argued that this shift could allow a transcending of the polar divide between thought and reality, a consequence of which would be the end of feuds between different specialisations and disciplines as well as requiring the emergence of a dialogic relationship with other disciplines. Of course, the suggestion that all this would place the intellectual historian at the centre of academic work was an influential factor. According to Toews, this shift required a 'linguistic turn' of the sort initiated by the rise of semiotics.<sup>16</sup>

While Toews indicates that this shift resulted in a greater confidence within the specialisation of intellectual history, he argues that this did not result in the ending of disciplinary feuds but merely in their shifting according to the type of linguistic turn that was affected. In the discipline of history, he argues, the linguistic turn resulted in a split between, on the one side, those that take the semiotic and symbolic nature of the turn to its extreme and, on the other, those that do not take it

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<sup>15</sup> John E. Toews, 'Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn: The Autonomy of Meaning and the Irreducibility of Experience', in *American Historical Review*, Vol. 92, No. 4, October, 1987, p 879; what makes Toews' article particularly useful is that it is written in the form of a review of many of the major works associated with the linguistic turn in history.

<sup>16</sup> Toews, (1987: pp 879 – 881) Toews draws specifically from William J. Bowsma, 'Intellectual History in the 1980s: From History of Ideas to History of Meaning,' in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, No. 12, (Autumn 1981)

that seriously. The effect of the former, according to Toews, for the discipline of history is that “historiography [is] reduced to a subsystem of linguistic signs constituting its object, ‘the past’, according to the rules pertaining in the ‘prison house of language’ inhabited by the historian”.<sup>17</sup> Having clearly taken his cue from Jameson in his criticism of the former Toews argues that the majority of historians tend to opt for the latter and rather historicise the past, thereby making it (apparently) irreducible to language. This is a pertinent discussion that will be returned to later in the chapter; first however, it is necessary to briefly indicate the implications of the linguistic turn as Toews sees it.

The first implication of the linguistic turn is the re-evaluation of what Toews terms the “text context problem”. He brings this problem into relief through an engagement with La Capra’s and Chartier’s proposed revision of the ‘Annales School’ (what Toews refers to as “socio-cultural history”), principally with their argument that historical evidence is not reducible to socio-economic models.<sup>18</sup> Here Toews suggests that La Capra and Chartier are arguing for a mode of reading that is both a critical and a creative action, in other words, a mode that engages with a reading as text (a reading that has the residue of other readings and their meanings in it, both explicitly and as a trace) and a mode that multiplies meanings without ever ‘arriving’ (a continuous play of meaning). What this mode of reading would allow for La Capra and Chartier is the deconstruction of “creation-reception” and “production-consumption” binaries that, in turn, necessitate a questioning of the “binary opposition between elite and popular culture”.<sup>19</sup> This, Toews suggests, would amount to a fundamental critique of socio-cultural history.

At this point Toews does not have a problem with La Capra and Chartier as he reads them as redefining what meaning is and how it is arrived at. It is when La Capra and Chartier take their reasoning further that Toews becomes uncomfortable.

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<sup>17</sup>Toews, (1987: p 882)

<sup>18</sup> ibid, p 883

<sup>19</sup> ibid, pp 883 – 885

For La Capra and Chartier the above also necessitates a critique of the opposition between representation and reality. They argue that in socio-cultural history meaning is derived from an extra-linguistic reality whereas, in their view, meaning in fact constitutes reality.<sup>20</sup> An implication of this – of context being a particular type of text as it is constituted out of “complex relations of signifying practices”, as is a text<sup>21</sup> – is that historical evidence, as that which is used to make meaning, must be viewed as being both “documentary” (it is imbued with meanings) and as “work-like” (it also gives/makes meanings).<sup>22</sup> Toews suggests that this would amount to a semiological history.

This “semiological history” may make it impossible, according to Toews, to avoid what he calls the “pitfalls of representation” without in fact doing away with history. In other words, Toews argues that this theory of the “linguistic density” of historical evidence has outlived its usefulness, as it seems to problematise the very foundations of the discipline.<sup>23</sup> Instead of relying on semiotic theory to such an extent (and to such an end) he suggests that what is needed is an understanding of the “complexity of mediated connections between [individual] experience and meaning” that would allow an engagement with the new analysis of meaning construction while allowing the “cultural sphere” to be “set aside as autonomous”.<sup>24</sup> According to Toews, this could be achieved through an effective use of the concept of discourse, thereby bringing us to what he views as the second implication of the linguistic turn for the discipline of history, namely, that discourse becomes the organising term for the conception and practice of history.<sup>25</sup>

While Toews acknowledges that a form of discourse based, at least loosely, on Foucault was made available to the American academy by Mark Poster he

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid*, p 885

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, p 886

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, p 885

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, p 886

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p 888

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p 889

suggests that a more productive understanding of discourse than Foucault's – particularly to the ends outlined above – can be found in the work of J. G. A. Pocock, in which three elements of discourse are identified.<sup>26</sup> The first of these is that discourse contains a structural dimension that is stable and constituted out of a number of “languages” (these “embody the rules that ... [determine] what counts as reality and [limit] the possible ways in which realities can be connected”<sup>27</sup>) that can be operating at any one time. For Toews, the historian's task then becomes the identification of these “languages” so that they can be applied to all texts and contexts. A second factor of discourse, according to Toews' reading of Pocock, is that of speech acts by which he means those events in language that manipulate the structural dimension of discourse so as to transform it. It is this interplay between form and speech (“structure and action”) that Toews argues is actually the mark of discourse.<sup>28</sup> Thirdly, Toews suggests that for Pocock discourse can only be understood within a concept of the relationship of language and experience where language is understood as “an inherited inventory of constituted patterns of meaning” and where experience is viewed as being situated within its own history. In other words, discourse (and Toews finds this particularly useful) needs to be viewed as the primary operating element in the interaction between meaning and experience.<sup>29</sup>

Understanding discourse in this light is useful for Toews in that it allows him to argue, drawing on Martin Jay's discourse analysis of western Marxism, that historical understanding needs to contend with both meaning and experience; in

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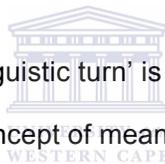
<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, pp 890 – 892; Toews' dislike for Foucault's understandings of discourse follows from his reading of Allan Megill's *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) where Megill argues that their theories are incapable of engaging with the real world and that to take them literally would be madness. This criticism, Toews argues, hinges on experience – something that he thinks should be a key element of historical understanding. See Toews, (1987: pp 893 – 897) for his reading of Megill.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*, p 891

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, p 891

<sup>29</sup> *ibid*, p 892

other words, it needs to contend with the “everyday lived individual”.<sup>30</sup> More than this, it also allows history to be situated – to some extent – at the centre of academic inquiry, as discourses cannot be understood separate to the historical constructions of meaning and experience that they negotiate. Toews argues that the historian should be viewed as the empiricist who can moderate theory. He argues this by reading Skinner’s *The Return of Grand Theory* as an indication of the consequences of theory and Hollinger’s *In the American Province* as providing a strategy through which the historian can moderate this effect.<sup>31</sup> This strategy requires the historian to hold on to a number of key principles in the face of theory, namely: that thinking is a historical act that takes place within events and structures that are mediated by discourses, that the articulation of arguments is historically significant, and finally that the historian’s voice becomes distinct and meaningful within a specific community of inquiry.<sup>32</sup>



In short, for Toews, the ‘linguistic turn’ is useful to the discipline of history in that it allows a rethinking of the concept of meaning. However, before the unsettling effects of history’s textuality – which it is forced to face through the ‘linguistic turn’ – can be brought to bear on the discipline, discourse – as that which operates the space between meaning and experience – needs to be included as a primary interpretive category in historical inquiry. According to Toews, this allows the maintenance of the individual as the true object of history and it situates the historian at the centre of critical academic inquiry. This shift to experience as a foundational category for history is not unique to the North American context in which Toews is writing; it also lies at the core of much radical social history in South Africa from the mid-70s to the present. This vein of writing history can, I think, generally be viewed

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid*, p 897; importantly, this “individual” is to be understood as free and able to act. While Toews does seem to argue that this individual is caught within a web of meanings and experience, he nevertheless works on the assumption that this individual is unproblematically there and can speak – an understanding that an encounter with the problem of representation in postcoloniality, as was indicated in the previous chapter, quickly unsettles.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid*, pp 898 – 905;

<sup>32</sup> *ibid*, p 904

as the dominant mode of writing history in this country and therefore deserves some comment.

Belinda Bozzoli and Peter Delius's 'Radical History and South African History'<sup>33</sup> provides an overview of the emergence of what has been termed "radical history" in South Africa. What is of particular interest in this piece is the manner in which the category of experience is utilised as a bridge that makes possible the synthesis of leftist work in the academy and 'popular' uprisings in the 70s and 80s.<sup>34</sup> In constructing this history, Bozzoli and Delius place a strong emphasis on the impact of what they term the "indigenous left" on the development of radical history as well as forwarding the category of experience as allowing the historian access to this newly "re-emergent" expression of human agency.<sup>35</sup>

A mode of historical writing that, according to Bozzoli and Delius, began its rise to credency during that time is that of the biography.<sup>36</sup> Ciraj Rassool, in his PhD dissertation *The individual, auto/biography and history in South Africa* (2004) argues how this actually comes to constitute what he refers to as a "biographic order" that has set the tone for the writing of history in a postapartheid South Africa.<sup>37</sup> While these histories tend to focus on leading figures such as Oliver Tambo or Nelson Mandela; Charles van Onselen, in his *The Seed is Mine* (1996)<sup>38</sup>, has written what might be construed in social history terms as a biography from below. Although the book's framing leaves us with little doubt that it is also to be read as a history of van Onselen as historian<sup>39</sup>, it is an intriguing (though sometimes narratively painful) telling

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<sup>33</sup> Belinda Bozzoli and Peter Delius, 'Radical History and South African History' in Josh Brown et al (eds), *History from South Africa: Alternative Visions and Practices*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991)

<sup>34</sup> Bozzoli and Delius, (1992: p 21)

<sup>35</sup> *ibid*, pp 12 – 13 and 21 – 23

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, p 19

<sup>37</sup> Ciraj Rassool, *The individual, auto/biography and history in South Africa*, PhD Thesis, Department of History, University of the Western Cape, 2004 (unpublished)

<sup>38</sup> Charles van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, a South African Sharecropper, 1894 – 1985*, (Cape Town: David Phillip, 1996)

<sup>39</sup> See particularly the 'Preface and Acknowledgements' (v – xi) and Kas' funeral on pp 531 – 532, for this framing. This interpretation also allows a different reading of the main title "the seed is mine".

of the events that surrounded and constituted the life of Kas Maine. For its flow of narrative this book has relied explicitly on the category of experience as its evidentiary resource (and the historian's apparently unproblematic ability to reflect this) and on the enforcing of the distinction between history and historiography (practice and theory) that the work of someone like Dominique LaCapra has consistently sought to collapse.

This reliance on the category of experience for the writing of history, both in how it has been utilised by Toews above and in the South African context, has been criticised in recent years. Particularly, the notion that the category of experience fixes the identity of those being represented has been at the centre of these criticisms. Joan Scott, in a discussion of 'Experience',<sup>40</sup> provides a lucid reading of the role of experience in the writing of what she calls "histories of difference". Scott argues that generally within these histories – and particularly in her discussion of Delaney – the making visible becomes privileged as it is thought to break the silence of previously excluded subjects and, following this, writing becomes the scene of this production of visibility.<sup>41</sup>

This inclusionary process, according to Scott, which is heavily reliant on experience for its validity, has genuinely amounted to a critique of what she terms "normative history". This move towards experience has generally been well received in the discipline due to its reliance on experience as an ultimate referential form of evidence, in short, due to its affirmation of history's claim to represent reality – the task that Toews puts it to in his article discussed above. However, it is this very reliance on experience that, for Scott, removes the critical dimension of these histories of difference, as experience becomes the fact of difference and its

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<sup>40</sup> Joan W. Scott, 'Experience' in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (eds), *Feminists Theorize the Political*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992) pp 22 – 40; for a pertinent discussion of the problematic use of the category of experience in radical history in the South African context, see Nicky Rousseau, *Popular history in South Africa in the 1980s: The politics of production*, MA Thesis, Department of History, University of the Western Cape, 1994, particularly chapter 3 (unpublished)

<sup>41</sup> Scott, (1992, p 24)

construction is elided.<sup>42</sup> As such, “the evidence of experience, whether conceived through a metaphor of visibility or in any other way that takes meaning as transparent, reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems”.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, Scott argues that our focus should rather be on how subjects are constituted through experience; we should explain experience, not use it as a basis for explanation.<sup>44</sup>

Simply indicating the difficulties with the category of experience for the writing of history is, for Scott, not adequate. Rather, considering that history can be construed as a foundational discipline par excellence, it is necessary to investigate how experience operates as a foundation.<sup>45</sup> In other words, it is necessary to ask how experience is used and to what ends it is used as a basis for the writing of history. According to Scott, experience establishes the prior existence of individuals thereby making them into the starting point of knowledge. As such, it operates within an ideological system that “naturalises difference” and, through operating as a foundation, makes history into a system of the same.<sup>46</sup> The uses to which the category of experience is put in the writing of history are manifold: Firstly, one of the primary uses according to Scott is that experience serves to specify the limit of what she calls “post-structural histories” (the manner in which Toews utilises experience in his ‘Intellectual History’ is characteristic of this); Secondly, following from Collingwood’s *The Idea of History*, experience is used to separate the historian from her work, thereby guaranteeing the notion of her objectivity and grounding the researcher’s identity as a historian; and finally, following from Scott’s reading of E. P. Thompson’s *Making of the English Working Class*, experience is used to grant agency to individuals which is expected to result in social class.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, pp 24 – 25

<sup>43</sup> *ibid*, p 25

<sup>44</sup> *ibid*, p 26

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*, p 26

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*, p 27

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*, pp 27 – 30

Scott critiques the latter, arguing that the notion of the subjection of human agency is not taken into account in the concept of experience. She also argues that experience masks both how identities are constituted and its own discursive nature.<sup>48</sup> In critiquing the first use of experience, she turns to a reading of John Toews' 'Intellectual History after the Linguistic Turn'.

Scott argues that in Toews, the linguistic turn is reduced simply to the study of meaning and that the discipline of history is taken to be concerned with explanation. In other words, the discipline of history cannot be fundamentally shaken by the linguistic turn, as its field of interest is broader than that which Toews argues the linguistic turn is limited to.<sup>49</sup> As I argued earlier, Toews understands the broader concern of history to be the relationship between meaning and experience that he argues is mediated through discourse. Scott critiques this formulation by Toews on the basis that in attempting to protect experience from what he would term relativism, he refuses to define experience, thereby masking its constituted nature and establishing it as a foundational concept. This, according to Scott, works to mask the historian's role in the production of knowledge, thereby securing the historian as a unified subject while obscuring her role in the constitution of other subjects.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, in Toews as in Collingwood, experience serves as a guarantee of objectivity. A consequence of this is that experience works as a starting point for historical inquiry and as a kind of pre-made interpretation that works to fundamentally limit what can be said in history.<sup>51</sup>

Scott demands that we historicise experience in a manner that transforms the manner through which the category is constituted into the actual object of historical inquiry. For Scott this would amount to a "reading for the literary" where all categories (whether class, race, or gender) need to be viewed as being "contextual, contested,

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<sup>48</sup> *ibid*, pp 30 – 31

<sup>49</sup> *ibid*, p 32

<sup>50</sup> *ibid*, p 32; At this point Scott's critique of Toews is very close to Spivak's critique of Foucault and Deleuze in the previous chapter.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid*, p 33

and contingent”.<sup>52</sup> Thus Scott argues that the focus of history should be on the history of foundationalist concepts which, she argues, is what Foucault argues for in his ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’. In other words, in order to write a non-foundational history, Scott suggests that “the study of experience ... must call into question its originary status in historical explanation.”<sup>53</sup> Although she suggests that her argument does not “undercut politics”<sup>54</sup>, the emphasis on the making visible in Scott’s argument places it in close proximity to that of Foucault and Deleuze (discussed in the previous chapter) and may make it susceptible to Spivak’s critique of the latter. In any case, Scott’s critique of Toews and the use of experience makes it clear that the restriction of the linguistic turn to meaning and the defensive embrace of the category of experience is not useful for writing postcolonial histories.

### **White’s Literary Turn**



In the discussion of Toews’ paper, it was noted that his restriction of the ‘linguistic turn’, through the utilisation of the category of experience, was effected in response to another unfolding of the ‘linguistic turn’ in history; a thread that was developed by those who Toews argues take the semiotic and symbolic nature of the turn to its extreme. The work of Hayden White has been most strongly associated with this second thread and will form the basis for my discussion here. White’s work, though not expressly presented in this manner by him, can be viewed as forming two strategic approaches to what can be loosely referred to as the problem of history’s textuality – the pivot point between the two being the critique aligned with the holocaust that his approach was subjected to.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *ibid*, p 36; the destabilising effect of the linguistic turn for the discipline of history is here perhaps contained within the domain of literature.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid*, p 37

<sup>54</sup> *ibid*, p 38

<sup>55</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: the Historical Imagination in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Europe*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973) and *Tropics of Discourse*, (Baltimore and

White bases his earlier approach to this question on the notion that the discipline of history was facing a crisis, namely, that of the loss of its identity as the mediator between the arts and the sciences.<sup>56</sup> He formulates this argument by suggesting that much of what constitutes the arts and the sciences is now very different to that which was prevalent during History's inception as a discipline in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to White, history fails in the view of both of these 'disciplinary paradigms' (of science and art) due to what he construes as a "moral failure". Particularly, he argues that the sciences fault the historian for a "failure of method or intellect" (the criticism that he views to be the most sympathetic to the modern historian) and that "the artist indicts him [sic] for a failure of sensibility or will".<sup>57</sup> This crisis, for White, necessitates that the discipline of history historicise its own disciplinisation in order to gain an identity that is neither art nor science (while simultaneously updating its notion of these) and that can address the problem of freeing the present from what he calls, following Nietzsche, "the burden of history."<sup>58</sup>

The above requires, according to White, a re-evaluation of the modes in which history is written. Specifically, while White argues that there are some theorists who would attempt to reconstitute history as a science through objectivity,<sup>59</sup> he rejects what he terms the "Rankean innocent eye hypothesis" (the claim that the historian can represent history neutrally and thereby that history is a science) and rather suggests that interpretation is crucial to all historical representation.<sup>60</sup> White is not arguing that the majority of historians do not acknowledge the role of interpretation in historical work; rather, he contends that in the writing of history the

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London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) – both collections of previously published articles – are representative, I would argue, of the first engagement and Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) is his primary work that I would associate with the second engagement. I have used his articles as they were published rather than these books.

<sup>56</sup> White, (1978: p 28)

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*, pp 29 – 35

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*, p 41

<sup>59</sup> Hayden White, 'Interpretation in History' in *New Literary History*, Vol. 4, No. 2, On Interpretation: II, (Winter, 1973), p 286.

<sup>60</sup> White, (1973: p 284)

centrality of what he terms “the politics of interpretation” is generally elided through the manner in which this question is resolved. For White, the way in which the question of interpretation (its politics) is resolved is through a process of narrative emplotment.<sup>61</sup>

Narrativity, White suggests, is particularly important to the writing of history in that it is the way through which historical events become transformed into reality. In other words, narrativity provides the reality effect that he argues historians try to engender through their writing.<sup>62</sup> In this argument narrative emplotment is crucial to the writing of history as it is the means through which both the question of interpretation is resolved and the effect of the real is produced in historical production. Considering that White argues that “interpretation [always] presupposes politics”, a further use of narrative emplotment as a process through which interpretation is achieved is that it makes available a limited number of possible political positions that define the type of history that is being written.<sup>63</sup> In other words, it makes available the possibility of specifying how politics might inform historical writing and how history might be written in such a way as to conform to his desire for a history that is not ideologically determined/determining.<sup>64</sup>

The above posits the notion that a key element in the interpretive work of a historian is the choosing of a plot-structure; a process that, according to White, operates on three equally important levels, namely the aesthetic, the epistemological, and the ethical.<sup>65</sup> The aesthetic here has to do with the type of narrative strategy employed by the historian (i.e. Romance, Comedy, Tragedy, Satire), the epistemological has to do with the choice of explanatory paradigm used (i.e. Idiographic, Organicist, Mechanist, Contextualist), and the ethical has to do with the

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<sup>61</sup> Hayden White, ‘The Politics of Historical Interpretation: Discipline and Sublimation’ in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 9, No. 1, *The Politics of Interpretation*, (September, 1982), pp 113 – 114

<sup>62</sup> Hayden White. ‘The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality’ in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 1, *On Narrative*, (Autumn, 1980), p 9 and p 23, see also White, (1982: p 116)

<sup>63</sup> White, (1982: p 114)

<sup>64</sup> *ibid*, pp 118 and 120; see also White, (1973: p 314)

<sup>65</sup> White, (1973: pp 297 – 307)

ideological positions that determine the choice of the former two (i.e. Anarchist, Conservative, Radical, Liberal).<sup>66</sup> The link between these three is more of an “elective affinity” than a “dictated relationship”; nevertheless, White argues that they work together to decide on the trope that will inform the writing of a specific history.

