

Afrikaans Theatre: A Centre Moving?

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Critics such as Brydon (1984) have suggested a postcolonial, counter discursive interpretation of William Shakespeare's play, *The Tempest*. The existence of three stages of colonisation is confirmed even by a superficial reading of the text.

During the first stage Sycorax, a witch, is left on an island with child by passing sailors. Her son, Caliban, '[a] freckled whelp hag-born—not honour'd with/[a] human shape' (Act 1, Scene 2), is born on the island. An airy spirit called Ariel serves her but because he refused to obey her repulsive commands she fixed him into a cloven pine. The second phase commences after Sycorax had died and Prospero and Miranda have landed on the island. Prospero is the rightful Duke of Milan whom his brother Antonio had replaced and then put to sea to die with his daughter. He reaches and occupies the island, releases Ariel from Sycorax's spell and subjugates Caliban as his slave. During a storm a ship with friends and enemies aboard perishes nearby. Prospero reveals himself to the shipwrecked persons as the true Duke, after which the colonisers return to Europe aboard the repaired vessel. Now the third stage commences: Ariel receives his freedom and Caliban probably remains on the island. 'We want Caliban to be left behind in what is, after all, his own place, but', declares Bloom (1988:6), 'Shakespeare neither indulges nor denies our desires'.

Introduction

This interpretation of *The Tempest* reveals features relating to the discourse on the marginalisation and postcolonial situation of plays written in Afrikaans. These include the consecutive colonising of the southern tip of Africa, first by settler-occupation followed by military invasion. In 1652 a Dutch trading company, the Generale Vereenighde Nederlantsche G'octroyeerde Oostindische Compagnie, or V.O.C., founded a halfway station to replenish its ships *en route* to the East. Britain occupied parts of Southern Africa in 1795, 1806 and in 1902. South Africa officially became the Union of South Africa in 1910 after British victory in the Anglo Boer War (1899-1902). Several instances of internal cultural colonisation ensued after the National Party came to power in 1948 and the African National Congress in 1994.

According to Gilbert and Tompkins (1996:260-268) internal colonisation of minority cultures with limited access to political power commonly occurs. In Malaysia, which is the example Gilbert and Tompkins (1996:265) quote, the ruling elite enshrined the Malay language, culture and Islam to the disadvantage of other cultures. The resemblances between Malaysia and South Africa in 1948 and 1994 are striking. However, the South African situation in 1948 differed from the situation in Malaysia. In 1948 Apartheid caused forms of internal colonisation increasingly preventing or hampering cultural expression by most South Africans. The ruling elite enshrined the Afrikaans language in a fashion similar to the entrenchment of the Malay language. Presently it seems as if a reverse process is taking place. In practice it appears as if the ruling elite is enshrining the English/english language and culture to the disadvantage of most minority cultures, including persons speaking Afrikaans.

Essential to this observation is an acceptance that postcolonialism in South Africa represents a continuous process with diverse consequences. According to Ashcroft *et al.* (1989:2) this process originated in an act of European imperial aggression:

We use the term 'post-colonial', however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression.

Postcolonialism therefore refers to the influence of the process of colonisation on plays in Afrikaans after the event has taken place, including events relating to neocolonialism.

Using a general literary systems approach, it suggests that Afrikaans theatre was at different times subjected to diverse kinds of cultural subordination. As in instances elsewhere the consequences were severe: 'Colonisation is insidious', explain Gilbert and Tompkins (1996:2),

it invades far more than political chambers and extends well beyond independence celebrations. Its effects shape language, education, religion, artistic sensibilities, and, increasingly, popular culture.

Due to its public and often subversive nature, postcolonial theatre is frequently castigated. Afrikaans theatre protested against the power exerted by the colonial centre, and by so doing exposed itself to political intervention. Anticipating political intervention *Die verminktes* (1960; *The Maimed*) by Bartho Smit had its première in English at the Royal Court Theatre, London. *Die pluimsaad waai ver* (1972; *The Plume's*

Seed Blows Far) by N.P. van Wyk Louw had its first performance at the fifth celebration of South Africa becoming a republic. (All translations from Afrikaans are by the author of this article). Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd severely criticised the play because it did not conform to his expectations of an occasional drama. Verwoerd's comments released a barrage of public criticism against the playwright and his play.

The general aim of this article is to explain how Afrikaans theatre was subjected to various processes of postcolonialism. These processes were the result of occupation, invasion and different types of internal colonisation. Concluding, I shall attempt provisionally to characterise the uniqueness of Afrikaans theatre and the marginalisation to which it was subjected at times.

Occupation

Various forms of colonialism arose from establishing a Dutch V.O.C. halfway station at the Cape in 1652. This occupation led to the spread of Dutch cultural influence to the interior as a consequence of the migration of stock farmers speaking a variant of Dutch. Dutch-Afrikaans influence increased at the cost of the cultural heritage and the marginalisation of the indigenous Khoikhoi people, who were mercilessly massacred by the colonists. Wade (1995:xix) therefore appropriately asserts that colonisers have been suppressing South Africans since 1652.

Contrasting with the extinction of the Khoikhoi, the colonists contested the autocratic rule of the Dutch governor, Willem Adriaan van der Stel. D.J. Opperman (1978) depicted this event in his play *Vergelegen* (1956; meaning, an unattainable ideal, a remote location) as an example of the rising of Afrikaner nationalism. The action in *Vergelegen* indirectly suggests the playwright's reaction to the rise of Afrikaner nationalism in his own time. In the play Van der Stel and his followers clash with a group of 'free settlers' (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989:9) led by Adam Tas and Van der Heiden. The governor denies the settlers the right to trade their farm produce freely, which inevitably results in the formation of a united group of rebels distancing themselves from colonial Dutch authority. After submitting a petition objecting to Van der Stel's rule, the V.O.C. disbands his followers and calls the governor back to answer for his misdemeanours.

