Contesting the 'Born Free' Identity: A Postcolonial Perspective on *Mzansi* Stories[1]

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Abstract
Employing postcolonial approach, this article analyses the recent stage play script called *Mzansi* stories to demonstrate that despite the lack of space in the political mainstream, post-apartheid young generation have created alternative spaces for engaging in deconstructing and reconstructing the notion of Born Free and its implications for their socio-political participation in South Africa. The findings suggest that the Born Free notion as a broader framework for young people's identity is still under construction. The article concludes that plays and other related social network spaces such Mzansi stories have potential to enable society understand how young South Africans are engaging the meaning of Born Free identity in relation to prevailing socio-political circumstances within the nation.

Keywords: Born Free, Identity, Postcolonial, *Mzansi* Stories, socio-political, post-apartheid, South Africa

> *So, who we are, or who we are seen to be, can matter enormously* (Jenkins 2008:4).

Introduction
The question of identity is one that continues to haunt individuals and societies throughout history and many theorists have grappled with how this

[1] The three authors of this article share an equal contribution to this work.

issue could be handled or better understood in society. Identity is a construct which means the way an individual or a group conceive, define and represent themselves is often in relation to their position in society (Ellison 2013). Societies, families, individuals can thrive or perish based on their understanding of, and relationship with, their own identity. They can build or destroy based on how their identities are perceived by themselves and others.

In this article we have selected a piece of theatre as an entry point into a dialogue about the complexities surrounding the recently constructed identity of South African youth as the 'Born Free' generation. We look at how post-apartheid youths in South Africa are constructing and reconstructing this newly celebrated and contested identity. Using the postcolonial perspective on identity as a lens, we dissect the process and product of an original South African play *Mzansi*[2] *Stories,* created by the Born Frees, as an alternative form of expression, given alienation from political mainstream, through which the Born Frees own, appropriate and contest the dominant ways in which the self and other is constructed in South Africa. Therefore, we employ *Mzansi* Stories to argue that the plot and biography of the 'Born Frees' is being rewritten on stage as young people grapple with what is true and what is not about this identity construct that appears to have been imposed on them. We stress that whether they accept the identity or not, maybe as important as their own perception of the construct in relation to those of previous generations.

Theorizing the Notion of Identity: A Postcolonial Struggle

In social identity theory, a social identity is one's knowledge that one belongs to particular social group or category; thus, persons in the society are categorized with the self as in-group or separate from the self as out-group based, respectively, on similarity and difference (Stets & Burke 2000). In identity theory, however, identity is primarily, self-categorization in relation to specific roles, whereby the self is seen as an 'occupant' of a role, and the associated meaning, expectations, and performance of that role is made a part of this categorization (Stets & Burke 2000: 225). Identity, therefore, is formed through the self-reflexive activity of self-categorization (social

[2] *Mzansi* is a popular term and refers to South Africa. It is derived from a Xhosa word *uMzants*i which literally means 'south'.

identity theory) or identification (identity theory). Thus, while there is personal and collective dimensions to identity (Korostelina 2007), it can be seen from both theoretical traditions that all are primarily social as they emerge and exist through social interaction and relationships with others (Grad & Rojo 2008; Ellison 2013).

Postcolonial theory assents to postmodern approaches to identity, which conceives identities as dynamic, hybrid, multiple, evolving, fluid, sensitive, context-specific, and in constant state of flux (Korostelina 2007; Karkaba 2010; Lawler 2008). Each person, at any given time, has an array of identities available to them from which they choose which one they consider most effective in a given situation (Korostelina 2007: 15). Yet, the self-concept of an individual is often a combination of social categories making up a set of social identities, although all may not be meaningful at the same time in self-definition (Deaux 2001:1). A study of adolescent South Africans conducted by Shane Norris and others (2008), for instance, shows that in their self-definition, white adolescents prioritized personal categories such as age and gender while blacks, coloureds and Indians drew on collective categories such as language, ethnicity and religion.

The core of postcolonial conception of identity is highlighted by Cherki Karkaba (2010). Drawing on Edward Said's (1994) caution about the inconsistent and temporary nature of common identity labels, and Homi Bhabha's (1994) presentation of the notion of hybridity, Karkaba (2010:93) argues that the notion of identity in postcolonial thought is affected by a 'destabilization' and 'fragmentation' which results in 'increasing awareness that identity is a question involving the relationship of the self and the other'. This implies that the self and self-meaning (identity) only exists because there is the other. In other words, from a postcolonial perspective, identification and self-categorization are not possible without difference embodied in the other. The self is formed in opposition to the other (Basaglia, 2012). In addition, Karkaba (2010) notes that the self is unstable, continuously shifting, constantly changing in relation to the other. The point Karkaba (2010:93) is making is that the self-identity is 'not a finished product'. Richard Jenkins expresses the same idea differently. He (2008: 17) holds that,

> Identity can only be understood as a process of 'being' or 'becoming'. One's identity – one's identities, indeed, for who we are

> is always multi-dimensional, singular *and* plural – is never a final or settled matter. Not even death freezes the picture: identity or reputation may be reassessed after death.