As such, White argues, all history is written along a metaphoric, a synecdochic, a metonymic, or an ironic trope. While the correlation between these tropes and the different modes of interpretation specified above is always really one of, again, “elective affinity” (in other words, White cannot conclusively say that the following formulations are inevitably bound together), White suggests that they can be placed into relatively predictive groupings. Accordingly, the metaphoric trope corresponds with a romantic emplotment, utilises an idiographic mode of explanation and stems from/makes available anarchic implications; the synecdochic trope corresponds with a comic emplotment, utilises an organicist mode of explanation and stems from/makes available conservative implications. The metonymic trope, for White, corresponds with a tragic mode of emplotment, utilises a mechanistic mode of explanation and stems from/makes available radical implications; and, finally, the ironic trope corresponds with a satirical mode of emplotment, utilises a contextualist mode of explanation and stems from/makes available liberal implications.<sup>67</sup> White arrives at the correlation between these tropes and their various levels of interpretation through a reading of a number of different histories of the French revolution that, he argues, relate very different articulations of the same series of events due to the trope along which they are written.<sup>68</sup> An important consequence of this (tropological history) is that it allows White to argue that when a historian relates

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<sup>66</sup> *ibid*, p 307

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*, pp 307 – 312; LaCapra’s argument that the invoking of these tropes comes from White’s reading of Vico and that they usher in “through the back” door what White tries to usher “out through the front” is interesting reading in opposition to this claim. See Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), pp 76 – 77 for this argument.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid*, pp 294 – 307

a moment of history, she doesn't relate the story but only a sense of the types of emplotment that could be undertaken.

It is at this point that White's notion of the literariness of history<sup>69</sup> impels him to engage with the debate surrounding the revisionist histories of the holocaust. The response to these histories utilised the experience of the holocaust as something that specified the limit of what could be said in history. In 'The Politics of Historical Representation,' White argues that there is nothing intrinsically wrong, in terms of historical writing, with the revisionist historians' accounts of the holocaust – just as, he argues, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the histories that the Palestinians and the Israelis produce. The question is not one of facticity but of politics.<sup>70</sup> The logic of this argument, building on the notion of tropological history, can perhaps be best viewed in White's discussion of 'historical pluralism'.

In his 1986 paper of the same name,<sup>71</sup> White responds to W. J. T Mitchell's critique of "pan-textualism", namely "a political ideology" that "reads the entire fabric of nature and culture as a network of signs". While Mitchell concedes that this pan-textualism was a critical development, he argues that it suffers from what he terms a "deficient historical consciousness of a 'sense of history'".<sup>72</sup> Mitchell's invocation of a 'sense of history' as a baseline for what is permissible in the writing of history is effected, according to White, as literary pluralists need the discipline of history to be free from contestations, to be fully constituted, in order to be able to operate effectively as a discipline and so as to "check [literary pluralism's] fall into 'radical relativism'".<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> He has already abandoned the discipline of history for that of literature rather than pursuing the unsettling effects of history's textuality on itself, as will be made clearer shortly.

<sup>70</sup> White, (1982: 135 – 136)

<sup>71</sup> Hayden White, 'Historical Pluralism', in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 12, No. 3, (Spring, 1986); Importantly, the 'pan-textualists' discussed here are not the revisionist historians mentioned above.

<sup>72</sup> White, (1986: pp 480 – 481); La Capra and Chartier, as discussed above in the review of Toews, would fall under this categorisation by Mitchell.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid*, p 484

Pan-textualists, of which Derrida, Barthes, and Foucault are brought forward as exemplars by White, in their writing problematise the very notion of a historical sense by arguing that history has to do with language rather than the reporting of facts. In other words, according to White, pan-textualists view history as both being subject to many readings and as being an absence that is only accessible through texts that need to be rewritten. As such, they bring the notion of a 'sense of history' into question and a critique from that angle seems to be nonsensical<sup>74</sup>. In short, White argues that Mitchell misunderstands that "what is at issue is not the interpretation of facts but the nature of historical factuality itself".<sup>75</sup>

Having established the above, White then interrogates what would constitute something like 'historical pluralism', a category into which he would place his own writings. This investigation leads him back to the notion of tropological history, specifically the aspect of narrative being an interpretive mode (it imbues meanings into events) as opposed to the explanatory mode (it extracts meaning from within an event) that literary pluralists identify it as.<sup>76</sup> This is crucial to White as it allows him to argue both that the emplotting of history (the meaning it is given) must be culturally specific and that there can be as many emplotments of history as that society will recognise to be valid as stories (so the pluralist can escape to cultural determinism to avoid relativism). It is here that we see the full implications of White's theory: all histories that are properly narrativised are equally valid as histories no matter how reprehensible they might be to us (this is effectively what White said about revisionist histories); we might reject them politically, but that does not reduce their validity. And the only discipline that is properly placed to decide what a valid emplotment is, is the one that knows what emplotments are valid to what culture, namely, literary studies.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *ibid*, p 486

<sup>75</sup> *ibid*, p 483; White, importantly, does not view himself as a pan-textualist.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid*, p 487

<sup>77</sup> *ibid*, p 488 – 489; here history becomes subsumed in the literary.

Unfortunately for White, presenting his theory as pluralist allows his critics to simply nod their heads, as it were, and move on: if it is simply one theory among many theories that are all equally valid, then there is no need to linger on it. However, White re-addresses the problem that the holocaust poses for his theory in his 1996 essay “The Modernist Event”<sup>78</sup> in which he re-evaluates the status of the holocaust as event. Importantly, this constitutes an attempt to reinstate his theory for the writing of history, not his position on the revisionist histories of the holocaust. White’s argument here is that the dissolution of the “trinity of event, character, and plot” in modernist literature and art has been extended to the writing of history.<sup>79</sup> The dissolution of character and plot do not seem, at least to White, to be as important for the writing of history as the dissolution of the event. Significantly, this dissolution of the event in modernism is the modernist event itself. In other words, the modernist event is an event dissolved. What White means by this is that the sheer magnitude of these events and their effects, combined with the sheer volume of documentary evidence (photos, films, etc.) that attests to them and that seems to portray the objective truth of these events, makes them almost incomprehensible and somehow resistant to traditional historical narrativisation.<sup>80</sup> This resistance, according to White (and here he is specifically speaking of the Holocaust), is due to the fear that to narrativise may mean to humanise, to make whole, to “enoble the event” which our understanding of the event denies.<sup>81</sup> This, however, does not make the event unrepresentable.

White argues that, while the modernist event makes it very difficult – if not impossible – to narrativise it traditionally, it is possible to represent it in a narrative of a modernist type, what White calls an “antinarrative nonstory”. In these modernist narratives (of which White takes Virginia Woolf’s *Between the Acts* (1970) as the pre-

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<sup>78</sup> Hayden White, ‘The Modernist Event’ (1996), reprinted in Hayden White, *Figural Realism: Studies in the Mimesis Effect*, (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999)

<sup>79</sup> White, (1999: p 66)

<sup>80</sup> *ibid*, pp 72 – 74

<sup>81</sup> *ibid*, p 81; here we see explicitly that the historical narrativisation of an event is decided politically in our present.

eminent example), the events flow out of their outlines, into each other, thereby losing their distinctness and any pretence to meaning that might be artificially attached to them.<sup>82</sup> For White this mode of narrativisation that is made necessary by the modernist event tends towards an aesthetic of the sublime and disgusting, a tendency that, he argues; only histories written along an ironic trope can achieve.<sup>83</sup>

In presenting the ironic as the most productive trope for the writing of history, White's position comes close to Spivak's essay 'From Haverstock Hill Flat to U.S. Classroom, What's Left of Theory?'<sup>84</sup> with one (there are more, but one is crucial) distinction: White seems to view irony as imbuing meaninglessness into history whereas Spivak views irony as a "constant parabasis" – the continuous interruption of the form by its content.<sup>85</sup> Rather than imbuing meaninglessness, this makes possible, for Spivak, a mode of engaging with the postcolonial subaltern subject that she specifies as "the infinite unguaranteed patience to learn to learn from below"<sup>86</sup> or, as she formulated it in 'Deconstructing Historiography' (discussed in the previous chapter), a strategic essentialism that brings into relief – and therefore into play – the limit of the European critique of humanism.

This becomes particularly important when we recall the opening scene of this chapter: the removal of Peires from the stage of representation in Bailey's play, 'iMumbo Jumbo'. This moment which I argue causes the discipline of history to face its own textuality, is also the very moment that – as was discussed in the previous chapter – brings into play a strategically essentialist enactment that may allow an engagement with the postcolonial subaltern subject in the manner that Spivak calls for above.

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<sup>82</sup> *ibid*, p 81

<sup>83</sup> White, (1982)

<sup>84</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak, 'From Haverstock Hill Flat to U.S. Classroom, What's Left of Theory?' in Judith Butler, John Guillory and Kendall Thomas (eds), *What's Left of Theory: New Work on the Politics of Literary Theory*, (New York and London: Routledge, 2000)

<sup>85</sup> Spivak, (2000: p 31); LaCapra is more blunt and argues that White's notion of irony protects him from the destabilising effects of the 'other', see LaCapra, (1983: p 78)

<sup>86</sup> *ibid*, p 34; Spivak marks this possibility as "the impossible solution", nevertheless, it is the only ethical position to take in relation to the subaltern.

While it is important to critique the constitution of subjects, it is, we can deduce from the preceding argument, also imperative to engage with the subaltern 'other'. Through a substantial lack of a theory of the subject in his notion of the writing of history (or even of the problematic nature of the archive<sup>87</sup>) White does not address the latter. Spivak, in her reading of the text of a symposium on interpretation in her essay 'The Politics of Interpretation',<sup>88</sup> provides a substantial critique of White on this point. He fails here, according to Spivak, mainly due to his lack of a concept of ideology as being both larger than and dependent on the individual subject (which Spivak views as crucial for any engagement with the subaltern) and he rather engages in the ideology of disciplinary privileging by maintaining literary criticism as the key to historical writing.<sup>89</sup> The narrow understanding of ideology that White utilises (ideology that pertains only to an individual) betrays, Spivak argues, the operation of a notion of the freely choosing subject (one might as well say European) in White's theory; a notion that a broader understanding of ideology would dispel.<sup>90</sup>

Spivak prefers Booth's notion of language to that of White's as his is much closer to what she calls Bakhtin's notion of the "dialectical hinging of subject and language in/of ideology". She refers to this as "the politics of textuality" by which she means "seeing that the network of politics-history-society-sexuality [amongst others] defines itself in ideology by acknowledging a textual or weblike structure."<sup>91</sup> Finally, Spivak critiques White on the very terminology that he uses to specify his ideal type

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<sup>87</sup> White views the archive as "an unprocessed historical record", a chaos that the historian – through narrativity – imposes a formal order on to. This notion, LaCapra argues, simply "gives rise to [an] avoidance of the problem of interplay between structure and play in the text and in one's relation to it" – in other words, it avoids the linguistic density of the archive. White does sometimes articulate a different notion of the archive that, according to LaCapra, unsettles White's reliance on the four master tropes. See LaCapra, (1983: pp 79 – 81), particularly FN 2 for this argument.

<sup>88</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak, 'The Politics of Interpretation' in W. J. T. Mitchell (ed), *The Politics of Interpretation*, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983)

<sup>89</sup> Spivak, (1983: p 351); Leela Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998) presents a useful discussion of the disciplinary privileging of Literary Studies in the humanities, see particularly Chapter 3 'Postcolonialism and the new humanities', especially pp 45 – 46.

<sup>90</sup> *ibid*, p 352

<sup>91</sup> *ibid*, p 352

of history – one that operates an aesthetic of the sublime as opposed to the beautiful – namely, meaninglessness. Spivak argues that White assumes the claim of meaninglessness too quickly/easily, that he does not engage with the density of this term and that he therefore deprives it of its theoretical value.<sup>92</sup> The notion of a politics of textuality that Spivak broaches above may offer a strategic ability to engage productively with the problem of representation through its opening of the possibility of, what John Mowitt might call, traversing disciplinarity (in other words, it attempts not to be subsumed within a particular discipline). It is with this possible productivity in mind that it is now necessary to investigate precisely what might entail a politics of textuality in the discourse of history.

### **The Politics of Textuality**



As was mentioned earlier in the discussion of Spivak's critique of White, the moment in Bailey's play where the discipline of history is made to face its own textuality is also the moment where it becomes possible to engage with the subject in what Spivak would term a politically scrupulous way. As such it is through a fundamentally disruptive engagement with its own textuality – through working in the space that is cleared by this – that it might be possible to write an effective (following Foucault) history after apartheid. It is in this vein (one which goes further than both Toews and White in that it does not withdraw into a protectionist disciplinarity) that a discussion of the politics of textuality must be situated. Of course, textuality has not always been credited with such a politics and it is necessary, therefore, to situate the ensuing discussion in relation to these other politics of textuality, of which perhaps Frederic Jameson can be made an exemplar.

Jameson, in his 'Figural Relativism; or, The Poetics of Historiography' (1976), engages with White's tropological method for understanding history (both in writing

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<sup>92</sup> *ibid*, p 361

and reading) on a somewhat different level than that of Spivak above.<sup>93</sup> While generally sympathetic in its tone, Jameson argues that White's method is incomplete in its investigation (or lack thereof) of the relationship between the four master tropes and the other codes through which meaning is constructed.<sup>94</sup> More importantly for Jameson, White's theory hinges on a cyclical understanding of history whose meaning is effectively relative. This is unacceptable, in his view, as it cuts across his Marxist understanding of history as a progression with real referents; one might say here that Jameson finds White's method to be ideologically inadequate.<sup>95</sup> Although useful in its brief discussion of the central tenets of White's method, Jameson's critique is perhaps more useful in how it reveals the formative effect of his political/ideological position on his reading.

This political/ideological investment is precisely what underscores Jameson's investigation of what he terms "the Ideology of the Text" in his 1976 – 78/88 (his dating) essay of the same name.<sup>96</sup> Situated as a response to the proliferation – particularly on ideological terms – of disciplinary shifts to the postmodern (shifts that he views to be incomplete as they do not take into account postmodernism as a part of monopoly capitalism), Jameson's essay seeks to engage this sense of change through an examination of something that he views as central to it across the disciplines, namely, textuality.<sup>97</sup> Constituting what Jameson views as a useful strategy for cutting across the subject/object divide and thereby implicating the intellectual as both reader and interpreter, textuality denotes, he argues, objects of study that are constituted out of many texts that we "decipher" and "interpret" but do

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<sup>93</sup> Frederic Jameson, 'Figural Relativism; or, The Poetics of Historiography' (1976), in Frederic Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971 – 1986, Volume 1, Situations of Theory*, (London: Routledge, 1988)

<sup>94</sup> Jameson, (1988: pp 159 – 161)

<sup>95</sup> *ibid*, p 167

<sup>96</sup> Frederic Jameson, 'The Ideology of the Text' (1975-76/86), in Frederic Jameson, *The Ideologies of Theory: Essays 1971 – 1986, Volume 1, Situations of Theory*, (London: Routledge, 1988)

<sup>97</sup> Jameson, (1988: pp 17 – 18)

not “know”.<sup>98</sup> As such textuality cannot simply be reduced to the literary realm, although Jameson does confine it there while simultaneously highlighting its problematic implications for literary studies.

Jameson considers textuality as being “problematic” for literary studies as it invokes a somewhat Derridean notion of the scene of writing. He finds textuality’s separation of the form from its (total) meaning through its focus on “meaningful fragments” to be particularly unsettling as it effectively equates to what he views as an avoidance of the political – of which he views Barthes’ S/Z as characteristic.<sup>99</sup>

According to Jameson, Barthes’ reading of Balzac’s *Sarrasine*, through his line-by-line analysis of it in S/Z, is an attempt to find the text in Balzac’s writing.<sup>100</sup> Barthes brings into play his five codes of narrativity that are woven together – “like a tissue” – to form the narrative of a story.<sup>101</sup> It is in the proairetic code that he argues Barthes identifies the text – the point where Barthes argues the meaning interrupts the form – in Balzac. However, Jameson argues that this identification actually necessitates the abandonment of textuality as it implies the destruction of narrative (its parts disrupt its whole, the narrator does not imbue meaning into it) resulting in a rendering meaningless of the literary text; in short, he argues that textuality smashes the literary text to pieces.<sup>102</sup>

He moves to contain this crisis for literary studies that the concept of textuality implies through calling attention to a “stable historical context” and individual

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<sup>98</sup> *ibid*, p 18

<sup>99</sup> *ibid*, pp 20, 22 and 30

<sup>100</sup> *ibid*, p 24

<sup>101</sup> According to Jameson these codes are divided into two parts by Barthes: On the one hand, there are the “indexes” such as the code of the person, the code of knowledge, and the code of the symbol, and, on the other, there are the “irreversible” codes, such as the hermeneutic and proairetic codes. The former group give a sense of the reality (naturalness) of the subject while eliding its historical construction (these are read through the proper name); the latter constitute the “readerly eye”, and, specifically, the proairetic consists of reading at the folds where these names (constituted by the former group) can be seen to intersect. See Jameson, (1988: pp 25 – 31).

<sup>102</sup> Jameson, (1988: pp 36 and 44 – 45)

experience,<sup>103</sup> notions that he argues Barthes' code of the person makes available for the restringing of the literary text. Specifically, for Jameson, it is the narrative form (hence the necessity for it to remain intact) of the literary text that allows its meaning to be made plain as it is the text's narrative form that can be made to correspond with a Marxist understanding of development.<sup>104</sup> As such, Jameson argues for an interpretation of Barthes' proairetic code as a "historical force of disjuncture" which relies on the framing structure of the difference between the "scriptable" and the "legible",<sup>105</sup> in other words, as requiring a master narrative that in turn imbues meaning.

This move allows him to declare that what is at work in the concept of text, its ideological backdrop, is precisely postmodernist theory (something Jameson views as being particularly weak in its arrival<sup>106</sup>) which corresponds with what he calls the third stage in capitalist development, namely, multinational capitalism. In other words, by labelling the concept of the text as postmodern, Jameson attempts to make it interpretable/understandable through the lens of Marxist literary criticism. Recalling Jameson's stated aim at the beginning of his essay, namely to identify the underlying episteme (ideology) of textuality (postmodernism), the tautological nature of his argument becomes especially clear if we select to rephrase its guiding assumption: the underlying ideology of postmodernism is postmodernism, or stated differently, the underlying episteme of textuality is textuality. In any case, what is clear from the above is that Jameson dismisses the concept of the text (and thereby the notion of the politics of textuality) as it unsettles literary studies and consequently unsettles Marxist claims to imbuing meaning and resistance.

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<sup>103</sup> *ibid.*, p 41; Clearly, Jameson would fall prey to Joan Scott's critique of experience and Hayden White's critique of a "historical sense" outlined above.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, p 51; here Jameson's critique of textuality is very close to his critique of Hayden White above.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, pp 54 – 55

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, p 63

The attempt to uncover what could be termed “the text’s political unconscious” is, according to Paul Smith, a characteristic move of Jameson’s which he argues amounts to an attempt to break the “distorting mirror of ideology”, where the text is taken as “the agent for the reproduction of ideology”.<sup>107</sup> This strategy, which is central to much Marxist literary criticism, reduces the concept of human agency to practical non-existence as the role of the subject/individual in this reproduction of ideology is elided or, at best, viewed as trivial. In his evaluation of the shortcomings of Marxist literary criticism (which does not amount to an abandonment of Marxist theory) Smith suggests that Eagleton may be viewed as presenting a more productive understanding of the literary text as he views it as a “production of ideology” as opposed to an expression of it.<sup>108</sup> Despite this, Smith suggests that all the modes of Marxist literary criticism that he has discussed (i.e. Macherey, Jameson, Eagleton) reduce the literary text and its workings to the level of the imaginary and therefore have no sense of “the anchoring of the text in the person who reads it” – without which it cannot be ideological as the ideological must lodge itself in a subject.<sup>109</sup>

It is this question of the subject at which ideology is aimed, in other words the question of the interpellation of the subject, that interests Smith in his discussion of the importance of human agency.<sup>110</sup> Smith finds the publications of the journal *Screen* in the 1970s a useful starting point for engaging with this question as they view, drawing from Lacan, the subject as being produced in language. This is useful for Smith (although he argues that *Screen* makes a rather problematic leap from the subject being produced in language to it being made susceptible to ideological

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<sup>107</sup> Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject, Theory and History of Literature*, Volume 55, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p 28

<sup>108</sup> Smith, (1988: p 29); principally, Smith argues that the reduction, characteristic of critics such as Jameson, of all contradictions in the literary text to class struggle (as being caused by it) actually misunderstands Marx’s argument that class identity is in fact formed in struggle.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid*, p 29

<sup>110</sup> *ibid*, p 24; importantly, for Smith the text is not contained within the literary, rather, it extends to and incorporates the scenes of writing.

interpellation) as it allows the suggestion that, if the subject is an effect of language, then its interpellation must be various.<sup>111</sup> As such, the subject cannot be the equivalent of the individual as it is often taken to be in Marxist literary criticism, rather subjectivity should be construed as a series of moments constituted out of conflicting interpellations. Thus, Smith convincingly argues, a person's history is the accumulation of differing interpellations into varying subject positions; in other words, their subjectivity is not always already there.<sup>112</sup> Smith suggests that in order to speak about the subject without cerning it or subsuming it within a single discipline it is necessary to both take into account a person's own history (their subjectivity) as well as to historicise the modes through which the subject becomes interpellated.

Having clearly argued for a difference between the physical person (the "actual human agent") and its subject positions (constituted out of conflicting interpellations), Smith then suggests that ideological interpellation is never total. In other words, not all the positions that a text (whether literary, filmic, or otherwise) prescribes will necessarily be assumed as not all interpellations are equally effective.<sup>113</sup> This understanding of the subject as a momentary effect that is constituted through multiple interpellations that may or may not work, brings about a contradictory and interstitial space in which it becomes possible to view the emergence of the human agent as a concept that can resist certain ideological interpellations.<sup>114</sup> This is not to argue that a person can simply select various subject positions in order to resist interpellation; rather, Smith argues that this very resistance to interpellation needs to be viewed as an effect of interpellation itself. In other words,

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<sup>111</sup> *ibid*, pp 30 – 32; Stated differently: Language is in essence various, since the subject is the effect of language it too must be various; consequently, a various subject must be variously interpellated.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, p 33

<sup>113</sup> *ibid*, p 35

<sup>114</sup> *ibid*, p 37

Smith argues that resistance is produced by and in ideology as precisely where a subject is interpellated there too agency and resistance become enabled.<sup>115</sup>

Hence the question of ideology is not, according to Smith, really about the subjection of the subject but rather about the subjection of human agency. It is the concept of the text (though Smith looks beyond it) through its bringing into play the scene of writing that allows Smith to bring human agency and the possibility of resisting interpellation to the fore. As such, whereas Jameson wants to disregard the text as it unsettles Marxist literary criticism, Smith argues that it is precisely this unsettling effect that makes it possible to speak of a textual politics.