Opperman's play presents two perspectives. The first relates to an actual historical event, which he transposed as a 'subtext' to the time of writing the play. According to Jameson (1993:81) the historical event is presented in such a way 'that that "subtext" is not immediately present as such ... but rather must itself always be (re)constructed after the fact'. This perspective culminates in Van der Heiden exclaiming: 'we are no longer Huguenot or Dutchman/but new persons, stronger, more lonely/than they are Yes, I am an Afrikaner' (Opperman 1978:91).

His realisation relates to the second phase of cultural colonisation during which the margin writes back to the centre giving preference to its own cultural productions. Van der Heiden realises that a new identity has grown out of ‘Huguenot’ and ‘Dutchman’, and that the name ‘Afrikaner’ ties him to a new place, which is not Europe. He really expresses what Ashcroft *et al.* (1989:8f) call

the special post-colonial crisis of identity ... the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between self and place.

Simultaneously Van der Heiden’s words suggest the opposition between the ‘Afrikaner’ and an *other* (‘they’). By transposing the historical opposition between the governor (‘they’) and the free settlers to his own time, Opperman criticised features of society (Kannemeyer 1986:270). Especially relevant is the portrayal of the governor’s group as corrupt representatives of government and church. In addition the playwright criticised the division of society in ‘blacks, browns and whites’ (Opperman 1978:86): ‘In this country we shall become one great nation/from many nations, and take from each the best’.

The differences between the playwright’s representation of postcolonialism and the importance the historian Davenport accords to the clash between government and citizen, indicate a number of ideological discontinuities. Davenport (1989:37) dismisses the revolt as

part of the pre-history of Afrikaner nationalism, perhaps, but largely devoid of articulate political ideology and lacking in awareness of the Cape as potentially anything other than an outpost of the V.O.C.

Opperman rejects his claim by emphasising the ‘pre-history of Afrikaner nationalism’ and by foregrounding the postcolonial tension between *self* and *other*, *centre* and *margin*. In addition the play criticises the development of the discourse of Apartheid. In the end Van der Stel concedes that his ideals for the colony were unattainable, including his dream of ‘one great nation/from many nations’ (Opperman 1978:86). However, instead of regarding the main ideas of the play as a major subversion of the political power of the developing postcolonial Apartheid state, one may best view these as a mild form of criticism directed at corruption in general.

Invasion

Except Apartheid few events have surpassed the consequences of the Anglo Boer War on Afrikaner society, such as the attempts by the British colonial authority under Milner to anglicise South Africa. Despite internal divisions Afrikaners reacted negatively to

the colonial centre's display of authority. Milner's endeavours had two consequences. The first was protest in plays against the authority and culture of the coloniser. The second reaction emanated a few years later, after 1920, and was to be less bold, but no less intense.

Examples of playwrights and plays depicting struggle, are J.H.H. de Waal (*Die spioen en sy handlanger/The Spy and his Minion*; 1907), A. Francken (*Susanna Reyniers*; 1908), M. Jansen (*Afrikaner Hartel/Afrikaner's Minds*; 1914), S.P.E Boshoff (*Jannies, Johnnies en Jantjies/Jannies, Johnnies and Jantjies*; 1917), Jan F.E. Celliers (*Heldinne van die oorlog/Heroines of War*; 1913) and C.J. Langenhoven (*Die Hoop van Suid-Afrika/Hope of South Africa*; 1913), and *Die Vrou van Suid-Afrika/Woman of South Africa*; 1918). None of these plays survived the progress of time. However, using history on stage proved to be effective opposition to Milner's anglicisation of Afrikaner culture. These postcolonial plays simultaneously assisted in shaping a historical discourse which gave rise to a unique form of cultural materialism.

Afrikaner cultural leaders established this materialism by constructing a specific brand of nationalism. Dekker (1964:96) describes its manifestations in literature during the first two decades of the century:

an own national form of art ... [should celebrate] ... our history, our heroes, our nature as part of the fatherland, as an expression and creator of the character of our people [*volkskarakter*], the Voortrekker in full attire, the ox wagon, the *jukskei*/yoke-pin.

In this description Dekker assumed that the notion, the *Afrikaner*, represents an organic unity motivated by a single nationalism. Hofmeyr (1993:96) contested the assumption. She pointed out that Afrikaner nationalism related to economic and social influences predicating on capitalism. Part of these relations concerned the way in which cultural leaders managed literary production and consumption.

An example of a postcolonial play embodying the ideas of Afrikaner nationalism was C.J. Langenhoven's (1937) *Die Hoop van Suid-Afrika* (The Hope of South Africa). The play derives its postcolonialism from the depiction of episodes from history before the Anglo Boer War, as a form of protest against colonial occupation. The presentation is therefore blatantly propagandistic. In this regard Binge (1969:45) points out that 'Afrikaners experienced an upsurge of emotional bondage to a people [*volk*, singular; *volke*, plural]' and that Langenhoven's 'awakening' to this emotion 'related to the ... political movement resulting in South Africa becoming a Union in 1910'.

Die Hoop van Suid-Afrika consists of two acts, each containing three scenes. In the first act every scene depicts a different time and place: 1650 and Table Bay, 1750 and the Western Province, 1836 near Grahamstown. The second act depicts a scene near Chief Dingaan's capital city (*kraal*) in 1838 and 1839. The six scenes in the play

therefore present part of South African history from 1650 until 1839. It is, in particular, a presentation of the way in which time, represented by Father Time, treated allegorical characters such as Hope and Cape of Good Hope seen from the perspective of Afrikaner nationalism.