It should be added here that identity formation process can have certain consequences on behaviour, beliefs and relationships (Ellison 2013: 2). In trying to construct the self as unique, for instance, individuals and groups may accentuate or amplify minor difference with others and play down similarities. This has been termed the 'narcissism of small difference', until the differences in identities come to be seen as natural or obvious, instead of what they really are – produced (Lawler 2008: 3-4). This often influences attitudes and behaviours interpersonal and inter-group relations as those in a similar category or group as the self are judged positively and others negatively (Stets & Burke 2000: 225).

We consider the postcolonial understanding of identity to be an effective optic for engaging the notion of 'Born Free' as a category with which young people in post-Apartheid South Africa are identified. Some of these young people also utilize the notion in their self-definition/self-categorization. The relevance of this perspective springs further from the broader concern of postcolonial theory with the question of alterity, representations of the self and other; the disruption of cultures and social identities in previously colonized societies (apartheid in the present case); and the privileging of alternative and often less powerful knowledge and voices (Young 2003; Rattansi 1997). Indeed, some scholars understand the South African experience of domination to be so unique and exceptional that it cannot be considered postcolonial and must be treated as different from other previously colonized states – more so African states. Others have sought to argue against any form of South African exceptionalism (Settler 2006). In his highly celebrated study of colonial legacy in (South) Africa, Mahmood Mamdani (1996) argues that although the South African experience of apartheid set it apart from other colonised territories, it nonetheless suffers from the legacies of colonialism. Despite the unique racial structure and challenge South Africa had to contend with, Mamdani argues that apartheid was a variation of the colonial principle and practice applied across Africa. Laurence Piper (2009) argues that Mamdani's position is evident in post-apartheid South Africa which is increasingly revealing the postcolonial condition and resembling other postcolonial contexts. Mamdami sought to

show that post-apartheid South Africa fits the description of a postcolony, and increasingly so. If we take as a premise that post-colonialism is concerned with deconstructing the ways in which colonialism impacted the identities of both the coloniser and the colonised, and engaged with the recognition that the imbrication of colonised identities and polity continues long after the formal end of colonization (Rattansi 1997), then post-apartheid social discourses in South Africa can be analysed from postcolonial theoretical procedure to engage with the notion of Born Free as neo-colonial practice. In this sense postcolonial approach is both an emancipatory and oppositional response to Born Free identity. Thus we utilize a postcolonial notion of identity for its reflection of the most developed understanding of identity and its allowance for a more nuanced engagement with the Born Free identities in post-apartheid South Africa.

Engaging the Born Free Identity in Post-apartheid South Africa

While it is clear from popular usage that the 'free' in 'Born Free' refers to freedom from Apartheid, there is no specified period within which the Born Free generation is located. The term is used in some quarters to mean South Africans born in or after 1994 when South Africa became independent (Malila 2013). Other scholars have used the notion to refer to the about 27 million South Africans born in 1990 or after (Institute of Race Relations - IRR, 2015:3). Rather than focus on the time of birth, Robert Mattes (2012), refers to political experience. Thus, the Born Frees as commonly used in South Africa, he holds, comprise the generation of South Africans 'who have come of age since the advent of democracy… young people who have spent some or all of their high school years exposed to a pro-democracy curriculum' (2012: 135). Mattes (2012: 139) further uses the expression 'Born Frees' to refer to the 'growing number of young people [who] began [from 1997] to move through the ages of 16, 17 and 18 and enter the political arena with little if any first-hand experience of the trauma that came before'. What seems clear about all the definitions highlighted is the fact that the term refers to young South Africans who have lived all or most of their lives in post-apartheid South Africa. It is this understanding that we retain in this article. Although freedom from apartheid is generally understood as freedom

of non-Whites from white oppression, it has been observed that whites were also freed from apartheid. Consequently, one can speak of white Born Frees, who, unlike their parents, are free from compulsory military service and forced racism and hatred for black people (IRR 2015:4). But what are the unique benefits of being Born Free?

There are immense advantages of being Born Free in contemporary South Africa. Mattes (2012:139) notes:

> In many ways, the Born Frees confront a totally different world than that of their parents. There are no official limits to where they can go, work or live, or on whom they may date or marry. They have experienced a series of peaceful democratic elections that increasingly turn on new issues and personalities with diminishing links to the past. They consume news provided by a reformed public broadcaster, and have increasing access to privately owned radio and television broadcast news, as well as to increasing amounts of private and international news on subscription satellite television.

Mattes (2012) further observes that despite these developments, the Born Frees are evidently experiencing a South Africa that appears to be regressing rather than enjoying a positive change. He argues that 'many Born Frees face the same, if not greater, levels of unemployment, poverty, inequality and hopelessness as their parents' (Mattes 2012: 140). Other challenges include class segregation, crime, poor education and HIV. Despite government investment in education, the Born Frees cannot be considered better off in educational attainment and their high school completion rate is lower than that of the so-called 'struggle' generation. Though the frequency of protests in South Africa may suggest otherwise, it is shown that the likelihood of Born Frees to join and be actively participate in religious or community groups, or even work with others to raise local issues, is low. Moreover, they are not as committed to democracy as the 'struggle' generation (Mattes 2012: 139-141).