Importantly Smith doesn't abandon the subject in search of the agent, rather – and this is where his politics lies – he argues that an examination of how the subject is cerned (literally both enclosed and inherited in a disciplinary context) removes it as an alibi for the lack of “disciplinary self-reflection” and makes it possible to see how agency arises out of a conflict of interpellations. In other words, as John Mowitt argued in his foreword to Smith's book, the project of discernment allows the separation of the agent from the “shadow of the subject” which makes it possible to view the object.<sup>116</sup> Smith does not specifically examine the implications of this – although he does argue that feminist theory through its double strategy of essentialism and difference is probably the best example of his demand for criticism.

However, Mowitt suggests that it is possible to take Smith's argument further by focusing on the disciplinary object (by which he means a “regulative fiction that orients research in a particular field”, something that is not necessarily real but has real effects<sup>117</sup>) rather than on how the subject deflects disciplinary self-reflection.<sup>118</sup> Through invoking the object here Mowitt does not mean an investigation of its status

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<sup>115</sup> *ibid*, pp 38 – 40

<sup>116</sup> John Mowitt, 'The Resistance to Theory', foreword in Paul Smith, *Discerning the Subject, Theory and History of Literature*, Volume 55, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), p XII

<sup>117</sup> John Mowitt, *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object*, (Durham and London: Duke University press, 1992), p 27

<sup>118</sup> Mowitt, (1988: p XVII)

but rather an investigation of the discipline's inability to theorise its relation with it. He argues that this would allow a critique of the subject and discipline from the place of the object.<sup>119</sup>

In his *Text: The Genealogy of an Antidisciplinary Object* Mowitt quite clearly sets out his understanding of the above and its possible politics. Starting from a reading of Roland Barthes' essay 'From Work to Text' Mowitt sets out to argue how text, as a disciplinary object, is in fact antidisciplinary.<sup>120</sup> By denoting the text (the text is per definition ambiguous for Mowitt as it both functions as an object and unsettles its own function as such: it functions less as an object and more as a methodological field<sup>121</sup>) as an antidisciplinary object Mowitt does not argue that disciplines as such need to be done away with. Rather, he argues that the text needs to be seen both in the light of its interdisciplinary character as well as its function in constituting a critique of "the enabling conditions of disciplines as such."<sup>122</sup> In other words, as Mowitt has said elsewhere, the text can be viewed as traversing the field of disciplinarity – both disrupting disciplinary boundaries by stepping into each and keeping them in place through transgressing them (both interdisciplinary and antidisciplinary). More explicitly, the "slide" that occurs from (literary) work – the object of the discipline of literary studies – to text problematises the very techniques through which literary studies decides on its interpretative practice and moves beyond the literary (it cannot be contained there) to unsettle disciplinary reason as such.<sup>123</sup>

By insisting on the importance of Barthes' line "perhaps even violently, via the jolts of fashion" in 'From Work to Text' Mowitt suggests that the text should not be viewed simply within the domain of academic disciplines. Rather, its moment of

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<sup>119</sup> *ibid*, p XVII

<sup>120</sup> The essay can be found in Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text*, tr. Heath, S. (London: Fontana Press, 1990); Mowitt, (1992: pp 18 – 21)

<sup>121</sup> *ibid*, see the introduction 'The Two Texts', particularly pp 6 – 8 and p 46

<sup>122</sup> *ibid*, p 25

<sup>123</sup> *ibid*, pp 28 – 29

emergence in conjunction with social events marks its effects as not simply relevant to the academy but to society generally. Here Foucault's understanding of disciplinarity is indispensable for Mowitt as it allows him to argue, quite convincingly, that the "subjection of human agency" – through the organisation of social knowledge around the institutionally/disciplinarily understood subject – might both be understood through and unsettled by the text.<sup>124</sup> In other words, since society is ordered through a disciplinary logic, the same logic that text unsettles, text might allow a fruitful engagement with the subject without reifying its own procedures in doing so (through its constant unsettling of itself).<sup>125</sup> Principally this effect of text is registered through its unsettling effect on our (disciplinary) ways of knowing (interpreting) that clears a space through which the 'other' might make their interpretation known.<sup>126</sup>

In short text, as an antidisciplinary object that both specifies and unsettles how we know things disciplinarily, clears a space in a manner that constitutes a critique of the academy and society (both as disciplinarily regulated spaces). This space clearing gesture may allow the "other", who we have been terming the subaltern subject in the previous chapter and above, to inscribe her own meanings onto things. This would amount to an interruption of our selves, the results of which we cannot now fully know, but it may amount to a learning to learn from below. Following this, in the removal of Peires from the stage of representation, discussed above, the way in which the discipline of history knows its subjects/object is problematised in such a way as to allow an alternative enactment of a different meaning.

The previous two chapters have functioned to stage the discipline of history's double crisis – that of representation and that of its textuality – in such a way as to argue that it may be possible, through utilising Mowitt's concept of the text, to write a

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<sup>124</sup> *ibid*, pp 48 – 60; particularly, Mowitt argues that the Text arose as a response to the advances of mass culture on the academia.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid*, pp 36 – 39

<sup>126</sup> *ibid*, p 46

history that creates a space for the unexpected arrival of the other. The remaining chapters will attempt to specify the implications of this.



## Part Two



## The Prophetess as Sign

For long the veld was strewn with bones bleaching in the sun.

H. I. E. Dhlomo<sup>1</sup>

Whereas the previous two chapters in this dissertation sought to deal with the questions of representation and, subsequently, textuality in history through a rigorous reading of what have been labelled by some as being somewhat more “theoretical texts that one sort of breaks one’s head against once and then leaves”<sup>2</sup>; the following three chapters will attempt to, in a sense, provide a more thorough ‘reading out’ the implications of these in the discipline of history. This will be done through reading a number of historical works – by which I mean works done within, and subsumed by, the discipline of history – alongside a few historical plays that all deal with the same constellation of ‘events’, namely the Xhosa Cattle-Killing episode that has been alluded to throughout this dissertation. Before embarking on this reading and indicating precisely where this chapter lies within it, I think it will perhaps be helpful to briefly delineate the main moves that have been made to bring the dissertation to this point.

If we consider the problem of representation in the discipline of history, and particularly in western intellectual thought, the first chapter looked at how questions of representation have featured in a number of academic ‘exchanges’ – the most notable of these being Spivak’s critique of a dialogue between Foucault and Deleuze and her reading of the work of the Subaltern Studies collective. Here it was posited that one of the most effective ways in which to engage with the ‘other’ was through

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<sup>1</sup> Nick Visser and Tim Couzens (eds), H. I. E. Dhlomo: Collected Works, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985), p 4

<sup>2</sup> This was a comment that was made by a faculty member during the discussion of a version of my first chapter that I presented in the History and Humanities Seminar held weekly in the CHR at UWC.

operating a strategic essentialism (the method deployed by the Subaltern Studies collective) which might clear a space in which the other might “arrive”, in a Derridean sense of the word. This strategic essentialism works, it is argued in the second chapter, in a manner akin to that of parabasis.

Furthering the critique of representation and identity to that of nationalism – understood as an operation of a disciplinary logic – and the discipline of history’s relation to it, it was argued that it may be possible to interrupt the discipline of history – and thereby its action as nationalist alibi – by utilizing a similar strategy as was proposed for dealing with representation. It was along this line that the discussion of history’s relationship with textuality and something like a textual politics was deployed in the second chapter. Through reading Bradford’s critique of a number of Brett Bailey’s plays, but specifically iMumbo Jumbo, into the above argument it was suggested that the very moment that enabled such a strategic essentialism in his play also necessitated that the discipline face up to its own textuality. Here, rather than move towards an understanding of history’s textuality in such a way as to either reject the unsettling effects of this textuality through a recourse to experience or through subsuming it within the discipline of literature studies – both of which proved not to be useful when it came to the problem of representation – an understanding of textuality that draws from Mowitt’s notion of text as an antidisciplinary object was put forward. This notion of textuality was then understood as allowing (or coming from) a textual politics – following Spivak’s formulation – as it works along a similar line to that of the trope of irony, in other words and paraphrasing De Man, it works as a permanent parabasis of disciplinary reason.

The historical play then allows a strategic use of parabasis which works to create a space for the unexpected arrival of the other and, in so doing, effects a re-articulation of the discipline of history. This chapter then, through reading the work of a prominent historian alongside two different plays on the same event, will begin to seek to engage with the working of this re-articulation.

## A History of Purpose

Jeff Peires, who has featured quite prominently in many of the readings already hosted in this dissertation, has produced what must be considered to be one of the most extensive discussions of what he terms the Xhosa Cattle-Killing episode of 1856 –7. His account, which tries to address the various dominant discourses surrounding the episode, also – I would argue inadvertently – allows us to see how the stage, or the historical play, is always already contained within the discipline (a kind of internalized parabasis). As such, it is necessary to introduce and critique Peires' version of events as well as to examine how the play can be seen in his writing before looking at the effects of this on the discipline.

In his *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing of 1856-7*<sup>3</sup> Peires sets out to address and, to a certain extent but not absolutely, resolve the mysteries and theories that have sprung up around the somewhat controversial story of Nongqawuse and her prophecies. Peires begins his narrative with a discussion of what he views as one of the key roots of Nongqawuse's prophecies, namely colonial dispossession and specifically the War of Mlanjeni or, as he titles the chapter, "Riverman's War".<sup>4</sup> It is here that Peires finds a (not the) root for Nongqawuse's prophecies on a number of levels: Firstly, Peires argues that it was most likely during this war that Nongqawuse was orphaned.<sup>5</sup> This allows him to offer an explanation of how she ended up living in Mhlakaza's household as well as to depict Nongqawuse as a young (she would have been an orphaned child only three years earlier) impressionable and emotionally traumatised girl, who could be easily manipulated by her uncle.<sup>6</sup> Of course, it is this very same scenario that allows Bradford – as discussed in the previous chapter – to suggest that Nongqawuse may

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<sup>3</sup> Jeff Peires, *The Dead will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing of 1856-7*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, (Jeppestown: Johnathon Ball Publishers, 2003)

<sup>4</sup> Peires, (2003: pp 23 and 55)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p 327

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p 110

actually have been a victim of rape or abuse and that, as such, her prophecies should be read as a gendered entry into the crises of society.

Furthermore, it was as a result of this war that Sir Harrismith was recalled from the Cape and replaced by Sir George Grey, a move that would turn out to have dire consequences for the Xhosa – even though, accepting Jeff Guy’s critique of Peires (discussed in the previous chapter but basically that it is useless to criticise a colonial official for being precisely that), it is not certain that Harrismith would have acted any differently to Grey in the circumstances. The war of Mlanjeni was also, according to Peires, indicative of and, to some extent, constitutive of “a great upheaval” in the region.<sup>7</sup> He argues that one of the most important consequences of this upheaval was the collision of traditional Xhosa and traditional Christian belief systems – personified for Peires in Mhlakaza – which formed a central element in the mechanism of the prophecies.<sup>8</sup> However, as will be discussed in a bit more detail later, Julian Cobbing in his review of *The Dead Will Arise* argues that this upheaval may be the cause of the disaster and that the prophecies might only have been a side issue; something which Peires, in his attempt to maintain some form of Xhosa responsibility for the catastrophe, according to Cobbing’s argument, does not adequately consider.<sup>9</sup>

The final move that Peires is able to extract from his prefixing of the war of Mlanjeni to the 1856 – 7 catastrophe is his argument that Mlanjeni should, effectively though not in Peires’ words, be viewed as the father of Nongqawuse’s prophecies. Apart from the arguments already drawn from the results of Mlanjeni’s prophecy, it is in his purported last words that Peires finds the seed of Nongqawuse’s prophecy. Mlanjeni was reported as saying, shortly before he died of TB, that he would rise up again and would come from the West bringing with him all the warriors that had been

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p 57

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, pp 63 – 64 and 159 – 164

<sup>9</sup> Julian Cobbing, ‘Book Review’ in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, June 1994, Vol. 20, Issue 2, pp 337 – 339

slain.<sup>10</sup> Inside Peires' argument, it was most likely the similarity between Nongqawuse's prophecy and Mlanjeni's last words that lent credence to her prophecies. While the similarities, in some aspects, seem quite obvious, the final effect of Peires' rooting of Nongqawuse's prophecies in the events surrounding Mlanjeni is the removal of any independent agency from her; she simply becomes a tool that was put to use by men and, it seems, for Peires this was done unproblematically. As was discussed in the previous chapter, Peires defends his argument by suggesting that the 'facts' of history limit what can be said. In other words, to "read against the grain" (in Stohler's formulation) would not be history in the proper sense as it would not be true to the facts. However, I would argue that this formulation not only falls prey to the critiques surrounding issues of representation that were broached in part one of this dissertation, it patently seeks to avoid any engagement with them at all.<sup>11</sup>



A key element of the above mentioned move effected by Peires is the person of Mhlakaza. According to Peires, Mhlakaza was not simply the uncle of Nongqawuse through whom she managed to obtain the ear of the king – though he does fulfil this role in Peires' argument. More importantly, however, Peires argues that Mhlakaza was in fact the apprentice of the Archdeacon Merriman, an Anglican and a preacher of the Christian doctrine of resurrection.<sup>12</sup> He makes this argument, in the first edition of his book, by drawing on a number of somewhat unconvincing documentary proofs, namely: baptismal and marriage records where dates and names seem to be a little conflicting; a letter from Merriman's wife where she denies that the prophet was her former servant; and a number of obtuse allusions in official correspondence to the link between the Merriman's and the prophet.<sup>13</sup> The objections to this connection have already been addressed in the previous chapters and will not

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<sup>10</sup> Peires, (2003: p 57)

<sup>11</sup> In the previous chapter, Bradford's critique of Peires along these lines was dealt with quite extensively and, therefore, it will not be repeated here.

<sup>12</sup> Peires, (2003: pp 57 – 64)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp 60 – 62; see particularly FN 109 and FN 111.

be discussed here again. Interestingly, in his response to these criticisms – contained in the afterward to the second edition – Peires presents a few more pieces of evidence which, I think, do make the link a little more probable;<sup>14</sup> however, even after Peires' response, this connection must remain viewed as one of open conjecture rather than as incontrovertible.

The immediate effect of establishing this connection between Mhlakaza and Wilhelm Goliath for Peires is that he can then claim, due to the vulnerable and impressionable state that Nongqawuse apparently was in, that Mhlakaza/Wilhelm was actually behind the prophecy.<sup>15</sup> This is not to argue that Peires does not think that Nongqawuse had a vision but, rather, that the content and interpretation of that vision was due to Mhlakaza. There are two consequences that follow from this assertion in Peires' argument. The first is that in the person of Mhlakaza, Peires can make plain the collision and blending of traditional Christian and traditional Xhosa belief systems – which he views as crucial to any understanding of them – and the second follows from this; namely, that the seemingly overt Christian influence in the prophecies (particularly the notion of resurrection) is simply an indication of Mhlakaza's influence over them, and not of colonial interference by Grey – either directly or indirectly.

While Peires discounts the validity of what has been termed “Grey's Plot”, he also argues that Grey should bear the brunt of the responsibility for transforming this event into a catastrophe.<sup>16</sup> According to Peires, it was Grey's imposition of magistrates onto the Xhosa chiefs in 1855, who Cobbing calls “Africa's first native commissioners”,<sup>17</sup> which operated as one of the sparks for the adoption of the prophecies by the chiefs, as well as for their perseverance.<sup>18</sup> One of the key examples that Peires discusses in making this claim is that of Major Gawler and

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p 361

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p 328

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p 336

<sup>17</sup> Cobbing, (1994: p 337)

<sup>18</sup> Peires, (2003: pp 88 – 93 and p 137)

Chief Mhala. In his discussion, Peires highlights the nature of the contestation between the two – attempts by Gawler (Mhala’s magistrate) to usurp Mhala’s influence and authority and Mhala’s attempts to maintain it – it becomes apparent that Mhala’s support for the prophecy and its dictates was largely associated with a defiance of Gawler and Grey’s colonial policy, which Peires argues Gawler was simply implementing.<sup>19</sup> This relationship/contest culminated in a six month long police action by Gawler, ostensibly in the interest of the “unbelievers”, of which Peires finds it difficult to reckon whether it was starvation or the police action itself that “broke the back of the Xhosa”.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from creating conditions in which it became necessary – either due to political expediency or desperation – to support Nongqawuse’s prophecies, Peires argues that it was also due to the nature of Grey’s response to the Cattle-Killing that it resulted in such a catastrophe. Towards the beginning of the movement, Grey largely ignored what was happening – an action that Peires argues, along with the imposition of a magistrate, caused Sandile to adopt the prophecies – and towards the end he proceeded to turn the tables, as it were, to his advantage.<sup>21</sup>

Grey achieved this through, firstly, limiting the amount of non-governmental aid that was available to those who were entering the colony in search of assistance.<sup>22</sup> In addition, he also imposed strict conditions under which those seeking aid could receive it, namely: they had to sign labour contracts within the colony and as soon as they were healthy enough they had to earn their keep.<sup>23</sup> Secondly, Grey initiated what has become known as the chiefs’ plot – something that Peires strongly refutes.<sup>24</sup> The ‘Chief’s plot’ effectively consisted of a rather thinly veiled “legal cloak”

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp 207 – 239

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p 235

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p 133

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pp 266 – 277; a key example of this is Grey’s efforts (and success) in shutting down the operations of the “Kaffir Relief Committee”.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p 287; Peires suggests that an incredible 87% of all those who sought aid ended up as labourers in the colony.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pp 184 – 190

which could serve as a pretext for Grey's arrest and detention of the chiefs as well as the invasion of Gcalekaland and the annexation of two thirds of it for European settlement.<sup>25</sup>

Effectively, Peires argues that there were two main causal contributions (and one central attitude, which will be discussed below) on which the Cattle-Killing hinged, namely: the effect of a collision and enmeshing of traditional Xhosa and traditional Christian beliefs that was personified in Mlanjeni and, particularly, Mhlakaza; and the actions and non-actions of Grey. Here we might learn to read the proper name 'Nongqawuse' in the title of Peires' book as a signifier of absence rather than of agency. Of course, this is an oversimplification of Peires' argument, for example, he does spend quite some time discussing why individual chiefs (including Sarhili) supported the prophecies and he does mention the effects of drought and lung-sickness as influencing factors. However, the latter tend to lurk in the background of Peires' text – as contextual information rather than as explicit causes; and the former is, I would argue, outweighed by what Peires presents as the single most important factor in determining why people either believed or didn't. For Peires, this can be attributed to an attitude of social class.<sup>26</sup>

Peires builds this argument through engaging in an etymological discussion of the words used in Xhosa to designate those that supported the prophecies and those that did not, namely, believer and unbeliever. Peires suggests that the literal translation of these terms results in a division between people who, on the one hand, are "soft" – as in able to deny themselves and to submit – and, on the other, those who are "hard" – as in either disloyal or stingy.<sup>27</sup> Placing this within a context where, according to Peires, there has been "a general weakening of the pre-colonial order since the 1800s", he argues that there was effectively a class battle looming where

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pp 240 – 256; quite clearly, as Peires also points out, the charges were 'trumped up' and, in one instance, were even rejected by one of Grey's own tribunals.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p 206

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p 198

the councillors tended to be the “monied elite” and the chiefs represented the “old order” (the one exception being those councillors who were made wealthy by their chief and tended to remain loyal to their chief).<sup>28</sup> In short, Peires argues that in terms of this attitude (which he says is the only consistent one) the Cattle-Killing was the battle ground upon which this “class conflict” unfolded, in which the chiefs propagated the Cattle-Killing in order to save the old order for the “national good”, as he argues later:

...there is every sign and indication that the cattle-killing was national in character, driven by Sarhili and the believing chiefs as custodians of the national good, and intended not to destroy the old order but to restore it in all its pristine glory.<sup>29</sup>

And, it is within this Marxist interpretation of the Cattle-Killing where one assumes (one can only assume as Peires does not make this clear) that Peires situates the responsibility of ‘the Xhosa’ in the unfolding of these events.<sup>30</sup>



It is perhaps useful here to recall Bradford’s critique of Peires – discussed in the previous chapter – where she argues that Peires’ analysis is characterised by a deliberate elision of women as agents from the “Cattle-Killing” – and therefore, within the argument of the first part of this dissertation, fails to even begin to contend with what we might call the subaltern in Eastern Cape history. Another interesting critique of Peires’ work is found in Julian Cobbing. In his review of Peires he argues that what Peires has left in the background, namely the spread of lung-sickness and drought and the environmental impact of the frontier wars, should be viewed as the major catalyst in the ‘Cattle-Killing’.<sup>31</sup> Cobbing suggests that Peires has spent so much time trying to portray the cattle-killing as a national suicide that he has missed the more

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp 198 – 204

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p 383

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p 336; interestingly, in his afterward Peires feels the need to “come out of the closet” and to declare his Marxist intentions and politics in his reading of history, see p 381.

<sup>31</sup> Cobbing, (1994: p 338)

obvious causes for the disaster, namely: the destruction of crops and the loss of male labour through the war of Mlanjeni; the effect of the Ngiqa being evicted from their most fertile lands after the war; and that the rains had been at best poor in the 1854 – 55 season and had failed completely at the end of the 1855 season, resulting in a much reduced harvest in 1856. In addition, Cobbing suggests that the killing of cattle may have occurred as a quarantine measure in order to curb the spread of lung-sickness.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, Cobbing makes the somewhat startling assertion that it may be possible to think of the prophecies surrounding the cattle-killing less as the constitutive force behind the catastrophe and more as the “distorted explanations [put forward] by the contemporary white magistrates and their repetition by later South African historians.”<sup>33</sup> While this dismissal of the prophecies does seem somewhat hasty, Cobbing’s criticism of Peires in relation to the subordinate influence of lung-sickness and war in Peires’ analysis does, I think, hold some weight.