In the play the stereotypical portrayal of characters is obvious. Langenhoven describes Jan van Riebeeck and Dingaan as 'historical', and Boer, Savage, Slave and Woman of South Africa as 'typical'. The playwright depicts Savage as an example of the postcolonial *other*, making no progress in life and without virtue, being unfair and dishonest (Langenhoven 1937:5-8). Savage is bent on revenge because 'the white man took my land' (Langenhoven 1937:15) and he lusts after 'the white women of the white man' (Langenhoven 1937:30). He brutally replies to the Reverend Charel Cilliers (1937:50): 'Look around you, white man. We shall annihilate all your people. The mountains and valleys are black of my people. Do you see us?'

Langenhoven's emphasis in *Die Hoop van Suid-Afrika* on the role of women, religion and race was part of the postcolonial discourse on the empowerment of Afrikaners at the beginning of the century. It also provides an indication of the nature of Afrikaner identity then. Towards the end of the century Deon Opperman (1996) reversed the nuances of the discourse in his epic play *Donkerland* (Dark Land). In the play historical events compel the white man, being the neocolonised subject, to return the land he has appropriated from the indigenous people. Ironically a black woman, Meidjie (a word previously used in Afrikaans to refer to a black servant), becomes the ancestral mother of the family De Witt (meaning *the whites*). In his play Langenhoven had no doubt about the nature of Afrikaner identity. Opperman (1996:157), however, deconstructs Afrikaner identity metaphorically to 'a small heap of broken rubble ... testimony to the existence of a thin line of humanity'.

A similar quest for identity may be found in Herbert Dhlomo's play *The Girl Who Killed to Save* (Nongquase the Liberator) (Visser & Couzens 1985). As with Opperman's and Langenhoven's plays, Dhlomo projected an historical event—the cattle slaughter and subsequent starvation among the amaXhosa—onto contemporary issues. *The Girl Who Killed to Save* (first published in 1935) differs in an important aspect from Langenhoven's play. In *Die Hoop van Suid-Afrika* (first performed in 1913; see Visser & Couzens 1985) Langenhoven attempted to legitimise the *status quo* represented by Afrikaner nationalism. Dhlomo does not legitimise but questions the *status quo*. *The Girl Who Killed to Save* (Visser & Couzens 1985) appeals against the portrayal of Savage in Langenhoven's play and against the occupation of land by whites. The text depicts whites as the *other*. The European colonist is a white thief (Visser & Couzens 1985:12) but, as in Opperman's *Donkerland* (1996), he will relinquish the land he has occupied. Compare Chief Kreli's words at the conclusion of the second scene (Visser & Couzens 1985:15): 'Kreli will triumph over the European.'

Kreli will rule over all the country’.

The quest for cultural identity is an important part of postcolonial plays written in South Africa since the turn of the century. In Afrikaans postcolonial plays Afrikaner nationalism contributed to the estrangement of the Afrikaans subsystem from other forms (Hauptfleisch 1997:49) of South African theatre.

Postcolonialism after 1920

I have already referred to Milner’s attempts to anglicise South Africa in the period immediately following the Anglo Boer War. Previously, during the second British occupation from 1806 onwards, Lord Charles Somerset similarly aimed at anglicising the region. Their attempts included the compulsory use of English by the judiciary and in the public service, churches and schools, emphasising the importance of language in the postcolonial process. Because speakers use language to control reality, Somerset and Milner succeeded in disempowering Afrikaners legally, economically and socially. British colonial rule reduced Afrikaners to an *other* by undermining their dignity, perception of belonging and identity. In this process one may distinguish two phases.

During the phase succeeding the Anglo Boer War, playwrights vehemently turned down all forms of British colonial culture. Then followed a phase of appropriation during which dramatists were directly concerned with the ideology informing the process. Consequently the ‘crucial function of language’, i.e. ‘seizing the language of the centre and re-placing it in a discourse fully adapted to the colonized place’ (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989:38), was reversed. Afrikaner leaders realised that an armed struggle against colonial rule could not succeed. They had to adapt their strategy to the requirements of a cultural battle in a new war zone, the colony. Gustav Preller, for instance, argued that Afrikaners should reject English influence on the vocabulary or grammar of their language.

Historical and ideological considerations evidently influenced postcolonialism in early Afrikaans plays. These considerations included dominance of the economy and civil service by English-speaking persons, a devastating drought, an economic depression and South Africa’s participation in World War I as a member of the British empire. Consequently postcolonialism marginalised the mainly agrarian Afrikaner to a collective, urban working class surpassing all cultural boundaries. ‘Afrikaners were discriminated against’, Kavanagh (1985:13) wrote:

Unskilled and newly proletarianized when they arrived in the towns, they found themselves in circumstances remarkably similar to those in which the proletarianized black worker found himself.

The possibility that the Afrikaner as a group could disappear, caused serious concern among their leaders.

Dramatists responded to the situation by writing plays depicting social reality. Realism was, however, ameliorated by compassion. Jan F.E. Celliers described this change in the preface to his play *Reg bo reg* (1922; *Having a Right*, quoted by Antonissen 1973:73):

Plays written until now, concerned themselves mainly with historical matters. In our time of early national construction, this is easy to explain and defend. Similarly we may defend art displaying some moral or other involvement However, for art to achieve locally what it should and what it has achieved elsewhere, we should follow an holistic approach, by concerning ourselves primarily with humanity—man, his character, passions, feelings, developments, struggle, the amusing and sorrowful relations following from differences between persons.

An exception is P.W.S. Schumann's play *Hantie kom huis-toe* (1933; *Hantie comes Home*), which depicts the existence of poor whites with great realism. Plays with a similar theme included *Die skeidsmuur* (1938; *The Dividing Wall*) by A.J. Hanekom, *Drankwet* (1933; *Liquor Act*) by E.A. Venter or *Die stad Sodom* (1931; *The City of Sodom*) by F.W. Boonzaier. Van Wyk (1995:71-79) points out that Afrikaans plays depicting poor whites serve as an indication of Afrikaner leaders' enterprise to encourage cultural (Afrikaners versus Jews or English-speaking persons) and racial (whites versus blacks) distinctions between Afrikaners and non-Afrikaners. Afrikaner leaders extended the notion of an *other* by including not only the British coloniser but everyone who was not an Afrikaner. The meanings attached to the word 'Afrikaner' increasingly associated skin colour with the language of Afrikaans (Van Wyk 1995:111).