Having, in the above discussion of Peires’ work, looked principally at his arguments surrounding the cattle-killing and at a number of critiques of those arguments, it is now necessary to look at the manner in which Peires’ work is written. The historical play can be seen as lying latent within Peires’ work in two main ways – through its function as a script and through the orchestrated nature of Peires’ writing. The *The Dead Will Arise* opens, after a brief discussion of etymology, with a list of the main characters and their significance in the ‘story’ (mostly in terms of whether they believed or didn’t). This list is entitled ‘Dramatis Personae’ and is divided, for a reason that is not made clear but which one assumes reflects the period in which the book is written, between ‘black’ characters and ‘white’ characters. Interestingly this list is prefixed with a short paragraph in which Peires asserts that History is different

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p 339

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p 339

to fiction in that it cannot control the number of sub plots or characters that are involved in the story.<sup>34</sup> These words haunt the remainder of Peires' book.

Throughout the rest of *The Dead Will Arise* Peires is at pains to distinguish his book from works of literature. It is littered with short asides, such as “[t]his history is not, unfortunately, a fiction...”,<sup>35</sup> where he divulges what he views to be the constraints of writing a historical work as opposed to a literary one. However, no matter how hard pressed Peires feels in writing a history, it is also equally clear from his book that he is not simply writing one either. At a variety of moments Peires explains to his reader that what he is about to do is, in his view, actually quite boring historical work and, if the reader wants to remain within the narrative, she should skip straight on to the next chapter.<sup>36</sup> And later, worried that his reader might not have managed to ascertain the finer points of his argument due to the strength of the narrative, Peires devotes a whole chapter to answering “probable questions” that a reader might have.<sup>37</sup>



Peires is not only aware that the writing of history works more like the writing of literature than the writing of a textbook; he writes his history through the allegory of a theatrical play. Beginning, as has already been noted, with a list of characters (racially defined) for his drama, Peires then introduces a number of these characters as though they are entering into a play – for example, on p 74 Peires introduces Grey's work in South Africa in this manner. Peires also “takes pauses” in his “drama” to deal with changes of scene and changes of “characters in the ... drama”<sup>38</sup>, a narrative technique that could be likened to a directors note or a short interlude in a performance that is aimed at ensuring a clean and clear change of scene. This notion of Peires as the director of the drama/play that he is writing is reinforced throughout

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<sup>34</sup> Peires, (2003: pp 17 – 20)

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p 342

<sup>36</sup> See for example the comments he makes shortly before discussing the finer details as to why certain people believed the prophecies and others did not, (Peires, 2003: pp 145 – 146).

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p 327

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p 88

the book by his continuous attempts at directly addressing his reader (as was mentioned above, telling them which parts of the book to read when), culminating in the final paragraph of the afterward where Peires makes the reader responsible for the survival of the book.<sup>39</sup>

This discussion of the elements of the play in Peires could proliferate substantially – the footnotes, for example, contain many instances where Peires acknowledges “tak[ing] liberties with historical fact” in order to write a flowing narrative and, conversely, where he has refused to because, after all, he is writing fact not fiction.<sup>40</sup> It is sufficient to assert here, however, that elements of the theatrical play as well as of literature are continuously at work within Peires’ text; undermining and at times altering the meaning of his “factual” narrative. Returning briefly to the opening statement with which Peires prefixed his character list, it is clear not only that he effectively attempts to control the characters and plots in his history (this is made especially clear through the critiques of both Bradford and Cobbing) but, perhaps more importantly, Peires in fact attempts to adjudicate these characters and plots as well.

### **Dhlomo: Suicide or Cure?**

From the above discussion of Peires, it is clear that at work within his analysis is both the unsettling effect of the historical play – in terms of disrupting the truth claims that his narrative makes – and what I have termed a purposeful history. This purposeful history seems to work towards placing a national responsibility on the Xhosa that hinges on Peires’ notion of class conflict lying at the heart of the division between believers and unbelievers in the catastrophe. Of course, as was argued above, Peires does not place culpability for the death of so many thousands of people and

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p 391

<sup>40</sup> See for example, Ibid, p 126 FN 8 and p 342

cattle at the feet of the Xhosa nation – this culpability is reserved, I think correctly, for the colonial administration and particularly George Grey – however, it allows Peires to implicitly constitute a consciousness for the Xhosa nation of Marxist class struggle, in other words, to mark the nation as deeply modern.

Writing approximately a half a century before Peires, H. I. E. Dhlomo also engages with questions surrounding the 1856 – 7 Xhosa Cattle-Killing catastrophe and Xhosa nationalism. Dhlomo in many ways held a quite complex political position for his time – though he would fall under the weight of criticism in the previous chapters for being both Eurocentric and essentialist – which can be seen quite clearly in the majority of his writings, including his plays.<sup>41</sup> According to Bhekizwe Peterson's reading of his writings, Dhlomo was an architect and spokesperson of a pan-African nationalism, one that was fashioned on the values of a western humanism.<sup>42</sup> According to Peterson, Dhlomo held this view as he believed that not all members of a nation necessarily represented that nation's enlightened qualities. This valorisation of the individual, while concomitantly advocating the good of the nation, is a seeming paradox that, according to Peterson, is evident in the majority of his works that we still have today; not least in 'The Girl Who Killed to Save'.<sup>43</sup>

Dhlomo held strongly to the promise that he perceived in nationalism, namely that those that made themselves worthy would be assimilated into European civilisation. According to Couzens and Peterson, Dhlomo held this view throughout his known life; however, they both note that there is a marked shift between the type and tone of the nationalism in Dhlomo's earlier work and that of his later.<sup>44</sup> It was as

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<sup>41</sup> The majority of the biographical information that I use is drawn from Tim Couzens, *The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H. I. E. Dhlomo*, (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985) and Bhekizwe Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality*, (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2000).

<sup>42</sup> Peterson, (2000: pp 177 and 223)

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, p 198

<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, Couzens puts this shift down to the obvious set back that the 1936 Native Bills presented to the promise Dhlomo perceived in nation, whereas Peterson seems to argue that this more pessimistic nationalism was always latent within Dhlomo's work – see Peterson (2000: p 195) and Couzens, (1985: p 50).

a result of the conviction that Dhlomo held with regard to the usefulness of nationalism that, according to Peterson, he worked to produce what he viewed as a national literature – he felt that all nations had enlightened individuals and a body of literature that reflect the nation; in other words, the nation works as the condition of their possibility.<sup>45</sup> Here Dhlomo, in his understanding of literature, is very close to Jameson’s notion of Third-World literature as being inherently nationalist, discussed in chapter one.

In addition to his commitment to the ideal of nation, Dhlomo was also very involved in the current politics of his time – most particularly through his journalistic work.<sup>46</sup> According to Couzens, Dhlomo developed what he terms an “Africanist aesthetic” in his art/literature which often worked to inform party political ideology, something which would seem to corroborate Peterson’s assertion that Dhlomo was interested in drama as a specific mode of interpellation (though, of course, it was not articulated in this manner by Dhlomo).<sup>47</sup> Despite the political significance of both Dhlomo as an individual – as he would like it – and his work, his early works did not sell very well and he died an alcoholic; a state that Couzens suggests Dhlomo fell into due to the failure of the promise of nation.<sup>48</sup>

If we take Peterson seriously when he outlines the manner in which Dhlomo understood the three-way working of individual-nation-literature, it opens the possibility to think of Dhlomo not as an author per se, but rather as an integral part of a generic ‘black’ nationalism itself (although at times this manifested as a Zulu nationalism).<sup>49</sup> The ambiguity of Dhlomo’s position with regard to the nation here – he is writing to try and constitute such a nation while writing as a response to the position that that nation situates him in – also marks the central (or, as will be shown

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<sup>45</sup> Peterson, (2000: p 188)

<sup>46</sup> Couzens, (1985: pp 275 – 276)

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p 263 and Peterson, (2000: p 190)

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pp 177 and 241

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p 356

below, slightly off-centre) character of his play 'The Girl Who Killed to Save', namely: Nongqawuse.<sup>50</sup>

The play, which is subtitled 'Nongqawuse the Liberator', begins with a short note on the History of the event that it contends with. This history is presented somewhat formulaically even though it is written in a very descriptive prose: it makes mention of some of the key moments of the Cattle-Killing; draws attention to the magnitude of the catastrophe and to the fact that Nongqawuse survived it; and makes absolutely no mention of the colonial role or response to the Cattle-Killing. In short, it works as a backdrop against which the play is set (off). The play is divided into five scenes, the most important being, in my view, the third as it operates as an interpretive hinge for the whole episode.

The third scene of the play is set inside Commissioner Brownlee's home and it deals with a number of the major perspectives on the catastrophe of 1856 – 7. The scene opens with Charles Brownlee and his wife (she is left unnamed throughout the play) holding a discussion about Nongqawuse's prophecy in which Charles puts forward the notion of the chiefs' plot (that the chiefs orchestrated the prophecies so as to starve their people and cause them to attack the British).<sup>51</sup> However, as he is explaining the theory two other people arrive, they are a missionary and Hugh Brownlee – Mrs Brownlee's brother. These two posit a different way of looking at the prophecy and its results, although they do this from two different perspectives. Hugh argues that "[n]ew ideas, opinions and institutions can be built only on the ruins of the old" and that, as such, the catastrophe should not be viewed as a "national suicide" but rather as a "process of metamorphosis" or "childbirth".<sup>52</sup>

This process, according to the character of Hugh, will unfold along a process of evolutionary theory, particularly the survival of the fittest. He argues that those that survive this catastrophe will be the more intelligent and less superstitious individuals,

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<sup>50</sup> Visser and Couzens, (1985: pp 3 – 29)

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, pp 15 and 16

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p 18

people who could become part of a more modern nation. The missionary argues a very similar point; however he suggests that the process will be more spiritual. He suggests that in the point of despair, when the prophecy has failed and the Xhosa are starving, they will be forced to turn to God for guidance and that at that moment the Xhosa nation will be saved.<sup>53</sup> In both arguments, the price of the catastrophe is not considered to be too high as the result will be a people who trust in Western Science and the Christian religion, becoming modern through throwing themselves on to the mercy of the colonial administration. In other words, it is suggested that the Cattle-Killing should not be viewed as a national suicide (we might read this as self inflicted genocide) but rather as a much-needed cure that would ensure the health of the nation. It is in this discussion that the shift is also made from Nongqawuse as the main character to the nation as main character.

In the first scene of the play we meet the character in whose name it has been written. Nongqawuse is presented as an incredibly beautiful young woman who, through her beauty, has many of the chiefs – including Sarhili – believing her prophecy. This presentation of the belief in Nongqawuse's prophecy in this way is in keeping with the general tone towards women in the play – where they are significant only as mothers, wives, or those that lure men.<sup>54</sup> Through exposing Nongqawuse's inner turmoil, the play gets to the heart of one of Dhlomo's chief pillars of the nation, namely the individual. Nongqawuse is torn between, on the one hand, her love for Mazwi – an unbeliever – and her responsibility towards the nation – which she describes as being loved by everyone and therefore by no-one.<sup>55</sup> In the end, she decides to deny herself her own love so as to fulfil the love of the nation, to make

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, pp 18 – 19

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p 5; see also the general attitude towards Brownlee's wife – from scene three onwards – and the other female helpers in the play.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, pp 5, 7 and 9

herself a great individual so as to make the nation great.<sup>56</sup> The second scene of the play continues with this theme.

This scene is set at a meeting between the chiefs, Sarhili, and his councillors at a large kraal. In this scene, the question is broached as to why the prophecies have not yet been fulfilled. It is in this context that Sarhili's chief councillor argues that the "race suffers through the sins of its highly-placed leaders", by which he means those that have not slaughtered their cattle.<sup>57</sup> Guided by the notion that the "sins of great men become the sins of the race they represent" Sarhili (called Kreli in the play) instructs Mhlakaza to divine who is responsible, with the result that he declares that the chiefs that have not slaughtered are the reason why the prophecy has not been fulfilled. The scene closes with Sarhili declaring that individuals, by whom he means the other chiefs but it resonates with Nongqawuse's dilemma earlier, must "lose themselves in the race".<sup>58</sup> In other words, whereas Nongqawuse became a great individual through denying her own desires and fulfilling those of the nation, the chiefs who did not slaughter maintained their own desires and thereby – in the eyes of Sarhili and others – sacrificed the nation. Of course, in the light of the third scene, whereas Nongqawuse and Sarhili both thought that they were either preserving the nation in its current state or returning it to its former glory, in reality they were curing it through purging it of the elements that resisted progress, namely superstition and tribalism – the nation would not be the same again.

In the fourth scene we see the relief effort underway: Mr and Mrs Brownlee and Hugh are providing material assistance and the missionary is providing assistance on a spiritual level. The clear result of the catastrophe is that the Xhosa people are becoming entirely dependent on the colonial administration, both for physical and spiritual well being. People are beginning to reject their old beliefs as superstition due to the prophecies not coming true. In the midst of this scenario the

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p 11

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, p 13

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p 15

missionary and Hugh begin to have a discussion about whether or not there should be variety in life – a very thinly veiled discussion of whether the Xhosa should become exactly like the British or if they should maintain some sort of difference – which is not resolved.<sup>59</sup> In the final scene (set a few months later) we see the long term benefits of the prophecy being lived. There are a number of conversations occurring around the question of death – the scene focuses on an old man that is dying – and how, after Nongqawuse, death no longer needs to be feared because there now (through converting to Christianity) is a hope of resurrection. A key element in this scene is the number of hints that occur to indicate that not all have abandoned the traditional Xhosa customs, particularly when it comes to medicine. However, the scene abruptly ends with the old man having a vision and then promptly dying. In the vision he states that those that died as a result of the catastrophe are in fact grateful to Nongqawuse because she saved the nation from their superstitions and tribalism.<sup>60</sup>



It is interesting that this occurs during an attempt to heal the sick – and a discussion of the correct medicines to do this – as it returns us to the question at the heart of the play, namely, whether the catastrophe was a national suicide or a cure. In the final moments of the play, when the elderly man is having his vision, Nongqawuse is presented, drawing from Catholic theology, almost as a Mary figure as those around her refer to her as their liberator – this is marked in the scene by the arrival of Tiyo Soga (considered by Dhlomo as a father of the African nation) at the house of the dying man.<sup>61</sup> Although Nongqawuse declares in the old man's vision that she was well meaning but misguided, Dhlomo's notion of the "new African" allows a different reading. As both Peterson and Couzens have argued, the new

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, p 25

<sup>60</sup> Ibid, p 29

<sup>61</sup> Peterson, (2000: p 197)

African in Dhlomo's writing is strikingly similar to the new people from Nongqawuse's prophecy.<sup>62</sup>

### **A Play called Nongqawuse**

The above discussion on Dhlomo's play is interesting on a number of levels that are pertinent to the discussion here. Firstly, it is interesting in its similarities to Peires' work. Both Peires and Dhlomo are interested in interpreting the 1856 – 7 catastrophe as a defining moment in the emergence of an African nation, although they have differing concepts of the nation and who is included in it. While Dhlomo does afford Nongqawuse a little more agency in his play than Peires does in his book, both works are similar in the sense that they name the catastrophe through Nongqawuse but both effectively exclude her from being truly central to the event. Secondly, Dhlomo's play is interesting in that it is clearly a vehicle for interpellation into a specific political ideology. Of course, this promise of the nation which the play draws people into was bound to fail (as was argued in the first chapter) and the beginnings of this failure could be seen in the 1936 Native Bills which effectively sounded the death knoll for any future prospects of African assimilation into what then constituted the South African nation (this is reflected in the tone of Dhlomo's later work). Finally, this play is interesting in that it reinforces the notion that not all plays that are based on an historical theme will work to re-articulate the discipline of history, as this play clearly leaves it intact – both as a discipline and as a national alibi.

The more recent play titled 'Nongqawuse: the Truth Commission' and written and performed by the Community Arts Project in Cape Town may prove to be more useful in this regard.<sup>63</sup> The tone is set by the title of the play which is very provocative in terms of the misreadings that it allows. On the one hand, the title could imply that

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid, p 197 and Couzens, (1985: p 271)

<sup>63</sup> Tamara Guhrs and Nhlanhla Mavundla, Nongqawuse: the Truth Commission, (Cape Town: Community Arts Project, 2002), unpublished

the event that has come to be associated with Nongqawuse functioned as a Truth Commission of sorts – here it would be necessary to view the Truth Commission as a means of restoring or curing the nation – a concept that is quite close to Dhlomo’s argument.<sup>64</sup> On the other hand, the title could intend a juxtaposition between the two in which the question would arise ‘which one was/is more effective’. Still further, it may imply – and it seems that this is the meaning that the playwrights intended – that the play will seek to get to the heart of the Truth about the 1856 – 7 catastrophe.

In any case this play, which draws heavily on Peires’ *The Dead Will Arise* for its historical content – as well as the opening scene of Dhlomo’s play discussed above, deals with history – as the title would imply – in a very interesting manner. Set in South Africa in 2002, and then modified slightly for its schools tour in 2004, the play sets out to ask how a nation is to deal with its painful past.<sup>65</sup> A number of high school history students are given an assignment for the holidays in which they must investigate the stories surrounding the Cattle-Killing movement of 1856 – 7. Two students in particular, Lukes and Sparks, travel to the Eastern Cape where they encounter a number of elderly people who give them different perspectives on the event.<sup>66</sup>

The stories that they are told are the normal run of the mill theories that Peires contends with in his narrative on the event, with one crucial difference. In Peires’ account the different contributing factors, meanings and interpretations were deliberately maintained in a particular dispersion, which Peires actually policed by instructing his readers which parts to read and when to do so. For example, it is clear in Peires’ text that the war of Mlanjeni serves as a backdrop to the event and that Hints’a’s death was an emotional catalyst for Sarhili, not a current stimulant.

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<sup>64</sup> One thinks here of Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness*, (London: Rider, 1999), where he argues that the purpose of the TRC was primarily the restoration/healing of the nation.

<sup>65</sup> Community Arts Project, Funding Proposal for Nongqawuse: the Truth Commission, February 2003

<sup>66</sup> Guhrs and Mavundla, (2004: scene 3, stanza 1)

However, in the play these events become blurred into each other, presented almost as though they are occurring simultaneously. In scene three, the betrayal and death of Hintsa, Harrismith's derogatory attitude towards the Xhosa chiefs, Grey's civilizing mission, Eyre's brutality, and Mlanjeni's prophecy are all presented concurrently – in short succession of each other – with the teacher as the conductor between them. The blurring of time that occurs in this presentation, through unsettling a key element of disciplinary history – namely the chronology of events in time – works, I would like to argue, to undermine the disciplinary integrity of the discipline.

Towards the end of this scene, during a freestyle rap (a mode of poetry that is consistently used throughout the play in order to ensure that the young audience is always involved and, one might say, enrapt by the unfolding drama) that works to summarise the story thus far, the Nongqawuse story is tied firmly into the present. The characters of Lukes and Sparks ask the question: “2004, what has changed my brothers?” this question ties into an earlier statement that is made by one of the passengers in the taxi on the way to the Eastern Cape, namely: that Nongqawuse's prophecies are the same as the promises that politicians make during election times – they are never fulfilled. Here, in a manner that resonates with the discussion about the recent use of Nongqawuse as a marker of the current political situation in South Africa that was discussed in the introduction, the story of Nongqawuse is put forward as a vehicle for engaging in the political struggles of the present. This question is returned to at the end of the play.

In the final scene, the students are back at school and are discussing their holiday research project with their teacher. One of the characters, Mzukisi, makes the pronouncement that “History is full of pain, blood and tears” as opposed to truth or answers and, later, another character, Sabelo, declares that “history leaves us full of questions”. These assertions of the limit of history operate on a very different level to the comments by Peires towards the end of his account where he suggests that his version of the history is not definitive, in the sense that it may be possible to write the

history along a different politics.<sup>67</sup> The difference between the two expressions of limitation is that in Peires the reader is left in no doubt as to the validity of the 'historical fact' that has been presented, whereas in the play the very notion of the discipline of history's recourse to fact is placed under question. As the organisers of the play state in their funding proposal: "[the play] encourages people to question the very nature of history itself."<sup>68</sup>

The final lines of the play return us to the question of the Truth Commission, and thereby to the question of the political use of history, which has been conspicuously absent from the play since the title. The characters in the play ask for a Truth Commission to decide how Nongqawuse should be remembered. Interestingly, this question is then turned to the audience who are asked to adjudicate the memory of Nongqawuse (the audience generally seems to declare that Nongqawuse should be honoured). It may be productive here to think of how this question might be phrased differently: in the light of the above reading of the play, the return to the question of a Truth Commission and the request of the audience to adjudicate the memory of Nongqawuse might be read as an investigation of the effectiveness of this story for the future. Not in a simple moralistic notion whereby we must learn our apparent lesson from the past, but rather in the sense that the blurring of history in its articulation with politics (and the effect of this on nation) might productively posit a space where it might be possible to think differently of the future. Here Nongqawuse (as sign) might be viewed as a space clearing gesture that may create the conditions for an arrival of the 'other'.

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<sup>67</sup> Peires, (2003: p 341)

<sup>68</sup> Community Arts Project, 2003

## Hysterical Theatre?

Politics broods over those fields of bones.

Brett Bailey<sup>1</sup>

Therein consists the difference between hysteria and psychosis: hysteria/history is more than a trivial word game – hysteria is the subject's way of resisting the prevailing, historically specified form of interpellation or symbolic identification.

Hysteria means failed interpellation...

Slavoj Zizek<sup>2</sup>

The discussion in the previous chapter centred largely on how the Historical Play might work to destabilize the discipline of history from within. In other words, through looking at Peires, Dhlomo, and a play by the Community Arts Project (CAP), it asked the question of the relation of the play to history. This historical play, latent within the written discipline and sometimes explicitly performed on stage, works to unsettle the discipline's claims to represent truthful or 'empirically accurate' versions of the past. As such, I argue, it works to destabilize History's position as alibi for any claim to a constituted whole – whether it is nation, identity, or discipline. Clearly, as was demonstrated through the discussion of Dhlomo's play, not all plays work as Historical Plays and, those that do (such as the CAP play) do not do so fully: even though in the CAP play the audience was asked to adjudicate Nongqawuse's memory, it was still unable to engage with Nongqawuse as a central figure in the actual play, except in her absence.

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<sup>1</sup> Brett Bailey, *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder*, (Cape Town: Double Story Books, 2003), p 153

<sup>2</sup> Slavoj Zizek, *For they know not what they do: Enjoyment as a political factor*, (London; New York: Verso, 1991), p 101

In pursuing the implications of the questions of representation and textuality in the discipline of history, this chapter starts with an absence of a different sort. Somewhere around the year 1960 George Milwa Mnyaluza Pemba penned and directed an amateur play on the story of Nongqawuse. There is very little known of this play. Even the script is long lost, compelling us in the absence of the script to begin with a brief discussion of Pemba himself. It is clear, when comparing the details that are narrated about Pemba's life in a number of biographies and news reports, that the general pattern of this story has been set and followed for a number of years.<sup>3</sup>

According to this story, Pemba was born in 1912, was educated in the Mission School system: he attended Van Der Kemp Mission School, where he adopted the name 'George' to avoid being teased, and then Paterson Secondary School on a Grey scholarship. Thereafter he enrolled to study teaching at Lovedale Teacher Training College in 1931.<sup>4</sup> During this same year he was admitted to Victoria Hospital due to an acute case of appendicitis and after his stay at the hospital, was granted four months of personal tuition with Austin Winter Moore, a professor of Art at Rhodes University.<sup>5</sup> Sometime during the period of 1938 – 1941 Pemba met with the poet S. E. K. Mqhahi and, while on his "Grand Tour" to view all the various ethnic South African cultures in their own setting, Pemba also met H. I. E. Dhlomo – both of whom, it is argued by Hudleston, strongly influenced Pemba's politics.<sup>6</sup> The struggle that Pemba faced in trying to pursue his painting – he constantly had to work full-time and paint part-time, working on one occasion as an officer of the court and, later,

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<sup>3</sup> The biographies that are being used here are Hayden Proud and Barry Feinberg (eds), *George Milwa Mnyaluza Pemba: Retrospective Exhibition*, (Cape Town: South African National Gallery and Mayibuye Centre, University of the Western Cape, 1996) and Sarah Hudleston, *Against All Odds: George Pemba: His Life and Works*, (Johannesburg: Jonathon Ball Publishers, 1996). A profile on Pemba, published by *The African Horizon* and reproduced in Hudleston (1996: p 36) is written along a very similar outline of the 'main' events of Pemba's life.

<sup>4</sup> Proud and Feinberg, (1996: pp 20 – 21) and Hudleston, (1996: p 19)

<sup>5</sup> Proud and Feinberg, (1996: p 23); this was granted to him on the basis of the portraits that he drew while in hospital.

<sup>6</sup> Hudleston, (1996: pp 37 and 47)

running his own “Spaza shop.” These elements of his life story feature quite prominently in all of the biographies until, in 1968, the International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF) began to support Pemba as he was housing the children of his brother who had joined uMkhonto We Sizwe.<sup>7</sup>

Pemba was also involved in politics, being both a member of the ANC as well as of the Federation of South African Women in Port Elizabeth,<sup>8</sup> but was never an activist in the strictest sense, preferring rather to laugh at those who would be oppressors. Paradoxically however, Pemba’s politics were strongly marked by a commitment to the British Monarchy while simultaneously proclaiming pride in his own Xhosa heritage.<sup>9</sup> This apparent conflict may possibly have been managed by Pemba through his desire to transform British nationalism into African nationalism.<sup>10</sup> However, Huddleston quotes Pemba, writing in his personal diary about the politics of being a ‘Bantu’ artist, as stating that it “means offering something completely new to the world, something which can only be offered by a native.”<sup>11</sup> This comment might indicate the extent to which the racial ideologies of Europe had coloured his thinking. In accordance with this view, Pemba practiced a moderate politics along lines similar to that of Dhlomo.

Considering Pemba’s stated aim in his production of art, namely “to develop an international art form, not one contained by nationalism”<sup>12</sup> Jacqueline Nolte argues that contained within Pemba’s art is the conflict between his apparent political aim of moving beyond nationalism (which probably implied being assimilated into British nationalism) and his aesthetic desire for wholeness (indicated in the above

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<sup>7</sup> Proud and Feinberg, (1996: pp 26 – 28)

<sup>8</sup> In fact, Pemba was the only male member of this organization for some time, see Proud and Feinberg, (1996: p 26); Huddleston, (1996: p 51)

<sup>9</sup> Huddleston, (1996: pp 18 – 19)

<sup>10</sup> Jacqueline Nolte, ‘ Sources and Style in the Oil Paintings of George Milwa Mnyaluza Pemba’ in Proud and Feinberg, (1996: p 36)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p 42

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p 12

through his almost obsession with pristine 'native' culture).<sup>13</sup> According to Nolte, Pemba's paintings cannot simply be viewed as a form of historical commentary on township life as, apart from Pemba's own refusal of a characterization along the above lines, the pieces contain too many "ambiguities, contradictions, and constructions" to be taken 'simply' on any level. Rather, they should be viewed as artworks that engage with, emerge out of and, to some extent, constitute the historical time in which they were produced.<sup>14</sup> Building her argument about the contradiction between Pemba's politics and his aesthetics, Nolte suggests that in Pemba's art the particular becomes very important, as he is concerned with the whole, whether in terms of personal relations or the nation.<sup>15</sup> In other words, Nolte argues that Pemba's paintings are always balanced and complete in an all encompassing and general manner, while simultaneously containing an intensely detailed focus on individuals as standing separate from the whole, something which she suggests indicates this conflict. A final point, which will allow a return to the question of Pemba's play, is the circumstances surrounding Pemba's father's death in 1928. According to Hudleston, a sangoma prophesied Pemba's father's death six years before the event took place and, crucially for the purposes of this discussion, it took place in the exact manner and at the exact time that the Sangoma had specified.<sup>16</sup> This event raises the distinct possibility that Pemba would have had good cause to believe that prophecies can be fulfilled.

It is through Pemba's art that it becomes possible to return to his absent play with which this discussion opened. A number of years after the production of his play titled 'The Girl Who Killed to Save'<sup>17</sup> – a clear reference to Dhlomo's play, on which his play was apparently based – Pemba produced a number of paintings narrating the story of the event. One of these paintings, titled 'The Dream', is particularly

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p 66

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p 33

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p 38

<sup>16</sup> Hudleston, (1996: p 57)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p 60

interesting for the current discussion.<sup>18</sup> Of immediate interest is the title of the painting, 'The Dream', which is also the description given of Nongqawuse's prophecy in a review of the play, to which I will return later. The title is interesting in that it seems to alter the medium through which Nongqawuse would have received the prophecy. Rather than receiving it through a vision at the river's edge, it is possible to read the title as implying that she would have received it while in a state of sleep. If this is how Pemba constructed the reception of the prophecy in his play, then it would seem to immediately remove any notion that Governor Grey somehow conveyed the prophecy to Nongqawuse as an act of deception. Of course, the title might also simply imply that the vision was given in a trance-like state and, thus, may not altogether alter the possible interpretation.

The painting depicts Sarhili and his councillors sitting on the left of the painting filling it from top to bottom. On the right hand side of the painting stands Mhlakaza's entourage, also filling it from top to bottom. In the background there are rolling hills, ending in mountains, with a number of huts lining the edge just before the mountain. Fixed squarely between Sarhili and Mhlakaza, although hovering in the background, are the Xhosa subjects who are watching eagerly for the outcome of the meeting. Nongqawuse is depicted here as a young woman in 'traditional' clothing, she is clasping her hands together in what seems to be a nervous pose – the cause of her nervousness (i.e. it could be her being before the king, or that it isn't her prophecy, or that she is scared of the consequences) is not known, and her body seems to have been painted red with ochre. Overshadowing her is Mhlakaza, reaching out his hand towards Sarhili as if presenting her to him so that she may tell him the prophecy or, quite possibly, emphasizing the presence of the people and the effect that the prophecy is intended to have for them and Sarhili. Both Sarhili and his

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<sup>18</sup> The Dream (1989), oil on board. Collection of the SA National Gallery, Cape Town, (cat. No. 117) reproduced in Proud and Feinberg, (1996: p 104)

advisor/bodyguard have expressions on their faces that cause them to seem a little perturbed by the situation.

If we read this painting along the lines of the above discussion it becomes possible to intimate that in the play *Nongqawuse* was portrayed, not as the cause of the prophecy per se, but rather as the tool that was deployed by Mhlakaza and, following the general nationalist politics of Pemba, that the prophecy may have been for the good of the nation. However, the review of Pemba's play works to moderate this reading somewhat.<sup>19</sup> The reviewer is unnamed. I suspect the reviewer to be Athol Fugard. Fugard moved to the Port Elizabeth area in the early 1960s and may have had an association with Pemba's play. The reviewer presents the story of the play as one of regret since the prophecies led to the eventual demise of the Xhosa nation. S/he describes the play as both outstanding, despite Pemba's self declared lack of knowledge about theatre, and shocking to someone used to the high theatre life. As s/he states: "He put it there [meaning on the stage] with a crudity and a directness that violated just about everyone [sic] of the cherished western theatre conventions."<sup>20</sup>

Apart from the manner in which the play was put together with no props, no lighting, and no subtle or intricate scene changes, it was the response and interaction of the audience that most caught the reviewer's attention. The audience "interjected, and laughed at the moments of highest tragedy and at the end listened in absolute silence when a local poet jumped onto stage and proposed a vote of confidence in the play."<sup>21</sup> From this description it is possible to argue that the reason why the audience laughed at "the moments of highest tragedy" is that these were the consequences of believing in what Dhlomo would have called superstition. In other

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<sup>19</sup> 'Review of a play by a black theatre company in Port Elizabeth', author and date unknown, Athol Fugard Collection, The Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana. Hereafter referred to as 'The Review'. From the review we know that the play took place on the 11<sup>th</sup> March in the Crispin Hall in Port Elizabeth.

<sup>20</sup> The Review, p 2

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*

words, the laughter may have signalled that there was no longer room for such concepts within the regime of truth in which the audience operated thereby affirming Dhlomo's views.

Although the reviewer indicates that the overwhelming majority in the audience approved of the play, including the ANC, s/he also points out that there was some criticism levelled as well. This criticism, according to the reviewer, centred on the fact that the play did not deal with the prophecy as a deliberate concoction to destroy the Xhosa. However, the reviewer does not seem too distracted by these different interpretations of the prophecy, asserting rather that "if this beginning can be fostered and sustained ... then South Africa will see the emergence of a theatre of power and significance."<sup>22</sup>

While there are various interpretations that may be brought forward about Pemba's play (a play that in its absence seems to both proliferate and resist reading) what is clear from the above discussion is that the play was most likely deployed in the service of constituting or supporting Xhosa (though possibly extending beyond this to 'black') nationalism. Quite clearly, as the references to the presence of the ANC in the review of the play suggests, one of the reasons for the staging of the play was the critiquing and challenging of the emergent system of segregation. However, it was also quite clearly not done so strategically, in the sense that was called for in the first two chapters of this dissertation and, as such, continues to operate within (and implicitly reinforce) that which it attempts to critique.

### **Reading Differently: Crais after Peires**

If we were to continue a discussion of the disagreements between Peires and Crais, we might arrive at a different reading of the Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856 – 7 that bears on the review of Pemba's play. As such, in this following section I will discuss

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid*, p 3

Crais' arguments with regard to the prophecies of Nongqawuse through offering a reading of his *The Making of the Colonial Order: White Supremacy and Black Resistance in the Eastern Cape, 1770 – 1865*.<sup>23</sup> I would like to set the tone for the reading of his book by drawing from Crais' introduction where he states that in his book he wants to consider “a dialogue between problems of context, causality, and agency”, on the one hand, and “power, discourse and representation” (what he terms the postmodern critique), on the other.<sup>24</sup> Effectively Crais suggests here that in *The Making of the Colonial Order*, through a strategy of reading differently, the problem of identity and representation in history may be addressed. The confidence may be overstated.

Central to Crais' argument is the notion that a shift took place during the transition from Dutch to British rule at the Cape.<sup>25</sup> He argues that the British brought with them new techniques of governmentality based on surveillance and the disciplining of the body rather than on the paternalism of an earlier Dutch rule. He argues for example that there was a necessary move away from slavery and towards a wage labour market that was assisted by the “commodification of land”<sup>26</sup> and the colonization of the mind through mission education.<sup>27</sup> Here Crais suggests that an inversion took place where the high ideals of emancipation were transformed into the ideological construction of the other along race lines; an ideology that he argues would become the key driving force of Imperial colonialism.<sup>28</sup> Of course, Crais' arguments have not always been well received by South African historians. It may be worth considering criticisms of Crais' representation of the Cattle-Killing movement.

In her review of *The Making of the Colonial Order* Shula Marks suggests that Crais' book is “in many ways a powerful and persuasive long essay on power and

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<sup>23</sup> Clifton C. Crais, *The Making of the Colonial Order: White Supremacy and Black Resistance in the Eastern Cape, 1770 – 1865*, (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1992)

<sup>24</sup> Crais, (1992: p 2)

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, p 2

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p 168

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p 3

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p 149

culture”.<sup>29</sup> However, Marks argues that there are a number of key problems in Crais’ book which lead to serious doubts of detail as well as of some of his central hypotheses. One of the key areas that she critiques is his application of Foucault’s works. Marks suggests Crais does this too mechanically as he does not seriously analyze the development of the state even as he argues that corporeal punishment (the domination of the body) was a central element of British rule.<sup>30</sup> In addition Marks suggests that Crais’ understanding of British racism is both contradictory and over simple, as she states in relation to the notion that the ideology of the other – which Crais says developed out of material self interest – was the driving force behind colonialism: “This is to confuse the racist language of difference with the specificities of racist laws and practices in different historical contexts”.<sup>31</sup> Later Marks suggests that Crais has not sufficiently supported his arguments as, in an argument which hinges on the emergence of class consciousness and a shift from patriarchy; he has not done any serious class analysis or analysis of the construction of gender. In short, Marks states that “the cloth is more complex, the pattern more intricate, the weave more uneven, than Crais would have us believe.”<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, Peires argues, apart from attacking Crais for his inability to speak Xhosa, that he completely misreads the importance of the arrival of the 1820 settlers in the Eastern Cape. Rather than assuming that these settlers were significant as producers, Peires suggests that their real importance lies as bringers of mercantile capitalism.<sup>33</sup> Apart from these criticisms, Peires also takes issue with Crais’ notion that the Eastern Cape was significant as an arena for the emergence of white

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<sup>29</sup> Shula Marks, ‘Racial Capitalism: A Cultural or Economic System?’ in *South African Historical Journal*, vol 28, (1993), p 313

<sup>30</sup> Marks, (1993: p 314)

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p 315

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p 316

<sup>33</sup> Jeff Peires, ‘Pinning the Tail on the Donkey’, in *South African Historical Journal*, vol 28, (1993), p 320

supremacy in Southern Africa when, he argues, its significance is rather the emergence of a somewhat problematic and unsustainable Cape liberalism.<sup>34</sup>

A review that is written in a somewhat less condescending tone is that of Susan Newton-King. Newton-King argues that, while Crais' book is "squarely revisionist", it is so with a difference, namely, it tries to place culture at centre stage.<sup>35</sup> While King is more sympathetic in her reading of Crais than either Marks or Peires, she does suggest that Crais' book fails as it doesn't follow through with any of the "hermeneutic devices" that it introduces.<sup>36</sup> While many were critical of Peires' book, writers such as Gunther Pakendorf, for example, thought that it was delightful.<sup>37</sup>

In the light of the above reviews, I want to return to Crais' narrative at a point where it begins to overlap with Peires' *The Dead Will Arise*, namely, at the War of Mlanjeni. Crais argues that by the time of the War of Mlanjeni the new techniques of governmentality, and its effects, were already in full swing: there was an immense pressure on 'natives' to become wage labourers due to the imposition of fines, taxes, rent, and the pound system (and the consequent evictions of those that couldn't pay); land was being organized into manageable units (commodified, as Crais says later); and there was a growing emergence of a common class consciousness among those that were being evicted or dispossessed of their land.<sup>38</sup> A key element in Crais' argument here is the Kat River Settlement. He argues that initially the settlement was organized in line with colonial intentions: it was made up of Protestant individuals, had a capitalist market, and promoted the ownership of private property.<sup>39</sup> However, Crais suggests that there was still a class separation and, by the 1850s, the

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<sup>34</sup> Peires, (1993: p 321)

<sup>35</sup> Susan Newton-King, 'Crais' Narrative History', in *South African Historical Journal*, vol 28, (1993), p 322

<sup>36</sup> Newton-King, (1993: p 323)

<sup>37</sup> Gunther Pakendorf, 'The Eastern Cape Revisited', in *South African Historical Journal*, vol 28, (1993), p 328

<sup>38</sup> Crais, (1992: pp 142 – 174)

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, p 161

settlement had become characteristic of the new colonial order, namely, dispossession and eviction for those that weren't wage labourers.

When in 1851 those that were dispossessed in the Kat River Settlement heard rumours of the prophecies of Mlanjeni, a hope for resistance began to emerge. Crais suggests that, at least among the Xhosa, it was rumoured that the young Mlanjeni was in fact Nxele returned from the dead and that he had the power both to defeat the British and to break the drought that was ravaging the area. This common hope, according to Crais, led to a revolutionary climate in the region. As such, Crais elects to read the war of resistance that was fought, both by the Xhosa as well as the members of the Kat River Settlement, against the British not simply as that, resistance, but rather as a proletarian movement, a class conflict.<sup>40</sup> While Crais does admit that a historical consciousness may be discerned in the remembrance of the past and how it was lost, he argues that it wasn't simply about this. Rather, drawing on a statistic that suggests that most of those that rebelled were either dispossessed of their land or were in fear of being dispossessed due to the impending Vagrancy Bill, he argues that it was about resisting the new colonial order of wage labour.<sup>41</sup>

He turns his attention particularly to the 'Cattle-Killing' episode by asserting that he generally agrees with Peires' representation of the event but that he holds a different interpretation of it than Peires.<sup>42</sup> He reiterates the notion that the cause of the war of Mlanjeni was not simply a desire for a return to the precolonial but rather that it emanated from a reaction to the new colonial order that was characterized by a discourse of the other. Crais sets the stage for the arrival of Governor Grey whose arrival in 1854 occurs in the midst of a severe drought in the Eastern Cape and in the wake of the resettlement of Sandile and Maqoma and the punitive cattle raids that Smith led (in which 60 000 cattle were taken) after the end of the war of Mlanjeni.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p 179

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, pp 176 – 188

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p 191

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, pp 192 – 197

Being absolutely convinced of his duty to civilize the 'native', Grey then set about implementing his policies aimed at ensuring both control and labour. As such, Grey appointed magistrates (who paid the chiefs and other headmen directly, thus breaking the chief's recourse to patronage), instituted schools and missions, and implemented a village system whereby it was only possible to settle in prescribed areas.<sup>44</sup> The end result of all these measures, according to Crais, was the strengthening of the emergence of a Xhosa working class.

In this context Crais suggests that the prophecies of Nongqawuse must be understood. With the immanent death of thousands of cattle due to the lung sickness that began to spread in 1855, Crais argues that the prophecies were a "single text of historical and symbolic production" that promised "an escape into history".<sup>45</sup> Echoing Peires' assertion that the principle reason why some believed and some didn't was class, Crais argues that it was the landless, disenfranchised, and those most threatened by the new order – namely the chiefs – that embraced the prophecies as an act of class resistance.<sup>46</sup> Quite clearly, although Crais asserts that he brings a different interpretation to the 'cattle-killing', namely one of class, what Crais does is actually take what was implicit but absolutely crucial in Peires' account and make it explicit in his.

In the aftermath of the catastrophe, Crais argues that Xhosa society was entirely disintegrated through the requirement that individuals become labourers so that they could get assistance. A further impact of the 'Cattle-Killing' was a greater stratification of what remained of Xhosa society as well as a shift in gender roles where men began to work the fields and women took on more domestic chores. Finally, for Crais, the result of the catastrophe was that the Xhosa began to think in terms of national identity. This served as a trigger for resistance about one hundred years later against apartheid.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid, pp199 – 202

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p 206

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p 209

Having provided a brief discussion of the main moves that Crais makes in addressing the 'cattle-killing' in the discussion above, it is now necessary to engage with the question of the implications of Crais' study – remembering, of course, that he claims to deal with problems of representation and identity in it. The first implication of his narrative has to do with the degree of agency that is afforded to Nongqawuse. Through foregrounding the emergence of a class consciousness as the key contributing factor and, almost paradoxically, as a key result of both the War of Mlanjeni and the policies of governor Grey, Crais manages to effectively elide Nongqawuse almost altogether. She is not present in Crais' narrative as an agent in this whole affair but simply as a point from which a prophecy was uttered. The subaltern cannot even attempt to speak. Interestingly, although Crais places much emphasis on the reading of the prophecy, it is clear from his analysis that the actual content of the prophecy itself was not important. What is important is that it gave a strategy for apparent class resistance.