Two playwrights who concerned themselves 'primarily with humanity' (Celliers quoted by Antonissen 1973:73) were J.F.W. Grosskopf and H.A. Fagan. In his plays Grosskopf depicts social displacement and poverty (*'n Esau/My Brother*; 1920; and *As die tuig skawel/When the Harness Chafes*; 1926). Fagan is known for his portrayal of female characters. In *Lenie* (1924) the title character revolts against her father's authority. *Ousus* (1934; meaning, the eldest daughter), *Ruwe erts* (1934; *Crude Ore*) and *Rooibruin blare* (1934; *Red-brown Leaves*) depict situations representing the repression of women in societies dominated by men.

The marginalisation of women in societies controlled by men confirms the interpretation that postcolonial discourse interrogates all forms of imperial dominance. In plays by Grosskopf and Fagan the postcolonial processes succeeding British occupation as well as phallogocentric authority vested in societal structures, 'colonise' female characters twice. In *Ousus* (Fagan 1986), for example, Mrs. Venter manipulates

her daughter by using society's expectation that the eldest daughter should tend to the needs of an elderly parent. Her expectations were based on an interpretation of Christian religious values in which the notion of a relentless God-the-Father dominated. However, fifty years later the portrayal of the postcolonial situation of women in Afrikaans theatre has not changed substantially. Although female characters such as Anna in Pieter Fourie's play *Ek, Anna van Wyk* (1986; I, Anna van Wyk) defy the patriarchal authority of the centre (represented by Senior) more openly, only the context of Afrikaans theatre has altered.

Further evidence of postcolonialism appeared in performances of workers' plays between 1930 en 1950. The historical background to these plays related to the vulnerable economic position of Afrikaner workers (O'Meara 1983 *passim*). Leaders and workers liaised closely and won the general election in 1924, a feat which the National Party repeated on its own in 1929. Exploitation, meagre wages and poor working conditions weakened the association between worker and politician until it ceased to exist. An additional consideration was that Afrikaner leaders entered the field of grand economics. This compelled the capitalist British colonial centre to act more accommodating towards the economic power the colonial margin had acquired. Due to the founding of economic megaconglomerates such as SANTAM and SANLAM in 1918, the results of resolutions passed by the Economic Congress of the *Volk* in 1939, and political victory by the National Party in 1948, a noticeable Afrikaner working class ceased to exist. By 1950 workers' plays in Afrikaans were no longer generally performed.

Die nuwe wêreld (1947; The New World), a worker's play by H.A. Fagan (1956), shows the class divisions which were prevalent in Afrikaner society then. In addition the text portrays the workers' struggle against the power of capitalism (Van Wyk 1989). *Die nuwe wêreld* (1947) relates the story of Gerhard, heir to the owner of Van de Leur Furniture Factory, returning after taking part in World War II. Gerhard tries to change the way his father manages the plant, but without success. He implores Mr. Van de Leur to 'reconcile himself with classes and factions', but his father maintains that 'one has to take people as they are' (Fagan 1956:43). A strike turns violent as workers set fire to the building, but still Van de Leur refuses to share management with his employees.

The continuing empowerment of Afrikaner workers during the thirties and forties due to the expansion of Apartheid disadvantaged black workers. Plays dealing with the position of black workers include *The Foolish Mistress* by Routh and *Tau* by Pinchuk (Orkin 1991:56f). *The Foolish Mistress* involves the relationship between a house wife and a maid, and in this regard it compares with an Afrikaans play by Corlia Fourie. In *Moeders en dogters* (1985; Mothers and Daughters) the crisis evolves around the death of the father, Gert Cilliers-Smit. A political crisis and the fact that Susie, the

maid, loses her child during the riots simultaneously ensuing in Soweto, deepen the family crisis. An important difference between the plays is that Susie's experience is not part of the main action, which is similar to Klaartjie's encounter in Fagan's play, *Ousus*. Susie plays a minor character and Klaartjie does not even appear on stage. In *Don Gxubane onner die Boere* (1994; Don Gxubane among the Afrikaners) by Charles Fourie, Gracie plays a black Cinderella.

In summery one may state that postcolonialism in the thirties and forties predicated on the marginalisation of Afrikaner society overall. Specific concerns related to the position of women, poverty, urbanisation and the fate of the worker. However, Afrikaans plays become increasingly 'aesthetic' in the sense that themes moved away from the depiction of raw realism. 'Aesthetisation' resulted in plays moving ideologically from the margins of postcolonialism to an own, neocolonial centre. Political transformations resulting in victory for the Afrikaner electorate in 1948, accelerated these changes. A generation of cultural philosophers extended the cultural involvement of the new political centre by reflecting on the role the arts should play in the new dispensation, including theatre. The emphasis fell on the unbreakable bond between individual and group, between the Afrikaner and his *volk*. In some way Celliers preempted this development in the preface to his *Reg bo reg* (1922), that the playwright should depict 'man, his character, passions, feelings, developments, struggle, the amusing and sorrowful relations following from differences between persons' (quoted by Antonissen 1973:73).

Neocolonialism

According to Gilbert and Tompkins (1996:257) the notion *neocolonialism* is applicable to

situations in which the most significant coloniser is not Britain (or one of the former European powers) but some other nation or cultural group.