A further point of interest with regard to Crais' foregrounding of class is the affinity that it has with exactly the type of historical work that Ranajit Guha was attempting to critique in his 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency', specifically the way in which villagers' own explanation for the event is replaced by a Marxist one.<sup>47</sup> Quite clearly Crais' – and for that matter Peires' – narrative fails when it is made to contend with the rigour required of a project of deconstructing historiography, as Spivak termed it.

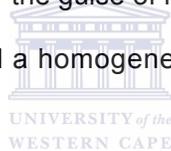
Throughout Crais' discussion of prophecy in his narrative, in relation to Nongqawuse but also to Mlanjeni, the prophetic is feminised through Crais' references to "uterine wetness" that he associates with the scenes of the prophecies, namely rivers. The prophecies, as feminine, through reference to "liminal space", are then revealed as being inadequate in themselves; the prevalence of these terms is

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<sup>47</sup> Ranajit Guha, 'The Prose of Counter-Insurgency' in Ranajit Guha (ed), *Subaltern Studies II*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983) pp 1 – 42

something that Peires also identified in his review of Crais.<sup>48</sup> The significance of what I have termed the ‘feminisation’ of the prophetic is made apparent when it is recalled that all the prophecies in Crais’ narrative fail. Although they serve as catalysts for action, the specific actions that they intend are never fully followed and never completely fulfilled. As such, the implicit argument in Crais’ narrative is that the feminine is not a useful – or, rather, is an inadequate – tool for resistance to power. So, in Crais, Nongqawuse is doubly absent. She is absent not simply as an agent but also, crucially, as a part of the feminine that is declared unfit.

Bringing this particular reading of Crais to its furthest conclusion, and in a manner that resonates with Spivak’s critique of Foucault and Deleuze, one might argue that in the act of writing about these prophecies, Crais has not merely elided or refused Nongqawuse the possibility of agency but worked to obscure the work of the investigating subject. Writing under the guise of heterogeneity, Crais has unwittingly perhaps established and masked a homogeneity which excludes and, in effect, banishes the subaltern.



A final implication of Crais’ narrative, and one that has an absolutely direct bearing on the discipline of history, is his argument that the prophecy heralded hope in the form of a return into history. This raises an interesting question/assertion: namely, that a return to history and the attempt to stabilize history and current society within its boundaries may or will always lead to death. In any case, it is clear from the above that Crais’ attempt at writing a history that would fall within the parameters of a postmodern critique is, I would argue, although interesting in a number of the points it makes, not successful. Of course, it may be precisely because he engages with what was then the somewhat in vogue notion of the postmodern rather than with, what I would view as, the somewhat more rigorous demand of thinking the postcolonial that his project does not succeed – he fails to read differently.

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<sup>48</sup> Peires, (1993: p 319)

## **Intoxicating Vision: Bailey's Hysteria**

What remains absent in practically all of the historical or theatrical dealings with the 1856 – 7 'Cattle-Killing' movement according to the playwright Brett Bailey is an attempt to consider "that Nongqawuse might actually have had visions."<sup>49</sup> In other words, the event is always explained through recourse to that which unfolds around it, whether in the present day or at the time of its happening. As such, it is explained by recourse to concepts such as capitalism, nationalism, or gender politics, none of which, in Bailey's view, actually consider either the prophecies or Nongqawuse as such. Of course, this criticism implicitly echoes the functionality of emplotment and narrativization that Hayden White proposed, namely that we always impose meaning on to the history that we narrativise according to our politics. It does this in such a way as to, on the one hand, critique histories that have been written like this (which is most history) for not adequately dealing with the subaltern (here signified by Nongqawuse) and, simultaneously on the other, unsettling this very critique – these histories are untenable precisely due to their politics.

Bailey tries to deal with the dilemma of considering the prophecies themselves in his play *The Prophet*. He proclaims that he is not presenting an historical narrative which would need to give meaning, but is rather performing a healing ritual.<sup>50</sup> Despite these claims to not write history Bailey clearly desires to historically ground the play. The handing out of pamphlets to the audience explaining the history of the event upon leaving the theatre,<sup>51</sup> suggests that Bailey is not successful in bypassing history. This has prompted historians such as Helen Bradford to respond to his play as a work of history. This paradox of both denying history and claiming it is precisely where, as I pointed out in the second chapter, I argue that the productivity of the Historical Play is located.

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<sup>49</sup> Bailey, (2003: p 155)

<sup>50</sup> Cue Interview, Grahamstown Festival, 1999

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

Before moving on to read the proliferation of responses to Bailey's play as well as the play itself, it is necessary to clarify two points: Firstly, Bailey's play should not be read as an attempt to allow the subaltern to speak. Although not articulated in these terms, Bailey does have a concern for the voice of the subaltern. However, the play is set against the backdrop of Bailey's realization that "the girl [Nongqawuse] will not speak"<sup>52</sup> and, as such, tries to deal with that which she might have said, rather than with making her explain those words. Secondly, in order to productively engage with *The Prophet* it is necessary to deny Bailey the meddling rights of an author, expressed in his assertion that to read "these plays for their ideas or philosophy rather than for their drama would be to miss the boat."<sup>53</sup> And rather to argue that the drama is precisely in how their ideas and philosophy are handled on the stage. This is not to sideline the "drama" as Bailey intends the word but rather to add to it.

In his foreword to Bailey's *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder*, John Matshikiza suggests that the significance of the plays lies in the way that they deal with "the wounds and schisms of the past [that] are still painfully present",<sup>54</sup> a sentiment that resonates with Bailey's assertion that his plays "must sanctify the world."<sup>55</sup> The very fact that Bailey deals with these wounds – the most sensitive being the wound of the 'Cattle-Killing' – has been the locus of much criticism thrown at him. This criticism invariably follows the discourse of race whereby individuals query whether Bailey as a 'white' male has the right or the ability to engage with a 'black' person's story. Rather than responding to these criticisms by claiming to be authentically 'African' or 'black', as Matshikiza argues on Bailey's behalf in the foreword to *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder*<sup>56</sup>, Bailey responds by narrating his own almost prophetic

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<sup>52</sup> Bailey, (2003: p 150)

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p 10

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p 6

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p 156

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, p 6; other reviewers have argued similarly, see for example Kate Stegeman, 'Art, Nongqawuse and the Xhosa cattle killing', in *Sunday Independent*, 13 August 2006, where she argues that "his work seems more authentically African in his approach than Dhlomo's play *The Girl Who Killed to Save*".

spiritual experience – one that constantly lurks under the surface in *The Prophet* and which might, as will be explored later, allow a different interpretation of the play altogether.

This experience, which Bailey says took place in 2003 when he was camping on the edge of a dry river bank while hitchhiking from Zimbabwe to Mozambique, is invoked in the opening pages of *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder* and signals the beginning of Bailey's work in theatre.<sup>57</sup> In this vision, Bailey was approached by a silver-blue snake-man who he says represents the spirit of Africa. This snake man indicated to Bailey that the river of life had run dry in Africa and that as a consequence the future of Africa lay in a separation from the land through cities and industrialization. In this vision Bailey also felt a calling to, through theatre, create a space whereby Africa might be healed and that future avoided.<sup>58</sup> In other words, Bailey's response to such criticism is to say that he deals with these issues because the spirit of Africa has asked him to.



The second main area in which Bailey draws criticism, namely his fondness for inhabiting the interstitial, is largely due to his understanding of theatre as a site of healing. Bailey elicits the manner through which theatre might operate in this manner from his encounters with various kinds of Sangomas in his travels, backed up with his reading of Carl Jung's experience of the same in Uganda.<sup>59</sup> According to Bailey, Sangomas mediate the space between life and the collective unconscious through a process where "performance [becomes] an act of community", a process which Bailey asserts his plays attempt to mimic.<sup>60</sup> As such, Bailey trains his actors with exercises that he learnt from studying with Sangomas himself; a method that has led

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<sup>57</sup> Bailey, (2003: p 13)

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p 13

<sup>59</sup> See for example a discussion of an interview with Bailey in Dawn Kennedy, 'Shaman of theatre can't be pinned down', in *Sunday Independent*, 3 April 2005

<sup>60</sup> Bailey, (2003: p 19)

some reviewers to claim that he exploits his actors, in a spiritual and physical sense as opposed to a financial one.<sup>61</sup>

The operation of what Bailey refers to as interstitial space is crucial to the above as it is in the discomfort of that space, in the collisions between the rational and dreams, between theatre and ritual, that he argues people are made to confront the problems plaguing the nation and themselves, through which healing might occur.<sup>62</sup> These antinomies that Bailey creates in order to access the “unconscious, primal domain”<sup>63</sup> of his audience have not always been viewed as providing healing, as the subtitle for a review of one of his plays declares: “In Brett Bailey’s nightmarish universe nothing is either/or and everything is both. Divisions between life and death, good and bad dissolve.”<sup>64</sup> In contrast to this, I would argue that it is this very exploitation of the interstitial that, rather than dissolving it, shifts the locus of this distinction off the stage and into the audience; the site where according to Bailey healing can occur.



The troubling nature of Bailey’s aim to enact healing ceremonies in his theatre is reflected in the different ways in which this assertion is misunderstood. On the one hand, critics of Bailey argue that his work is entirely spiritual, in other words, his work is only religious ceremony. A comment that is typical of this understanding was made by the interviewer in the Cue interview at the Grahamstown festival in 1999. Here the comment was made that Bailey’s play is about voodoo in a final sense, however, Bailey responds to this with an emphatic no: the play *The Prophet* utilizes voodoo ceremony as a style, as a form of celebration that allows the telling of such a dark and bloody story.<sup>65</sup> Of course, Bailey also holds the position that it is ritual, a position that culminated in the literal sacrifice of a chicken on stage during the final night of

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<sup>61</sup> See for example, Chris Dunton, ‘Fusing theatre with ritual, anguish with the absurd’, in *Sunday Independent*, 17 August 2003

<sup>62</sup> Comments made in Cue Interview, 1999; see also Kennedy, 3 April 2005

<sup>63</sup> Kennedy, 3 April 2005

<sup>64</sup> Robert Greig, ‘Horrific and funny product of a darker vision’, in *Sunday Independent*, 14 July 2002

<sup>65</sup> Comments made in Cue interview, 1999

the showing of his play iMumbo Jumbo in the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town.<sup>66</sup> This sacrifice of the chicken also disrupts the second misunderstanding of Bailey's style, namely that he is producing ritualistic theatre.<sup>67</sup> The reality is that, for Bailey, his plays are both ritual and theatre which operate together in a sacred space, as he states in the introductory piece in *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder*: "the play is the shrine and the character of the play determines – and is determined by – the gods we want to visit."<sup>68</sup> A further element which works to unsettle the politics of Bailey's plays is his assertion that he is trying to bring about healing in the nation. This assertion brings Bailey quite close to the nationalistic politics of Dhlomo.

The Prophet, Bailey's third play in the trilogy *The Plays of Miracle and Wonder*, is situated in the third and final part of his book on the plays by the same name. The title of this third part, 'Revelations', carries a double meaning of, on the one hand, indicating that the section deals with the prophetic and, on the other hand, through a thinly veiled reference to the last book of the New Testament, it indicates the apocalyptic nature of its contents. It is this nature of the event that Bailey found resisted narrativisation/dramatization to the point of almost "exploding" him.<sup>69</sup> It is partly due to this resistance in the event which led Bailey to decide to, rather than narrativising the "immensely complicated story, [which is] so convoluted, so disturbing and blood-soaked"<sup>70</sup>, to instead attempt to address to some extent the problem as it was articulated by Xola Mda, the actor who plays the character of the dark priest in *The Prophet*, namely that "our [Xhosa] things have lost their meaning."<sup>71</sup> Bailey's use of children to enact the actual unfolding events of the cattle-

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<sup>66</sup> For an interesting discussion of this act, see Judith Rudakoff, 'Why Did the Chicken Cross the Cultural Divide? Brett Bailey and Third-World Bunfight's iMumbo Jumbo', in *The Drama Review*, vol. 48, no. 2, (New York University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Summer 2004), the audience – as well as animal rights activists – responded with utter horror at this invasion of the sacred space of the theatre.

<sup>67</sup> See Stegeman, 13 August 2006

<sup>68</sup> Bailey, (2003: p 23)

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p 153

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

<sup>71</sup> Ibid, p 155

killing is, I would argue, a technique aimed at undermining the ability to narrativise this event.

In order to shift the focus of the discussion in this chapter specifically on to *The Prophet* it is perhaps useful to take our cue from the words of the Juju, the demi-gods that control the different stages and meanings within the play when, in the shift towards what can be read as the last scene of the play, the Juju make the declaration that “the beginning is in the end”.<sup>72</sup> The play opens with two voodoo priests, a male representing darkness and a female representing light, who are performing a ritual to heal the nation of the trauma associated with the cattle-killing. In order to begin this ritual the priests awaken the Juju. Towards the end of the play, the intoxication of Nongqawuse with the voices of the dead as well as the nation’s intoxication with her voice is brought to a climactic ending with the priestess of light intervening and silencing the voices of the dead, effectively exorcising their presence from the soul of the nation.<sup>73</sup>



Importantly, recalling Bailey’s comment in the Cue interview where he suggests that part of the trauma of this story is that there are thousands of Xhosa that died in the catastrophe whose souls are not at rest. The dead that are silenced here – who are put to rest, their writhing and moaning is overtaken by sleep – should be understood as incorporating those dead as well.<sup>74</sup> *The Prophet* then ends with the Juju speaking to the nation, telling them that the “pot of gold is inside you”.<sup>75</sup> This assertion takes on deeper meaning when understood in a context of South Africa as a rainbow nation. In other words, this assertion could be read as declaring to the audience that what lies at the end of South Africa as a nation is entirely up to them. An alternative reading, however, may suggest that the nation will dissolve into its fragments, through a realization that we are at the end of nation.

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid, p 188

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p 192; the intensity of this moment is something which, unfortunately, the written script of the play cannot adequately convey.

<sup>74</sup> Cue interview, Grahamastown, 1999

<sup>75</sup> Bailey, (2003: p 193)

Although Bailey, in the final instance, might not manage to escape nation, *The Prophet* is the only narrativisation or dramatization of the event that actually attempts to deal with Nongqawuse as a central figure. Nongqawuse assumes this place, not through an attempt to give her voice, but rather through allowing her trauma and her tormenting by the voices of the dead to build to such an extent that it threatens to overrun the whole narrative. Central to Nongqawuse fulfilling this role is Bailey's assertion that she must have had a vision, that she did not lie, "not in the beginning anyway".<sup>76</sup>

A second character around which the play unfolds is that of Sarhili. Towards the beginning of the play, in a discussion of the possibility of the Russians coming to destroy the British, Sarhili makes the assertion that "we must not get lost in our dreams. Dreaming will get us nowhere".<sup>77</sup> However, the more he hears Nongqawuse's voice, the more he becomes intoxicated (lost) by the prophecy. As the play unfolds, it becomes clear that the prophecy has failed; however, at this point Sarhili's intoxication only intensifies until the priestess steps in. A third element in the play is the division between believers and non-believers, something which Bailey interprets along very similar lines to Peires' argument in *The Dead Will Arise*.

In *The Prophet*, the believers and non-believers are clamouring for the attention of the king, attempting to sway him to their own respective positions. This clamouring, however, only serves to increase Sarhili's desperation and eventually drives him further into his intoxication with Nongqawuse's voice.<sup>78</sup> Intriguingly, despite Bailey's argument that the British were responsible for introducing the impurity against which Nongqawuse speaks, the British only occupy a silent and peripheral role and only appear twice in the play: once during the failure of the

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p 156

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, p 173

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, pp 182 – 183; it is in the arguing between the two groups that Bailey's affinity to Peires is made apparent.

prophecy they march around shooting at the starving people, and once at the end of the play where they come as scavengers to glean all they can from the calamity.<sup>79</sup>

Bailey's assertion that Nongqawuse's claim to having had a vision must be, in the first instance, believed, stems from his own experience of having had a similar vision. While Bailey's recourse to the category of experience makes him vulnerable to the critique posited by Joan Scott, it also allows a different reading of the intentions of his play which might be more in line with a problematisation of "experience". It might be possible to read *The Prophet* as an allegory through which Bailey attempts to both understand and justify his own 'calling' which he received during his vision at the river in Zimbabwe. This reading might allow a problematisation of Bailey's vision as a foundational narrative for his work (which is how he uses it) as it demonstrates how meaning is attributed to it – it doesn't imbue meaning – as well as what the possible outcomes of a project based on such a 'foundation' might be. The project might cause people to think, as Bailey puts it, but the final end of that thought is both ambiguous and unclear – a notion that is perhaps contained in the ambiguity of the final lines of the play.

It is clear from the above discussion that Bailey's play refuses everything – be it conventional history, theatre, religion, or rationality – so as to cause all these different elements to collide with each other in the interstitial space between them. The possible productivity of such an endeavour is made apparent by Bailey's pronouncement on the effectiveness of *The Prophet*: "The narrative we have constructed is just not strong enough to break through the surface of hysteria."<sup>80</sup> This statement resonates strongly with the quote from Žižek with which this chapter opened and therefore allows the assertion that Bailey, through writing hysteria which was not subsumed within a guiding narrative, has managed to engage with the

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid, pp 153, 184, and 192; in the representation of the British along these lines, Bailey again echoes the argument of Peires with regard to the opportunism of the colonisers.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, p 157

subaltern without simply reproducing its condition of exclusion discernable in the absent play of Pemba and the history of Crais.



## Reading a Textual Politics

Let us confront...

Michel Foucault<sup>1</sup>

The focus of the previous two chapters has been on reading a number of theatrical plays and histories that all deal with the Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856 – 7 within the rigour of what Spivak calls “a textual politics.” Through reading Peires’ *The Dead Will Arise*, Dhlomo’s ‘*The Girl Who Killed to Save*’, and the Community Arts Project’s (CAP) ‘*Nongqawuse*’ alongside each other I argued that what I have termed the ‘Historical Play’ is already latent inside the discipline of history; having a destabilizing effect on it. Further, I proposed that it might be possible to read the proper name ‘Nongqawuse’, which is often understood as denoting agency, as rather signifying absence. However, while acknowledging the absence of Nongqawuse in the CAP play, I also argued that due to the violence which the play does to disciplinary history (both through its own narrative and its interaction with the audience), it might be possible to read Nongqawuse as signifying a space clearing gesture that might allow an arrival in a Derridean sense.

In Chapter 4, I read Clifton Crais’ *The Making of the Colonial Order*, a historical narrative that claims to address the problems of representation inherent in the discipline of history, alongside plays by George Pemba and Brett Bailey. I argued that Crais’ narrative achieves a double elision of Nongqawuse while affirming his own subject position as a male historian that can write/speak for the repressed subject. As such, he does not fulfill his own promise of writing a history that effectively contends with the problem of representation. Through reading Pemba’s play in its absence,

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase used by Foucault to describe the type of reading he is performing in his critique of Derrida’s reading of Descartes, a similar mode to what I intend to perform here; see Michel Foucault, ‘My Body, This Paper, This Fire’, in *Oxford Literary Review*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (1979: p 11)

which I argue both resists and encourages the proliferation of reading, I argued that despite these various readings the play seems to unfold and be put to use along a similar line to that characteristic of Dhlomo's nationalist politics. It therefore fails to critique something like apartheid – a politics that is in all manner of speaking symptomatic of nationalism. In contrast to these, Bailey's *The Prophet* works to unsettle/interrupt the discipline of history and, therefore, might allow an engagement with the subaltern which would allow us to learn from below: a key component of Spivak's textual politics. I suggested that Bailey achieves this effect by deploying a strategy of enacting hysteria.

In this chapter it is necessary to shift focus slightly so as to bring this argument into relation with two other studies that seek to engage with the plays of history, in other words and echoing Foucault in the epigraph, to confront their texts with my argument in this dissertation. While these other projects in my view do fall short of dealing with the problem of representation and subsequently textuality in the discipline of history – something which I have been arguing would require a textual politics – I hope to show how their projects may have benefited from utilizing a “textual politics”. Bhekizizwe Peterson's *Monarchs, Missionaries, and African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality* and Derek Peterson's *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* will form the basis of this discussion.<sup>2</sup> Both are quite complex texts that are difficult to pin down and, as such, in each case a rigorous reading will be offered before a critique is posited.

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<sup>2</sup> Bhekizizwe Peterson, *Monarchs, Missionaries, and African Intellectuals: African Theatre and the Unmaking of Colonial Marginality*, (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 2001) and Derek Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya*, (Portsmouth: Heineman, 2004)

## **Building a New Nation: Reading Bhekizizwe Peterson**

In his *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals* the central question that Peterson addresses is arguably that of the restoration of African agency in history.<sup>3</sup> Focusing on the period 1900 to 1940 (a period in which he argues discipline as a technique of governmentality becomes extended to the African body) in the Durban Johannesburg corridor, Peterson argues that theatre functioned as a political space that enabled such a restoration – what he terms the unmaking of colonial marginality – to take place through the working of an indigenous aesthetic voice.<sup>4</sup> Central to his argument is an understanding of historical plays. His analysis draws on the work of Frederic Jameson and Hayden White, especially his view that plays functioned as historical allegories. In other words, they are socially symbolic and as such do not reduce history to a text. They help us to understand the dynamics of history and vice versa.<sup>5</sup> Theatre, as a special kind of narrative (understood as an ideological tool), then works to articulate and disarticulate different ideological forces as they come to bear on the subject,<sup>6</sup> which Peterson understands as being superficially fractured – the subject is whole and chooses various subject positions: a fracturing in expression. It is in this apparent ability to choose (similar to Mbembe's self-styling subject discussed in Chapter 1) where Peterson locates an African agency that he argues unmakes colonial marginality.