In this regard one should bear in mind that the transition to a neocolonial situation in the fifties was not smooth and did not take place instantly. Because an internal political organisation, the National Party, initiated neocolonialism, it evolved from inside and therefore exhibited coherence, ruptures (an example being the disappearance of workers' plays) and fractures. An Afrikaans playwright who apparently criticised the National Party government's application of a neocolonial Apartheid ideology, was W.A. de Klerk (1971).

In his play *Die jaar van die vuur-os* (1952; The Year of the Killing of the Afrikaner Ox) conflict appears on three levels, that is in the family of the main charac-

ter, called 'the General' (*die Generaal*), with the English-speaking neighbours staying on the farm Soris, and with Ngondera who lives on the General's farm called Okonjenje. Inside his family the actions of the General's three sons represent different consequences of postcolonialism. Alexis's actions represent rupture. He becomes part of the brain drain following the change of government, first by challenging the authority of the father and then by emigrating. Representing the 'New Afrikaner', Martin, a medical doctor who has earlier returned after practising in Europe during World War II, embodies the antithesis of Alexis's ideas. The third son, Pieter, is an extremist wishing to perpetuate the old order. The General calls his English neighbour, John Hammond, a 'jingo' (De Klerk 1971:17), implying that Hammond represents the British coloniser. On his part Hammond reminds the General that Britain won the Anglo Boer War. Wishing to reconcile, the General sends Ngondera an ox as a gift (the ox to which the title refers) reminding him of a pledge to his father, that he would remain a friend of Kasupi's people. Ngondera refuses the gesture, kills the messenger, one of his followers accosts Gillian Hammond and in the end Pieter assassinates Ngondera.

This convinces the General that the isolation between persons belonging to different cultural and racial groups would not disappear without each sacrificing 'much ... that is nearest and dearest' (De Klerk 1971:89). The play ends with the suggestion that Martin and Gillian would marry. Apart from creating the impression of being manipulated, the end of the play anticipates an optimistic future. The Afrikaner (represented by Martin) and the English (represented by Gillian) sections of the population reconcile with each other, but the orientation towards 'the old Black Nation' (De Klerk 1971:91) remains paternalistic and condescending. In the end De Klerk could not convincingly criticise the policies of the ruling elite.

From 1938 onwards several festivities took place in Afrikaner society which added to the rise of neocolonialism. Typically a playwright wrote an occasional drama to commemorate the event. Examples are *Die dieper reg* (The Higher Law), written to commemorate the Great Trek centenary in 1938, and De Klerk's *Die jaar van die vuur-os* and *Langs die steiltes* (Beside Inclines) by Gerhard J. Beukes, both written for the tricentenary in 1952 of Dutch colonisation by Van Riebeeck. Due to the nature of the festivities most of the plays reflected on the significance of past events. A common feature was the way in which people's playwrights mythologised events and characters (Grundlingh & Sapire 1989).

Probably the most conspicuous playwright reacting to the progress of neocolonialism in Afrikaner society, was N.P. van Wyk Louw. It is generally accepted that nationalism informed much of his literary writing. In this regard Van Rensburg (1975:65) declares that he touches on different categories of nationalism in his plays. He (Van Rensburg 1975:66) describes *Die pluimsaad waai ver* as 'a play portraying two major communal ideas', which is nationalism and imperialism. The difference

between *Die pluimsaad waai ver*, performed for the first time in 1966, and *Die dieper reg*, which premièred in 1938, is that the latter is a response to British colonialism and the former a reaction to Afrikaner neocolonialism.

Language plays an important role in any critique of Louw's interpretation of nationalism (cf. Olivier 1992; Kannemeyer 1994; Van Rensburg 1996:125-163; Olivier 1996). In this regard Gilbert and Tompkins (1996:164) points out that language is 'one of the most basic markers of colonial authority'.

Integrally associated with language is the speaker's sense of autonomy and dignity, both of which are diminished when the coloniser denies the linguistic validity of indigenous languages (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996:165).

The threat posed by British colonialism, for instance, explains the use of metaphors relating to war in Louw's philosophical essays, and his attempts to justify the existence of Afrikaners as a cultural group in his play *Die dieper reg*. In *Die pluimsaad waai ver*, performed five years after South Africa became an independent state under Afrikaner rule, he proposed a broad nationalism recognising the existence of divergent cultural groups. His interpretation of nationalism therefore developed from exclusivity to a form including other cultures.

Opperman (1973:202) stated that by 1934 Louw was a fierce adherent of national socialism. Should we compare pronouncements he made in November 1936, his interest in Nazism was clearly not permanent (Louw 1986:23):

Not by declaration upon declaration, nor by flaming rhetoric or occasional poetry at every people's gathering [*volksgebeurtenis*], but by an all encompassing beauty will he [the artist] serve his course.

Due to the emphasis on beauty Degenaar (1976:23) labelled this form 'aesthetic nationalism'.

A second phase relates to an essay dated 19 October 1951, titled 'Rondom die begrip "nasionaal"'/'Concerning the notion of "nationalism"' (Louw 1986:419). No longer would Louw adhere to *aesthetic nationalism*, but from now on the principle of *justifiable existence* would be the corner stone of an interpretation Degenaar (1976:27) branded 'ethical [or liberal] nationalism'. For Louw this meant that nations and cultural groups or *volke* could tolerably coexist. Ultimately Louw's aesthetic and ethical nationalisms relate to what Viljoen (1977:6) called 'ground questions' on nationalism:

What is a people (*volk*)? What does a *volk* need to exist? How does one justify the continuing existence of a *volk*, especially a small one? What are the relations between one *volk* and another and with other groups with which it is forced to coexist?