The plays are read by Peterson as textual encounters in which it is possible to see the interstitial/intertextual sites (which he understands as the point where choices between texts/bodies are made) in which, he argues, the African intelligentsia had to

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<sup>3</sup> Peterson, (2001: pp 12 and 68)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp 9, 64, 86 and 222

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, pp 2 and 19; in this understanding history (the reality of the past) is kept separate from text (the literary), in other words, the integrity of both disciplines is maintained.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp 9 and 17

operate.<sup>7</sup> One of the key strategies through which these African elites operated the interstitial was through recourse to the figure of the monarch, a key figure in all the plays Peterson discusses and a symbol of hope for the aspirations of nation.<sup>8</sup> The interstitial space of the theatre was, however, also deployed as a form of social regulation, as an attempt to discipline the African body, to make the African docile and amenable to the needs of labour. As such, Peterson argues that the body, through its relation to character (it is often over determined by character), became a privileged trope in colonial discourse.<sup>9</sup> The above arguments are threaded through a series of semi-biographical narratives on the lives and politics of various individuals, namely: Bernard Huss, Benedict “Bambatha” Vilikazi, Ray Phillips, Herbert I. E. Dhlomo, as well as a few members of colonial high society.

### **Styling the Rural**



The emergence of theatre as a pedagogical and evangelistic tool in South Africa, according to Peterson, can be located in the convictions of Father Huss who was based at the Marianhill mission station a little outside Durban. Stated quite simply, Huss was of the opinion that Christianity and imperialism together equated to civilization.<sup>10</sup> In other words, Huss was concerned not only with the inner or spiritual life of his converts (and Africans generally) but also with the outer form of their persons. In effect what Huss was asking for was discipline rather than coercion as the means for social control.<sup>11</sup>

Peterson shows quite convincingly how theatre was developed at Marianhill within this greater concern as an attempt to contribute towards the control of the

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pp 11 and 87

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p 13

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p 3

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp 21 – 23

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p 30

leisure time of Africans.<sup>12</sup> At first theatre was only used and propagated by Huss within a mission context, as a method of entrenching civilization in their converts through effectively demonstrating evangelistic authority. However, the year 1918 saw the first public performance of the Marianhill plays and by 1919 drama had become generally accepted, due to the advocacy of Huss, as both a pedagogical tool as well as a tool for social control in general.<sup>13</sup>

The success of Huss' interventions are, according to Peterson, ambiguous to the extent that he both assisted and established the colonial order – something Peterson argues Huss deemed necessary for proper conversion – and he gave the 'Kholwa' (mission educated African converts to Christianity) the means through which to, again in Peterson's argument, resist their own marginality.<sup>14</sup> In order to make this argument, Peterson sets his biography of Huss against his biography of Vilikazi, with the intention of demonstrating how the Marianhill plays operate in the interstitial space between these two apparently iconic individuals.

Vilikazi, who was named Bambatha by his parents in commemoration of the 1906 uprising, assumed the baptismal name of Benedict when he joined the Marianhill mission and converted to Catholicism in 1919, the same time as the Marianhill plays began to go public.<sup>15</sup> Peterson reads the tension that is embodied in Vilikazi's names (between 'traditional' Zulu and Christian colonial subject) as being characteristic of both the divide within Vilikazi's own politics as well as that of the Kholwa in general. This was a tension that, Peterson notes, Vilikazi often exploited through signing his work "B. W. Vilikazi" and leaving it up to his reader to decide which name he was using. On the one hand, Vilikazi in his attempts to etch out the identity of an 'enlightened' African made strong recourse to a traditional Zulu heritage – one rooted in the Zulu monarch – which was viewed as being pure, virile and

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p 29

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, pp 33 – 35

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, pp 39 – 40

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp 92 – 95

strong. While on the other hand, the characters in his poems often dream to be 'white'; expressing a willingness to forego the past in order to be accepted in the future.<sup>16</sup> The hosting of this apparent contradiction in his politics leads Peterson to argue that Vilikazi should be understood as a nationalist poet at the intersection: his thought utilizes and transgresses every one of his influences including that of nationalism.<sup>17</sup>

Although Peterson positions Vilikazi in this manner, it is clear from his engagements with Dhlomo that Vilikazi was not willing to let go of an essentialist (nationalist) Zulu identity. The disagreement between Dhlomo and Vilikazi on the classification of 'Bantu' literature, where Vilikazi argued that 'Bantu' literature must be written by 'Bantu' in 'Bantu' languages for 'Bantu' people and Dhlomo argued that indigenous languages had become a tool for colonial control and domination as they restricted Africans' ability to assimilate into colonial society, is indicative of this tendency.<sup>18</sup> This tendency can be further seen in Vilikazi's poem on Nongqawuse where it is effectively argued that the prophecy led to the subjugation of the Xhosa and that the Kholwa, if they had been there then, would never have allowed this to happen.<sup>19</sup>

In any case, Peterson uses his reading of Vilikazi (and by extension the Kholwa as a whole) as embodying the interstitial to argue that the Marianhill plays, many of which may have been translated and transcribed by Vilikazi, should be viewed as sites of contestation rather than of one sided instruction.<sup>20</sup> As such, Peterson argues that the missionaries and the Kholwa had differing intentions and

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, pp 91 and 96 – 99; Peterson suggests that this recourse to the monarch may have been due to the Monarch's ability to provide land to the Kholwa who were at the time effectively the landless elite.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p 91

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p 69

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp 100 – 101; this position becomes incredibly interesting when brought into contention with Peires' assertion that one of the key sources and factors responsible for the prophecy and its endurance was precisely this Christian missionary influence that Vilikazi asserts would have stopped the catastrophe from happening.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p 42

differing interpretations when it came to the plays.<sup>21</sup> The Marianhill plays that Peterson focuses his discussion on are 'Joseph in Egypt', 'Job', and 'Indodana Elahlekiyo' (The Prodigal Son) which was the first play to be originally written in isiZulu, each of which he argues reflect the contested meanings and intentions of the plays and their participants. Importantly, Peterson suggests, as was mentioned above, that the plays need to be understood as historical allegories by which he means texts whose contexts are privileged over the texts themselves while maintaining their textuality. In other words, Peterson suggests that as historical allegories these plays allow an engagement with politics and history without becoming over determined by them.<sup>22</sup>

Each of these plays, according to Peterson, focuses on the dilemma of being a part of the Kholwa, of being not quite European and not quite African. 'Joseph in Egypt', in which Joseph is variously a spy (in the Zulu version) or a dreamer (in the English version), is read by Peterson as being somewhat optimistic about both the role that the Kholwa and the missionaries had to play in society and the promise of assimilation through the vehicle of Christianity. In short, Peterson argues that 'Joseph in Egypt' was an ideological tool that was utilized to subdue African resentment at how they were being treated as well as to argue that it was a necessary evil.<sup>23</sup> In contrast, 'Job' demonstrates a challenge to the dominant missionary discourses. Through examining the ambiguity inherent in colonialism, namely that it claims to civilize but denies those that it is civilizing the rights associated with being civilized, Peterson argues that in 'Job' the concept of repentance 'in itself' is posited. In other words, 'Job' suggests that it is enough to convert to Christianity and that the concomitant pressure to conform to European ideals is not necessary.<sup>24</sup> Of course a

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, pp 64 and 77

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p 156

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, pp45 – 51

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p 52

key feature of both plays is that the final reward for having endured the suffering is always delayed.

If the above plays both work to subdue the Kholwa frustrations as well as to challenge the dominance of the missionary and the civilizing discourses within colonialism, the 'Prodigal Son' explores the negative effects of colonial policy on the Kholwa. In the 'Prodigal Son' the argument is posited that the city represents all that is bad, evil, and corrupting in European society. Rather than heading off to the city to work and thereby becoming a part of the city life, the play calls for a return to the rural. Importantly however, the play does not call for a return to the precolonial but rather to the place of the African within the new order, in other words, a return to the reserves.<sup>25</sup> The tension between the politics of this last play and Vilikazi's ultimate move to Johannesburg to take up a post at the University of the Witwatersrand, a move that would seem to refuse the rural identity imposed on the African, is not substantially explored by Peterson.



Peterson suggests that the underlying tensions within these plays resonate quite strongly with two language disputes that took place in the 1910s between missionaries and the Kholwa. Both these disputes had to do with translations of catechisms and, he argues, reflected the growing contestation of the peripheral role that the Kholwa were given in these matters.<sup>26</sup> Through reading this more overt contestation as occurring more subtly in the plays along the lines of Vilikazi's politics, Peterson argues that converts were not simply empty receptacles but actually appropriated and contested what they were taught and that, as such, their responses (either in the plays or with regard to translation) should not be dismissed as secondary.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, pp 57 – 61

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, pp 73 – 76

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, pp 70 and 85 – 86

## Styling the Urban

Tracking the growing influence and importance of theatre for the purposes of education and societal control, Peterson shifts his focus to the Johannesburg area. Making this shift from the rural (Marianhill) to the urban (the Rand), he is concerned to highlight the continuities and discontinuities that mark such a transition. Peterson argues that, while the overall uses of theatre remained similar, the context in which 'African' theatre emerged in Johannesburg was very different. He suggests that in Johannesburg it emerged in a context of poverty and crime where there was a resultant lack of political rigor. In addition, Peterson argues that the tone of the politics and the mode of engagement with religion was very different; particularly considering that race and segregation had begun to pose serious challenges to the task of evangelism in Johannesburg. Most importantly, however, Peterson argues that the greatest discontinuity rests in the fact that the 'African' elite were beginning to "flex their muscles".<sup>28</sup>



Pursuing a similar pattern to his discussion of the Marianhill plays, Peterson builds his argument here in the space between two figures: Ray Phillips and Herbert I. E. Dhlomo. Both these men, as with Huss and Vilikazi, shared an institutional space (the Bantu Mens Social Centre) which, according to Peterson, they operated towards differing ends. The Centre was established by the American Mission Board (AMB) in 1919 as a means toward controlling the leisure time of, particularly, the African elite. Premised on an understanding of the urban dance culture that had developed among Africans in the cities – called Marabi – as being debauched and leading towards unwholesome living, the AMB suggested that there needed to be some form of alternate entertainment for those African's who were in fact trying to attain the ideals of European life.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, both Dhlomo and Vilikazi (upon his

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp 115 – 120

<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p 120; for a discussion of Marabi culture see pp 116 – 117

arrival in Johannesburg) also advocated for a space for the elite, and Dhlomo also held a negative view of Marabi; although not due to its apparently inherent sinfulness but rather due to its link to tribalism which he viewed as a key component in colonial control.<sup>30</sup> Despite Dhlomo's support for the creation of such a space, he was suspicious of the political uses that a centre developed in cooperation with the colonial authorities would be put to.<sup>31</sup>

As with Huss, Phillips felt that the best way in which to discipline the leisure time of Africans was through the use of the performing arts. However, while Huss was largely focused on the use of theatre to this end, Phillips argued for the use of film.<sup>32</sup> Funded by the Chamber of Mines, Phillips screened a number of ethnographic documentaries at the Centre as well as at other sites nearer to the mines.<sup>33</sup> Although these films were an important development in the social control of Africans, Peterson argues that theatre was both more accessible to the African elite as well as more useful for interpellating other Africans into specific political consciousness.<sup>34</sup> As such, the focus of much of his discussion is rather on the plays performed by the Bantu Dramatic Society and the British Drama League, culminating in an analysis of Dhlomo's writing. The significance of Phillips in this discussion is that it is against the development of these ethnographic films in the 1920s that Peterson argues Dhlomo's plays need to be read as he suggests that Dhlomo resisted including precisely the kind of essentialism in his plays that these films were premised on.<sup>35</sup>

The Bantu Dramatic Society is hailed by Peterson as being the first society for Africans by Africans. Although it has often been disregarded as being entirely complicit with the colonial project in its adoption of theatre – a criticism that Peterson describes as an “ideologically prescribed perception of what forms African cultural

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p 31

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p 126

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p 128

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, p 127

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, p 133

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p 114

practice should take”<sup>36</sup> – Peterson argues that the Society played an important role in developing a politics that embraced the urban African as such.<sup>37</sup> In other words, through deploying a limited nationalist agenda (it was limited precisely because of the restrictions on politics that prevailed at the BMSC) the Society managed to create what Peterson would refer to as an authentic African aesthetic which did not simply lament a lost paradise but rather celebrated the urbanized African. This is not to argue that there was no recourse made to a precolonial past, this was in fact one of Dhlomo’s favourite strategies; rather, when such recourse was made it was done strategically in order to counter African inferiority.<sup>38</sup> Despite its intentions in this regard, however, Peterson points out that the Society never really worked. Its members were always committed elsewhere and they almost never managed to perform plays that were written by Africans for Africans. Peterson counters this apparent failure by asserting that although the plays themselves were not ‘African’, the performance was.<sup>39</sup>



Alongside the development of the Bantu Dramatic Society Peterson notes the emergence of the British Drama League. The League, which reflected the shift from a civilizing mission to cultural relativism as the colonial project, aimed to work towards the preservation of African traditional society: precisely what Dhlomo was working against.<sup>40</sup> Peterson suggests that the League was very successful in its attempts at nativising Africans through advocating benevolent segregation and an anthropological understanding of African society.<sup>41</sup> As such, Peterson argues that the League represented the “ethnographic gaze” of colonial society which worked to establish a false binary between the rural happy African and the urban corrupted

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p 136

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p 155

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p 214

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p 152

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p 160

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, pp 163 – 165

African. It is in the interstitial space between these competing ideals of what it meant to be an African that Dhlomo operated.<sup>42</sup>

Dhlomo's work and politics was already discussed at length in chapter 3 and will therefore not form a substantial part for the discussion here; it will suffice to briefly reiterate a number of key issues in his work in the light of the above. Peterson argues that Dhlomo's politics must be viewed as being rooted in the interstitial rather than in ideology.<sup>43</sup> In other words, it was because of his ambiguous position within colonial society that Dhlomo articulated the politics that he did, not due to a preconceived ideal. Dhlomo's politics can be summarized as consisting of an ardent belief in the nation combined with disillusionment in the civilizing promise of colonialism. As was discussed previously, the beginnings of this politics can already be seen in 'The Girl Who Killed to Save', and as becoming more explicit in 'Moshoeshoe' – a play particularly about resistance.<sup>44</sup> According to Peterson, an incredibly important element of Dhlomo's politics was his understanding of narrative as the key to organizing history and identifying subjects, a perspective that Peterson argues allowed Dhlomo to privilege African agency in his plays and, we might add, positions Dhlomo very closely to Hayden White's concept of the narrative in history.

### **Broken Style**

Peterson's argument is both intriguing in its effectiveness and perturbing in its failure. It is effective to the extent that Peterson does manage to portray a sense of "agency" and thereby resistance in the engagements surrounding the various plays which he examines. This agency which Peterson posits is also intriguing in the sense that it is not simply one of resistance; it is also profoundly complicit with what he terms "the colonial project." The complicity, however, does not stop with the main biographical

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p 174

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p 216

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, pp 176 and 211 – 213

characters in his argument. Rather than undoing the effects of the colonial project, Peterson actually recycles the idea of the subject that he sets out to oppose.

A consequence of Peterson's understanding of the subject is that it authorizes an inclusionary response to the problem of writing history after apartheid; a process that effectively amounts to identity politics. Furthermore, it also raises the question of marginality. In Peterson's argument this is understood as a simple inside/outside delineation, a notion that Mowitt's and Smith's (not to mention Scott's and Spivak's) concept of the subject undoes. Throughout his argument, Peterson makes use of a concept of a self-styling subject. In other words in Peterson's understanding the subject seems to style itself: the subject for example consciously selects the different positions that it assumes and its agency lies in that selection

An important element in this understanding of the subject is the notion that agency equates to consciousness, in other words, the subject must be able to operate consciously to have agency and, consequently, nothing without consciousness can have agency. Quite clearly this would fall prey to Smith's critique of the subject, discussed in chapter 2, where he argues that the subject is always already multiply interpellated (interstitial) and that its agency arises out of the internal competition between these interpellations – a notion that John Mowitt extends and alters through his discussion of text into a theory of the subjection of human agency.

The second area in which Peterson's argument becomes troubling is that of the status accorded to plays within it. In his argument plays work as repositories of interstitiality that are readily available as an evidentiary form. In other words, in a similar manner to how Hayden White understands the archive as a repository of facts that needs to be ordered (see Chapter 2), Peterson views the plays as a resource rather than as an episteme. This is perhaps best described in his classification of the plays as historical allegories: as allegories, the plays maintain a certain distance from that which they describe, whether it is history, identity, or politics and, as such, through maintaining this distance the plays do not problematise that which they

represent either. While conceding that some historical plays may operate on this level, it has been a consistent argument in this dissertation that, rather than simply performing as allegories, historical plays through utilizing a strategy of parabasis actually disrupt the discipline of history rather than keep it in tact.

Considering the importance that Peterson has placed on the interstitial, it may have been more productive if he had posited a notion of the interstitial as a disruptive/interruptive space, rather than viewing the interstitial as a meeting space between two wholes that their designation as allegory serves to protect. As was shown in the discussion of Brett Bailey's *The Prophet* earlier, such a space threatens to overrun disciplinary reason through the interruptions it authorises and thereby might allow an effective engagement with the subaltern. In any case, through his failure to comprehend subject constitution and the inclusion of the subject as a problem that marks the interstices, Peterson fixes his argument within the realm of a nationalist (and at times ethnic) identity politics. This seems to be inadequate as a basis for critiquing apartheid. A strategic essentialism, to follow Spivak's formulation, would have enabled the reading of these plays to be doubly productive through questioning the role of the African intelligentsia while simultaneously disrupting the identities that have been utilized to such ends.

### **Texts and Contexts: Reading Derek Peterson**

The concepts of textuality and historical play that are at work in Derek Peterson's *Creative Writing* are on some levels very different to those that are at work in Bhekizwe Peterson's *Monarchs, Missionaries and African Intellectuals*. For Derek Peterson textuality has to do with the blurring between the text and its context that occurs when "composition" takes place in a "composing community".<sup>45</sup> In other words, Peterson proposes to read both the 'text' and its context as objects that are

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<sup>45</sup> Peterson, (2004: p 2)

crucially related to each other. Through reading texts in this broad sense, Peterson is then able to suggest that writing becomes scripting – in a theatrical sense – and that as such “political organizers [in Kenya] were also theatre directors”.<sup>46</sup> Or, as he phrases it later, “textual work was also the work of political imagination. It helped uphold communities of principle.”<sup>47</sup> It is in this scripting that Peterson then locates the appearance of an African agency that he wants to bring to the fore in his work.<sup>48</sup> Along with assigning agency to Gikuyu subjects, Peterson is also interested in, to a certain extent, salvaging the interventions of missionaries in colonial Africa so as to draw out the positive elements of their discourses within a postcolonial critique. Peterson’s argument is both rigorous and diffuse and, as such, I will first present a close reading of it before I posit a critique in the light of my overall argument.

Peterson builds his argument around three major threads in his text which for the purposes of this discussion we might term ‘the politics of governance’, ‘the local versus the national’, and ‘missionary ambiguity’. These threads work together in Peterson’s text to critique and destabilize the dominant historiographies of Kenya as well as the dominant literary interpretations of one of Kenya’s most famous novelists, Ngugi Wa Thiong’o. Despite the close proximity between Peterson’s use of textuality and the textual politics that I have been calling for, in the following discussion I will argue that Peterson runs into trouble through the manner in which he operationalises his understanding of textuality and consequent understanding of agency. First, however, we need to read Creative Writing.

### **The Politics of Governance**

In order to engage effectively with the Gikuyu experience of colonialism and their responses to it, Peterson argues that it is necessary to first understand the nature of

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p 242

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p 244

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, pp 143 – 144

Gikuyu society before and in the opening years of colonialism. In other words, he argues that it is necessary to understand what he calls the “grammar of ethnic debate”.<sup>49</sup> This grammar, which is marked by value and form, is threaded throughout all the various events that Peterson discusses and is actually the key through which he argues for the opposing and contestatory relationship between the local and the national.

According to Peterson, in precolonial Gikuyu society wealth and a resultant respectability as well as the right to speak were derived from the experience of clearing forests for agriculture, a process called *wiathi*.<sup>50</sup> This often difficult and arduous task defined the line between those heads of households who were able to provide for the well being of their dependants, and those that were incapable. Quite clearly, those that did not have land would fall into this latter category. As such, Peterson suggests that poverty should be understood as constituting a “political and ontological disaster” for men as it left them without respect, political voice, or a culturally valid claim to masculinity within a highly patriarchal society.<sup>51</sup> This leads Peterson to suggest that in Gikuyu society “culture grew out of horticulture”, in other words, Gikuyu valued the cleared space of the town or homestead and were therefore loyal to the land and the ability to control it. This loyalty was reflected in their religious and cultural practices.<sup>52</sup>

Having established the element of value in the “grammar of ethnic debate”, it is now possible to delineate its form. According to Peterson, the Gikuyu never viewed themselves as a unified “tribe” or “nation” led by a chief or king but rather as loosely associated groups, linked through kinship ties and other face-to-face verbal

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, p 10

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, pp 11 – 16 and 143

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p 13 and 167 – 168; interestingly Peterson never states explicitly that Gikuyu society was patriarchal, even though it is clear from the structure of households and communities that Peterson presents that this was the case.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, pp 36 – 38

agreements that were governed by the preeminence of robust debate.<sup>53</sup> Of course, the rights to debate were decided according to the values outlined earlier. Peterson suggests that there were then two forms of political control that were considered to be valid. The first was called mbari (actually the name given to the governing council) and related to a slow linear progression of history and debate. This form was generally practiced by the older wealthier and more established household heads and was focused on maintaining social order as understood through wiathi. The second was referred to as ituika and consisted of a sudden, almost revolutionary, change in leadership that was undertaken for the future posterity of the Gikuyu – the events that Peterson discusses as evidence of this all occurred during massive famine. This process was often coupled with a buying off of the current community elders.<sup>54</sup> This double form of political control clearly created the potential for generational conflict, something that Peterson argues all generations attempted to avoid.<sup>55</sup>



Thus the value of the “grammar of ethnic debate” was that of wiathi within the form of mbari and ituika. A further point of Peterson’s analysis, which will be made clear later, is that mbari became to be associated with the local whereas ituika became associated with the national. Having established the nature of the “grammar of ethnic debate”, Peterson then utilizes this to posit the notion that writing, and particularly the debates on writing, reflected the debate between mbari and ituika. The understanding of writing as reflecting and constituting political positions in a debate (what he terms “creative writing”) forms a central part of much of Peterson’s argument, as the title of his book makes explicit. As such, in Peterson’s argument creative writing becomes the web that connects the various points of Gikuyu and colonial society.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, p 13

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p 19

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, pp 72 and 127

The two main areas in which Peterson argues that this creative writing occurs are bookkeeping and bible translation. The second of these, bible translation, was utilized in very interesting ways by Gikuyu converts so as to open up possible lines of argument to contest their colonial marginality.<sup>56</sup> In addition, the issue of bible translation, and later bureaucracy, caused a number of debates surrounding Gikuyu orthography, which, considering that in Peterson's argument literacy became the basis for polity building, became quite heated. The strength of this debate leads Peterson to assert that orthography and the politics of writing and reading are at an intersection between language and politics.<sup>57</sup> In other words, writing becomes an interstitial zone.

The heated nature of these debates over orthography was due to the political faith that the Gikuyu had placed in the notion of assimilation; a possibility that the Gikuyu argued was being squashed by particularly Protestant attempts to alter the number of vowels and to institute a prescriptive nature of grammar so as to concretely establish meaning within the sentence – a move that was particularly helpful for bible translation but which the Gikuyu argued made their language look primitive.<sup>58</sup> The Catholic approach to Gikuyu orthography was, on the surface, much less restrictive. However, their orthography was designed so as to lead the individual to recall the spoken word of the Catholic Church.<sup>59</sup> In other words, meaning is derived from the church not from your own readings. Following closely behind these attempts to transform the orthographic practice of individuals was an attempt in 1928 to replace the theological basis of writing with a broadly scientific one that would homogenize grammar for the entire sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>60</sup> All these attempts necessarily met with resistance from Gikuyu who felt that their possibilities of being

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<sup>56</sup> *ibid*, pp 66 and 85; a position that brings Derek Peterson's and Bhekizizwe Peterson's narrative very close to each other.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid*, pp 118 and 135

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*, pp 117 – 122

<sup>59</sup> *ibid*, pp 122 – 125

<sup>60</sup> *ibid*, p 126

treated as equals were being undermined. In other words, writing was never simply about keeping records or communication; it had to do with political strategy. Although the missionary project was an integral element in colonial conquest, it is also clear from Peterson's argument that their interactions with local communities also authored the possibility of resistance.

### **Missionary Ambiguities**

One of Peterson's aims in *Creative Writing*, I argue, is to rescue the missionary project from a totalizing characterization as being entirely complicit with colonialism. Through positing a notion of creative writing as occurring in bible translation, Peterson opens the possibility of making such an argument. Particularly, one of his key moves is to suggest that the debates that occurred around biblical translation offer a possibility of reading the contours of Gikuyu generational debate, a debate that was fraught with tensions between the local and the national.<sup>61</sup>

Peterson begins his discussion of the missionary project through highlighting the manner in which missionaries 'translated' what they viewed as Gikuyu religion into a doctrinally premised theology, a translation that was done so as to draw the Gikuyu into religious debate and towards conversion. Through this process of translation, missionaries sought to link Christian doctrine to Gikuyu practice in such a way as to make Christianity the natural fulfilment of Gikuyu religion.<sup>62</sup> As such, this translation into the grammar of comparative religion, which often entailed deliberate mistranslations, was really a form of "political and intellectual control".<sup>63</sup> The missionary project began in the Nyeri District in July of 1908 when missionaries secured the rights to build a mission station on Tumutumu hill.<sup>64</sup> Among the earliest

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid, p 81

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, pp 45 and 49

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, pp 34 and 65

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, pp 42 and 50

concerns of missionaries were the issues of translation and of controlling the leisure time of their converts. In order to control leisure time, missionaries introduced a wage labour system at the mission station ensuring that they could buy the leisure time of their converts and thus keep them at the mission.<sup>65</sup> It was this move, according to Peterson, that began the commodification of time and labour in Nyeri District. This commodification of labour and time, extended through the colonial project, was to have important political consequences for Nyeri District and the rest of Kenya.

Education was also an important part of the missionary project. Peterson argues that through the establishment of mission schools the Gikuyu were introduced to the rules of bureaucracy and to the intricacies of biblical translation and Christian morality.<sup>66</sup> As such, mission schools and Christian marriage became interesting points of contest as they posited new standards for judging character, standards which were to a certain extent opposed to those derived from *wiathi*.<sup>67</sup> One manifestation of this contest was found in debates over cleanliness. The missionaries taught their converts to use soap and linen clothing so as to demonstrate their cleanliness; however, in Gikuyu tradition it was occasionally necessary to wash with animal fat so as to protect yourself from ceremonial uncleanness – a state entered in to through contact with unproductive and wild elements in nature.<sup>68</sup> Through adopting missionary techniques of cleanliness, converts were effectively arguing that these new techniques were as effective in ensuring *wiathi* as the traditional methods.<sup>69</sup> In addition, these “lessons in hygiene” were utilized as a vehicle through which to challenge the older generation.<sup>70</sup> Coupled with the biblical narrative of the coming kingdom, young men used mission education as a form of *ituika*, a way to prepare for a different future.

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<sup>65</sup> *ibid*, p 43

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*, p 149

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*, pp 55 and 59

<sup>68</sup> *ibid*, pp 36 and 73 – 76

<sup>69</sup> *ibid*, p 80

<sup>70</sup> *ibid*, pp 79 – 80

This is one of the main reasons why in Peterson's argument, although the missionaries are indicted by him on their complicity – expressed through their adoption of English language policies and vocational training schemes propagated by the colonial government and their essentialising of Gikuyu religion and culture – with the colonial project, they are generally viewed favourably. Peterson argues that, through their impartation of the English language, bureaucratic technique, and use of the bible translation to support specific ends, missionaries should actually be viewed as “grammar teachers”.<sup>71</sup> It was through utilizing this political grammar that resistance to colonial authority was developed.

### **A Nationalism Undone**

The contestation between mbari and ituika that was reflected in the debate over orthography and marriage forms the interpretative principle that threads Peterson's discussion of a number of key 'events' in the history of resistance in Kenya. The first of these 'events' that Peterson discusses is the move away from missionary schools and churches towards independent ones. According to Peterson, the increasing levels of commodity farming and wage labour, and the subsequent hoarding of land by more senior members of households, led many Gikuyu (particularly from Nyeri District) to move away and find employment on white owned farms.<sup>72</sup> The increase in wealth due to wage labour and the distance from mission stations then contributed to the founding of a number of independent schools. According to Peterson, these independent schools taught wiathi and the contribution of money towards the founding of these schools were considered to be ituika.<sup>73</sup> In other words, the founding of these schools fitted perfectly within the “grammar of ethnic debate”.

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<sup>71</sup> *ibid*, p 243

<sup>72</sup> *ibid*, pp 139 – 142

<sup>73</sup> *ibid*, p 143

Independent schools were, in Peterson's argument, about "training moral agency" in the colonial world. Part of this agency was the decision to take back the responsibility of raising their children away from the missionaries.<sup>74</sup> As such, the schools had a twofold approach to education. On the one hand, the students were taught English, trained in bureaucratic form, and encouraged to assume Christian names through baptism, and on the other hand, this training was to be turned towards a negotiation with the colonial government.<sup>75</sup> In order to lend these independent schools credibility apart from the missionary project, Bishop Daniel Alexander of the African Orthodox Church in South Africa was invited to train and ordain a number of clergy for an independent church.<sup>76</sup> He came to Kenya and performed this function; however, when he then tried to make the new churches send a tithe to him in South Africa he was instructed in no uncertain terms that no such tithe would ever be sent.<sup>77</sup>



Through looking at the establishment of an independent school at Kabiruini and the establishment of an independent Kenya Teachers College, Peterson demonstrates how this education strategy enabled Gikuyu to "contract the reach of colonial power, opening up government rules for negotiation."<sup>78</sup> In both cases the colonial government, largely at the behest of the missionaries who felt that independent schools and churches would undermine their effectiveness, was opposed to the establishment of these institutions. And, in both cases, through playing the bureaucratic game of government by inviting the responsible party in government to an opening ceremony without their knowledge, the institutions were sanctioned by government.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *ibid*, pp 143 – 144

<sup>75</sup> *ibid*, pp 139 and 149

<sup>76</sup> *ibid*, pp 145 – 146

<sup>77</sup> *ibid*, p 155

<sup>78</sup> *ibid*, p 155

<sup>79</sup> *ibid*, pp 150 – 155

Around the same time that Bishop Alexander was refused his request for a tithe to be sent to him, the independent schools and churches went through a split. Whereas in the official historiography this split is generally understood as revolving around a clash in personalities, Peterson argues that this split occurred as a reaction to the attempt to impose a national politics at the expense of local values.<sup>80</sup> In other words, in line with the “grammar of ethnic debate”, this split marked the impossibility of asserting the national over the local. There are many other instances that Peterson discusses which can be read against the dominant mode of historiography in Kenya as actually revolving around the “grammar of ethnic debate”, two notable examples would be what he terms the “garden affair” and the “East African Revival”.<sup>81</sup> In the former instance, what began as a national movement with the backing of the KCA was eventually condemned by them, as it became clear that it was really an expression of local debate that threatened the process of establishing a national identity. In the case of the latter, it was opposed nationally from within the independent church movements as it enflamed local tensions, resulting in an increase in regional discord that undermined the establishment of a national identity. To the extent that these acts all unsettled the drive towards a national unity, a drive that was justified under the framework of *ituika*, Peterson considers them to be deconstructive in nature.<sup>82</sup>

The Mau Mau movement in Kenya is, according to Peterson, probably one of the few ‘events’ that is actually treated in terms of its local expression rather than as a unified national movement. However, Peterson suggests that it is necessary to investigate how Mau Mau managed to achieve a form of national solidarity.<sup>83</sup> To this end he argues that writing in Mau Mau was the key element in transforming it into a

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<sup>80</sup> *ibid*, p 158

<sup>81</sup> see *ibid* pp 91 – 114 for the former and *ibid* pp 165 – 176 for the latter.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid*, p 114

<sup>83</sup> *ibid*, p 191

national war of independence.<sup>84</sup> Particularly through the practice of record keeping, or bookkeeping, Peterson argues that Mau Mau was able to recruit soldiers and supporters from across diverse local polities. This worked through imbuing a sense of national fatherhood on those who were giving their lives for Mau Mau – a significant factor considering that the ability to ensure the health of your household (here equated to the nation) was what decided your masculinity – and it allowed those who were investing money to be assured of a return in their investment.<sup>85</sup> Importantly, Peterson places the Mau Mau movement within a context in which, through the Beecher Report, the government was going to limit Gikuyu access to education, thereby squashing their educational strategy of resistance. In addition, there were an increasing number of Gikuyu after World War II that were forced to become proletarians due to the extent of commodity farming and its effects on Gikuyu communities. In short, Peterson argues that Mau Mau was about restoring social order and responsibility in a time of increasing chaos.<sup>86</sup>

The movement practiced government procedure in the forest so as to contest the legitimacy of the colonial government. Peterson suggests that there were two reasons why this bureaucracy was practiced: on the one hand, it helped establish a partisan polity through the promise of future reward, while on the other, it helped to establish the form of an independent state, the effect of which was to “provincialise” the colonial government through making them appear to be disturbers of the peace as opposed to the upholders of law.<sup>87</sup> Interestingly Peterson argues that Mau Mau was only a violent movement when it came into contact with strong expressions of local politics, such as the East African Revival.<sup>88</sup>

It is clear that in Peterson’s argument literacy – by which I mean the ability to understand the grammar of governmentality – is the basis for polity building, as

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<sup>84</sup> *ibid*, p 189

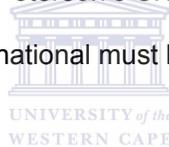
<sup>85</sup> *ibid*, pp 189 – 192

<sup>86</sup> *ibid*, pp 195 – 198

<sup>87</sup> *ibid*, pp 202 – 205

<sup>88</sup> *ibid*, p 210

writing becomes the interpellative tool through which individuals become part of imagined communities.<sup>89</sup> As such, Peterson locates African agency in the practice of grammar (a technique first imparted by the missionaries) as it allowed the Gikuyu to, in some form, speak to the colonial government.<sup>90</sup> However, this process of nation building that Peterson has shown to have been variously undone through the assertion of the local was, in his argument, not finally established through Mau Mau. He clarifies this through his discussion of Ngugi Wa Thiang'o's novels in Gikuyu. Noting how Ngugi re-wrote Gikuyu orthography so as to effectively convey his meaning, Peterson argues that Ngugi is attempting to interpellate a new imagined community through a call to moral and national unity.<sup>91</sup> As such, Peterson locates Ngugi within the strategies of *ituika* that he has been discussing throughout his book.<sup>92</sup> It is in relation to this call for the nation that Peterson suggests Ngugi is making that, I would like to argue, Peterson's Creative Writing as an assertion of the disruptive effect of the local on the national must be read.



### **Agents of Autochthony**

Although Peterson's approach to the question of nationalism through the disruptive positionality of the local is interesting and, I would argue to a limited extent, productive, it is precisely this privileging of the local in his writing that I think undermines the potential productivity of his text. Through privileging the local, whether it is in terms of an "ethnic grammar" or familial relations, as an effective means of disrupting the national, Peterson's argument tends to make itself available to a politics of autochthony. The difficulty that such a politics authors – problems of geographic essentialism, local exceptionalism, etc. – has been made clear by

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<sup>89</sup> *ibid*, pp 99 and 4

<sup>90</sup> *ibid*, p 139

<sup>91</sup> *ibid*, pp 222 – 236

<sup>92</sup> *ibid*, p 236

Alessandro Triulzi in his discussion of postcolonial (in a temporal sense) Cameroon.<sup>93</sup> As such, while it might dispel a claim to identity politics on a broader scale, it simply reinforces such a politics in the local.

A second element in Peterson's text that I would argue is not problematised enough is the emphasis that he places on context. While Peterson argues that text and context are blurred due to creative writing, it is interesting that the context that he provides is only focused on the local. In other words, he does not contextualize the missionary text (or for that matter colonial governmentality) as originating from Europe and, as such, the context into which the text would seem to blur is decidedly limited. Of course, the special hermeneutic value that Peterson attributes to context may be a possible reason for this narrow contextual focus. In other words, while Peterson argues for a blurring between text and context, in his narrative it is always the context that allows a correct interpretation of the text, rather than the other way round.



In addition to the difficulty of the relationship between text and context, in Peterson's text the status of agency is also unclear. Although Peterson locates the subject as being constituted in the interstitial space of writing, it is not clear whether Peterson views agency as coming from consciousness or as imbuing it. The implications of this are that if Peterson understands agency as coming from consciousness then the subject in his text becomes a self styling one; however, if he views agency as authoring consciousness then 'the subject' can only be deployed strategically in his text. The latter interpretation would place Peterson's text productively close to the concept of "textual politics" that has been argued for in this dissertation. Linked into this question of agency is the question of the status of Peterson as writer. The politics of his writing, his conditions of possibility, are left elided in his text, thereby masking the constituted nature of his own identity as

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<sup>93</sup> Alessandro Triulzi, 'African Cities, Historical Memory and Street Buzz' in Chambers, I. and Curti, L (eds), *The Post-Colonial Question*, (New York: Routledge, 1996)

scholar and author – an interrogation of which Peterson’s narrative appears to be perfectly poised to undertake.

Finally, in the light of the above criticisms it becomes necessary to query the status of text and historical play in Creative Writing. The status of the text in Peterson is subsumed within his allegorical understanding of society as theatre. What occurs in this moment of subsumation is that the disruptive effect of text on the disciplines of history and literary studies is contained. While both disciplines are implicated in the constitution/interpellation of subjectivities, they are implicated on an interdisciplinary level. In other words, they work together they do not interrupt each other. Consequently, historical play in Peterson denotes this interaction between disciplines rather than, what I have been arguing, the productively disruptive nature of an object that forces the discipline of history to face its own textuality.

### **Political Difference**



While in my above criticisms of both Bhekizizwe Peterson and Derek Peterson’s works, I argued that both of their arguments fall short of a textual politics in significant ways; it is perhaps necessary to return to this question of politics in order to close this chapter. Both Bhekizizwe Peterson and Derek Peterson (the former perhaps more explicitly than the latter) write their work within what I would term an inclusionary politics. In other words, starting from the premise that what we might call the subaltern has been excluded from historical discourse, they both attempt to depict them as being active agents through their resistance to the process of colonialisation and, more particularly, through their ability to appropriate different techniques of governmentality to their own end.

While these strategies are interesting and to some extent productive in how they are used to challenge dominant modes of historical discourse, I would suggest – echoing Helen Bradford’s argument in Chapter 1 – that their arguments falter

precisely at this point of inclusion. Stated simply, in their arguments they ignore that the category of the subaltern is always already included as a subordinate clause in the discourse of history.<sup>94</sup> As such, they miss the productive possibilities that exist in a “textual politics” as a result of its disruption of the discourse of history and rather, through effecting an inclusion, maintain the discourse of history and thereby the position of the subaltern within it. In other words, theirs does not offer a politics of difference but of maintenance.



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<sup>94</sup> This is similar to the argument in Premesh Lalu, ‘The Grammar of Domination and the Subjection of Agency: Colonial Texts and Modes of Evidence’, in *History and Theory*, vol. 39, No. 4, 2000, pp 45 – 68

## Writing History after Apartheid

My aim in writing this dissertation has been to delineate the possible productivity of the concept of the historical play for the writing of history in a postapartheid South Africa. As I argued in the introduction, the task of writing a history after apartheid would need to contend with the problematic nature of the relationship between the discipline of history and the politics of nationalism and identity. In other words, I argued that it is necessary for the discipline of history to confront its status as alibi to a politics of identity and nationalism, an argument that becomes especially pertinent when it is recalled that apartheid can be characterized as an outworking of just such a politics. Building on Michel Foucault's discussion of the political implications of his own project, I suggested that the writing of a history along these lines would enable a progressive politics.



In the first part of this dissertation I set out to argue in relation to a number of debates between leading Eastern Cape historians that an effective engagement with this problem of the politics of identity and nationalism would require a confrontation with the question of representation in the discipline of history and within academic discourse in general. Working with Gayatri Spivak's concept of a strategic essentialism as an effective method through which to interrupt the discourse of history, particularly its reliance on the foundational category of representation, I posited the notion through discussing the playwright Brett Bailey's *iMumbo Jumbo* that the historical play might allow the use of just such a strategic essentialism in the writing of history. Using a review of Brett Bailey's work, written by Helen Bradford, I posited the argument that the historical play in deploying a strategic essentialism simultaneously requires the discipline of history to encounter its own textuality.

Exploring the dynamics of such an encounter through reading what has been termed the linguistic and literary turns in history, I argued that these responses to the problem of textuality did not adequately deal with the question of representation that was raised in my first chapter due to their respective withdrawals into disciplinarity: a move that can be identified in John Toews' utilisation of experience as a foundational category for the writing of history and in Hayden White's shifting of the writing of history out of the discipline of history and into that of literature studies. Through reading the critique of these responses to textuality by Joan Scott and Spivak respectively, I suggested that a "textual politics" that draws on Paul de Man's concept of "irony" as constituting "a permanent parabasis of the allegory of tropes", a position similar to Spivak's strategic essentialism, allowed an effective engagement with the question of representation in the discipline of history.

By reading Paul Smith's discussion of the construction of agency and John Mowitt's discussion of the socio-genesis of the text, I refined the concept of the historical play within the frame of a "textual politics". Through this discussion I argued that the historical play operates in a similar manner to that of, following Mowitt, the text as an antidisiplinary object. The historical play, as an antidisiplinary object, disrupts the discipline of history's repressed dynamic by making it face its own textuality and, thereby, allowing a textual politics of the sort that Spivak calls for. As such, the historical play as object disrupts the discipline of history (and thereby its position as alibi) and allows a politics of what Spivak calls "learning to learn from below" (see Chapter 2).

Having established the status and productivity of the historical play in part one of this dissertation, in part two I sought to read out its implications for the discipline of history. Through reading a number of historical narratives and plays that deal with Nongqawuse and the Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856 –7, an episode whose present political relevance was posited in my introduction, I argued that the historical play is both latent within the discipline of history as a kind-of internalised parabasis

that continuously works to unsettle the discipline, and that the historical play is deployed as a strategy within theatre to deal with the demands of the discipline of history. Further, I argued in chapter 4 that the historical play allows the prophetic as such to be taken seriously in the writing of history, something which the majority of historical narratives and plays that were read completely dismissed. In performing this reading it was also made apparent that not all historical theatre works as historical play.

Of course, this is not the only project that has sought to utilise a concept of historical play for the writing of history. As such, in the final chapter of this dissertation I provided a serious reading of two similar projects: that of Bhekizwe Peterson and Derek Peterson, with the intention of confronting their arguments with mine in this dissertation. As a result of this reading I argued that through failing to contend with what I have been terming the problem of representation, both Bhekizwe and Derek Peterson's projects offer a politics of maintenance rather than of difference.



In the light of the above I would argue that the historical play, as an object that destabilises the discipline of history and, through performing a textual politics that allows it to engage with the problem of representation, allows the writing of a history after apartheid, in the sense that it seeks to destabilise apartheid's condition of emergence. Through destabilising this condition of emergence (and simultaneously the historian's ability to write the past) the historical play enables a progressive politics that might work to clear the space for, as I argued in chapter 3, an arrival in the Derridean sense.

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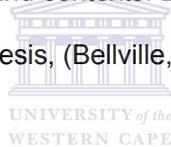
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