Louw (1978) addressed the justification for the continuing existence of Afrikaners as a *volk* in his play *Die dieper reg* (1938; *The Higher Law*). In the play the *Voortrekkers* (Afrikaners) reach the Hall of Eternal Justice after death to listen to the verdict the Voice of Justice would pronounce on their previous existence. The Voice justifies their decision to leave British colonial rule by linking their deed to divine intention, implicitly justifying the origin and existence of the Afrikaner as a *volk* (Louw 1978:27f):

Go, and know that your right/and deed may stand before God/because it was strong and simple/because He Himself is simple:/an unblemished Will, an eternal Deed/untouched by change.

The verdict confirms that the Afrikaner's blood inspired the decision to leave British rule, that is by the desire to be free. This desire is common to all of mankind, and it is part of the Law of Nature (Van der Walt 1985). God inspired Afrikaners to be free, but they themselves bore the responsibility for the fashion in which they used their freedom to choose. According to the playwright the Afrikaner's decision to leave was adherence to God's Will and therefore their deed and their existence as a *volk* will be sustained.

The idea that Afrikaners were God's chosen people and whatever they did deserved divine sanction, was a fable which commonly occurred among Afrikaners. Such an interpretation undoubtedly carries the stamp of an exclusive chauvinism. This also applies to *Die dieper reg*, because N.P. van Wyk Louw addresses only the plight of Afrikaners, their descendants and their destiny. From the perspective of nearly sixty years later such a vision is limited because it does not account for the multitude of cultural and other groups in the country. Therefore one may regard *Die pluimsaad waai ver* (Louw 1981; first performance in 1966) as correcting the main ideas in *Die dieper reg* (first performance in 1938). Simultaneously *Die pluimsaad waai ver* (1981) represents an ideological transition from an aesthetic to an ethical form of nationalism.

Die pluimsaad waai ver of Bitter begin (Louw 1981) (*The Plume's Seed Blows Far or Painful Beginning*) is an epic drama in which the playwright represents events from the Anglo Boer War. The double title suggests that the acrid experiences of war were part of what was to become the Republic of South Africa. War was not the end. It was the painful beginning of accomplishing an enduring Afrikaner dream of independence from (British) colonial domination. The action revolves around President M.T. Steyn, the last president of the Free State Republic. The narrator, an old woman, conveys the problem in the first line (Louw 1981:9): 'What is a *volk*?'

She answers her own question: A *volk* does not consist of mythical heroes. It

consists of internationalists (Grandfather Visser), nationalists (Steyn), diehards (General De Wet), traitors (Jan) and persons coming from outside the Boer republics: Pieter, an Afrikaner who is a British colonial subject, and two enemies of the Afrikaner in war, the Scots Wauchope and Hannay. The inclusion of Wauchope and Hannay confirms the postcolonial focus on language and place. Although they were the Afrikaner's enemies, they became part of South African soil and South African society overall by dying in the country. According to the playwright South African society overall also includes persons of colour (cf. Steyn's address to Parliament/*Volkstraad* 1981:16f).

Afrikaner leaders did not receive Louw's vision of an inclusive nationalism favourably. Especially Prime Minister Verwoerd's dismissive response (Pelzer 1966:673f) caused a public outrage directed at Louw personally. In this regard the prime minister's response endorsed Chris Barnard's (1974:5) statement that Afrikaans authors 'have always been part of the opposition' and were 'rebels against the authorities of their time'.

One may best describe the mood among Afrikaners during the sixties as reflecting 'cosy contentment'. Yet the manner in which Afrikaners treated other racial and cultural groups caused cracks among Afrikaners themselves becoming increasingly evident. Despite criticism and protest by intellectuals and clerics such as B.B. Keet, D.P. Botha, H.A. Fagan, G.D. Scholtz, W.P. Esterhuyse or Beyers Naudé (Kannemeyer 1983:222), the National Party government neocolonially continued to 'occupy' and 'invade' most South Africans' lives. This confirms that *neocolonialism* does indeed refer to 'situations in which the most significant coloniser is not Britain (or one of the former European powers) but some other nation or cultural group' (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996:257).

Playwrights reacting to this new form of postcolonialism included Bartho Smit (*Die verminktes*; 1960) and Adam Small (*Kanna hy kô hystoe*/Kanna's Coming Home; 1965). One may view *Die verminktes* (1960) as the playwright's reaction to the Mixed Marriages Act (1949) which prohibited marriages between persons from different races. *Die verminktes* (Smit 1976) relates the story of Frans Harmse's involvement with Elize, and the disclosure of Frans's mixed descent. The title latches on to the devastating consequences of the disclosure. Initially Bart (Elize's father) intended to maim Frans physically, which was to castrate him. Although he refrains from doing this, the text implies that being castrated psychologically in a community in which racial considerations were essentialistic (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989:44) and absolute yardsticks othered Frans. For society Frans's involvement with Elize implied that the scourge of his skin colour would contaminate her. This convinces Frans to leave. Smit signals his decision in the dialogue. Frans switches to a variant of Afrikaans (Smit 1976:56): 'Ma' die mêm hoof nie sêd te wies oor die castration nie—kôs why, da' wag nou 'n white future vi' haar'. ('Madam need not be saddened about the castration, because for her a white future remains.')

Using a variant of Afrikaans is an example of the postcolonial appropriation of the language of the neocoloniser. In this play the colonised language becomes an appropriated language, afrikaans (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989:38). A similar process takes place in Adam Small's plays *Kanna hy kô hystoe* (1974) and *Krismis van Map Jacobs/Map Jacobs's Christmas*, 1983). Other resemblances between Kanna (in *Kanna hy kô hystoe*; 1974) and Frans (in *Die vermincktes*; 1960) are evident: Kanna is an exile possibly returning from abroad, his mother (Makiet) is from the working class, and both texts reflect on morality, a culture of poverty, and political and social injustices. Both plays end without hope: Frans becomes a victim of Apartheid and Kanna again leaves the country.

Apart from Smit and Small a few other playwrights have responded in afrikaans to this neocolonial situation (cf. Smith, Van Gensen & Willemsse 1985:88-97). They include Pieter Braaf (*Asseblief Miesies/Please Madam*), Peter Kaleb (*Duskant die skietbaanlyn/This Side of the Shooting Range Line*), Peter Snyders (*Political Joke*) or Melvin Whitebooi (*Dit sal die blerrie dag wees!/That will be the Damn Day!*). Most of these texts remain unpublished. This also applies to Hans du Plessis's play *Boerse*, written in Griekwa-Afrikaans and with a similar theme as *Die vermincktes* and *Kanna hy kô hystoe* (Engelbrecht 1997). In these plays protest against the discourse of an Apartheid state roughly compare with the resistance depicted in English postcolonial texts from the same period (Fuchs 1982; Kavanagh 1985:51-58). An important difference, however, relates to form.

Neocolonialism after 1960

Contrasting with English postcolonial plays, plays written in Afrikaans after 1960 frequently used literary devices such as allegory combined with satire or irony. The presentations in English plays were mainly direct, realistic and the result of workshop productions. The most important Afrikaans main stream playwrights from this period were Bartho Smit, André P. Brink, Adam Small, Chris Barnard and P.G. du Plessis. Significantly Temple Hauptfleisch (1997:120) characterises their work as 'postcolonial':

These were writers all working within the Afrikaans theatrical system, which evolved out of the British colonial occupation on the one hand and the Afrikaans language struggle on the other

During the seventies a few events took place that profoundly influenced Afrikaans theatre. All of them were directly or indirectly related to the neocolonial policies of the National Party government. Perhaps the most significant events were the riots in Soweto during 1976 and 1977, which were triggered by the compulsory

use of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in schools. By 1990 political and economic pressures from inside and outside the country forced the National Party to relinquish political power to the majority. In 1994 the African National Congress won the general election convincingly, thereby introducing a new era in South African theatre (cf. Hauptfleisch 1997:159-172). Arguably the most prominent Afrikaans main stream playwrights from this period were Pieter Fourie, Reza de Wet, Deon Opperman and Charles Fourie.

The production of plays in Afrikaans main stream theatres declined notably during the seventies. Accordingly the Afrikaanse Taal- en Kultuurvereniging (Afrikaans Language and Culture Organisation) initiated annual theatrical competitions for university students, called Kampustoneel, that resulted in the production of texts such as *Ek, Anna van Wyk* (Pieter Fourie; produced 1984), *Diepe grond* (*Deep Ground*; Reza de Wet; produced 1985), *Môre is 'n lang dag* (*Tomorrow will be Long Day*; Deon Opperman; produced 1984) and *Don Qxubane onner die Boere* (Charles Fourie; produced 1994). Kampustoneel ended in 1995. However, Afrikaner leaders were concerned that Afrikaans would disappear as a language of cultural expression after the African National Congress came to power in 1994. This prompted the introduction of the Klein Karoo Nasionale Kunstefees (Little Karoo National Arts Festival). It remains to be seen whether this festival will generate as many new Afrikaans plays as did Kampustoneel.

Many Afrikaners contend that conceding political power resulted in the marginalisation in practice of Afrikaans as a high level cultural language and of Afrikaner cultural workers. Presently government is setting up a system of centralised control over the arts, marginalising Afrikaans theatre even further (Hauptfleisch 1997:169-171). Placing Afrikaans theatre within the South African theatre system, one should, however, accord to the notion an extended meaning including Standard Afrikaans and its variants. This is an important extension if we recall that the compulsory use of Afrikaans in schools led to the unrest in Soweto. It appears as if gradually destigmatising the language preceded the acceptance that dramatists may use Afrikaans and its variants in postcolonial plays written in English. Apart from variants used in plays by Small, Du Plessis, Braaf, Kaleb, Snyders or Whitebooi, variants also appear in crossover plays (Hauptfleisch 1997:66-84) such as *Sophiatown* (1988) by the Junction Avenue Theatre Company or *Cincinatti* (1979) by Barney Simon and cast. These applications are examples of a Creole continuum. According to Ashcroft (1989:47) such a continuum presents 'a paradigmatic demonstration of the abrogating impetus in postcolonial literary theory'.

Afrikaans plays from the neocolonial period consequently display a variety of postcolonial forms. In contrast with English postcolonial plays, Afrikaans texts subverted the neocolonial centre from inside by engaging in counter discursive arguments

with classical texts, using ritual and carnival, rewriting history, by depicting forms of resistance and by examining the position of women in society. (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996 have informed these categories and the following discussion.)

A first application of postcolonialism refers to plays reacting intertextually to, or commenting on, canonised or classical theatrical texts. One may interpret Reza de Wet's deconstruction of the myth of Afrikaner patriarchy and bravery in *Nag, Generaal* (1991; *Good Night, General*) as her reaction to the portrayal of the General in W.A. de Klerk's play *Die jaar van die vuur-os* and as commenting on N.P. van Wyk Louw's *Die pluimsaad waai ver*. Bartho Smit's *Bacchus in die Boland* (1974; *Bacchus on Boland*) clearly predicated on Euripides's *The Bacchae* as well, for being associated intertextually with (among many examples) Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* (1973). As in Soyinka's play the greatest departure from the classical text appears in die ending. In his text Smit satirises societies in which racial considerations dominate. However, when Bacchus tries teaching the farm owner compassion for his fellow-man, they throw him from the farm. Within Apartheid society, represented by the farm Boland, there is only one choice (Smit 1974:65): 'If one may not show compassion towards your fellow-man, the only alternative is becoming a hermit'.

A second kind of postcolonialism relates to the appropriation of theatrical performances such as ritual and carnival. Presently it seems as if Afrikaans theatre is increasingly borrowing from African theatre, thereby acknowledging that Afrikaans is an African language by virtue of its origin and continuing existence in Africa. A text bearing testimony to this fact is Charles Fourie's (1994) *Don Gxubane onner die Boere*. In the play the title character consults a sangoma (healer) trying to find his 'true love' (Fourie 1994:86). His quest takes him to a hotel in the north of which the guests and patrons are indifferent to the social and political reforms taking place in the rest of the country. In the end Don finds his true love, Gracie, and then they leave the hotel's guests and the town to their chosen destiny: becoming a fool's paradise (Fourie 1994:127). Appealing to public imagination Fourie uses his play to comment on extremists' propensity to political and cultural isolation. As Gilbert and Tompkins (1996:83) put it: 'Carnival presupposes the possibility of social reform by activating the communal imagination'.

Should a playwright design a historical discourse 'by enacting other versions of the pre-contact, imperial, and post-imperial past on stage' (Gilbert & Tompkins 1996:107), a third kind of postcolonialism evolves. In André P. Brink's play *Die jogger* (1997; *The Jogger*) recent history presents a backdrop to the action. The performance includes flashbacks in which Kilian, previously a colonel in the security service, has to confront his past. It transpires that he represents the Afrikaner. He states: 'If we were not one step ahead every time, it would have been the end of the Afrikaner' (Brink 1997:36). In the end he realises that he is a 'monster' and begs forgiveness, but

no one would listen (Brink 1997: 84f).

Die jogger (1997) compares with recent plays examining the Afrikaner's history and its relationships with other cultural groups critically. In the nineties these include Reza de Wet's *Nag, Generaal* (1991) and Deon Opperman's *Donkerland* (1996). Because these plays end by reaching out to postapartheid South African society, they may preempt the healing of an Afrikaner community scarred by the consequences of colonialism.

A fourth form of postcolonialism in Afrikaans theatre relates to body politics. As Gilbert and Tompkins (1996:204) explain:

In general the postcolonial body disrupts the constrained space and dignification left to it by the colonisers and becomes a site for resistant inscription.

Both *Die verminktes* (Smit 1976) and *Die jogger* (Brink 1997) represent 'site[s] for resistant inscription'. In *Die jogger* (Brink 1997) Vusi's cut out tongue is kept in a bottle on stage, becoming a metaphor for suppressed persons' freedom to present their own cases. In *Die verminktes* (Smit 1976) Bart uses skin colour to separate his daughter Elize from Frans.

A related form of postcolonialism appears in plays treating aspects of feminism. Compared with other forms of postcolonialism, depicting feminism is not dominant in Afrikaans theatre history. Most plays touching on feminism consider the role of a chauvinistic, Lacanian father. Apart from plays by Corlia Fourie (*Moeders en dogters* 1985 Mothers and Daughters) and Jean Goosen (*Drie eenakters/Three One Act Plays* 1992), important exponents of feminism in this period were Pieter Fourie and Reza de Wet (*Trits/Three Plays*; 1993). In both *Ek, Anna van Wyk* (1986) and *Die koggelaar* (1988; The Teaser) the main characters are called by the same name, Anna. In *Ek, Anna van Wyk* (1986) her husband and father-in-law abuses her physically and psychologically. Vermeulen convincingly established that both plays may be construed 'as ... theatrical sign[s] of the Afrikaner nationalist's psychic and sociopolitical crisis during the early eighties' (Vermeulen 1996a; cf. also Vermeulen 1996b).

Conclusion

Departing from Ashcroft's notion of *postcolonial* (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989:2) the colonial centre in Afrikaans theatre has clearly moved on several occasions. Critics such as Kavanagh (1985:8f) concede that this movement was the result of colonial occupation and invasion:

Historically the structures of modern South Africa derive from the inescapable facts of conquest and colonization. These facts remain important today. First, there was the

invasion of the area now known as South Africa, the defeat and subjugation of the indigenous peoples by British and Boer forces, and the seizure of the land and its resources. Then there was the protracted struggle of the Boers or Afrikaners to establish their conquest of the indigenous people in states independent of British rule, their defeat in war and their political struggle to reverse that defeat. Third, there was the struggle of the African nationalists for political rights and then hegemony in the land that had been wrested from their forebears.

Different forms of postcolonialism in Afrikaans theatre evolved as a result of historical processes. Apart from the degree to which Afrikaners were marginalised, the association between Afrikaners and other groups determined these forms, whether they were part of the political centre or not. An additional consideration was the tie between playwrights and the people (*volk*). Afrikaans playwrights were mirrors in which Afrikaners could view their own images.

Up to 1950 one may best summarise the historical processes as representing a form of *complementary postcolonialism*. Playwrights depicted the social, economic and political marginalisation of Afrikaners in a more (C.J. Langenhoven in *Die Hoop van Suid-Afrika*, 1937) or less (D.J. Opperman in *Vergelegen*, 1978) convincing fashion, siding with the *volk*. Following 1938 forms of *contemplative postcolonialism* appeared, which examined Afrikaner power associated with neocolonialism from a position of loyal dissent. Relevant playwrights were N.P. van Wyk Louw (*Die dieper reg*; 1978), W.A. de Klerk (*Die jaar van die vuur-os*; 1971) and D.J. Opperman (*Vergelegen*; 1978). By 1960 Afrikaans playwrights and Afrikaans theatre fully became an opposition to the neocolonial Apartheid centre (Barnard 1974). The move coincided with the introduction of a form of *subversive postcolonialism* in plays by dramatists as diverse as Bartho Smit (*Die verminktes*; 1976) and Adam Small (*Kanna hy kô hystoe*; 1974), Reza de Wet (*Drie susters twee/Three Sisters Two*; 1996), Charles Fourie (*Don Gxubane onner die Boere*; 1994) or André P. Brink (*Die jogger*; 1997). As is the case with all postcolonial writings, these plays question the abuse of power.

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