In addition to the preceding observation, is the general tendency, in popular and other available discourses, to tie the Born Frees' social identity to Apartheid and democracy, hence their treatment as primarily a political category (IRR 2015:3). This also impacts how the society views and assesses them as well as the expectations placed on them. Thus, the assertion of Malila

(2013) that while their parents had a political 'cause' to pursue, the Born Frees are 'imagined' to have been 'given' everything they need to be successful such as employment opportunities, a society not divided along racial lines, education and more. Hence, it is expected that they contribute in improving democracy instead of protesting their conditions (Malila 2013:5). Mattes (2012) and Malila (2013) are in agreement that while evidence shows that some of them are active and help in their communities, the picture is also one of socio-political disengagement and indifference to any endeavour that could contribute to the progress and transformation of South Africa. In addition, there is a suggestion that the Born Frees are plagued by many social challenges that are life-threatening, such as teenage pregnancy, drug abuse, perpetration of violence, and poor upbringing and socialization due to their parents still recuperating from the wounds of apartheid (Nxusani 2012).

In its recent study, the Institute of Race Relations (2015:3) considers itself the first to depart from the common treatment of the Born Frees as a political category by seeking to make available social and economic data on the Born Frees, with the conviction that these conditions can provide insight into political behaviour. The picture painted by the Institute is rather gloomy, and appropriately captured in the title of its report: *Born Free but Still in Chains.* Although the Born Frees are born and raised in a context with an increasing number of middle class families and in households richer than those of their parents, they still face daunting economic challenges. They face a 'high degree of alienation from the economic mainstream' (IRR 2015:4, 24). The IRR (2015:4, 24) believes that this constitute the explanation for the alienation of the Born Frees from the political mainstream as well as their regular participation in 'disruptive' and 'violent' street protests.

The forgoing underlines that the 'Born Free' is a contested notion that appears to be imposed on young citizens born in democratic South Africa. Identification or being identified with this category carries with it numerous privileges as well as expectations and challenges. This raises some critical questions: To what extent has young South Africans owned and appropriated the Born Free identity? How has the post-apartheid generation received or contested this categorisation? The observation has been made that the Born Frees are alienated from both the political and economic mainstream. It can be argued, therefore, that the two of the key social spheres relative to which the born free identity is constructed, important, made

meaningful and often assessed, excludes the Born Frees themselves. Nxusani's, (2012) assertion, thus, becomes critical, that because the Born Frees 'feel they are left in the cold when it comes to mainstream political culture', they have explored 'alternative' ways to exercise their 'democratic right of speech and expression'. Participation in protest, as a consequence of this alienation, has been stated, but for our purpose, we have explored workshop theatre, particularly, *Mzansi Stories*, as one such alternative medium of expression and engagement with the question of their categorization as Born Free. In what follows we analyse how young South Africans are contesting and interrogating the Born Free identity through *Mzansi Stories*.[3]

[3] It is worthy of note here that young South Africans have explored the question on certain online platforms available to them. A young South African has, for instance, expressed his utter discontent with the expression 'Born Free', arguing that it presents a false picture of the lived experience of the people it refers to. He also argues that the youth themselves had no part in the emergence and meaning the expression has come to acquire and call on young South Africans to 'fight forcefully for their right to cultural freedom that enables them to define themselves' (Maimela, 2014). Blogging on a Stellenbosch University site is another young South African at pains to logically prove that 'born-freeism' is a fallacy and an invalid concept. The blogger bemoaned the usage of the expression to define a set of South Africans in ways that places insurmountable expectations on them (Cewe, 2014). Malaika wa Azania has offered a personal reflection on the Born Free question in here recent book, Memoirs of a Born Free (2014). She questions the notion of being 'Born Free' given the struggle the so called Born Free generation for economic and other forms of freedom. In the same vein, another Born Free, Eleanor Swartz (2012), in an article published by the SA Barometer, contests the 'rhetoric of unruliness and destruction' which is used in the South African society to portray young the Born Frees as a 'lost generation' (2012:7). He argues that young South Africans today are faced with a struggle that is as important as that of the previous generation, and demands a shift from the dominant negative perceptions and representations of young people to more empowering narratives.

Contestation and Wrestling with Born Free Identity: *Mzansi Stories*

Theatre has for centuries been used as a tool for various societal needs. These range from the obvious functions of entertainment and the passing on of time to conscientization. Other, more socially conscious practitioners like Augusto Boal (1979: 89) set to construct theatre as a 'rehearsal for a revolution' and for human rights activism. Such is the diversity of the functions of theatre within society. In South Africa theatre has been used as a protest mechanism against the injustices of both apartheid and neo-apartheid regimes. Plays like *Woza Albert*, *Sophiatown*, *Asinamali* were all attempts at critiquing apartheid and giving a voice to the voiceless. Lara Foot argues that 'the power of theatre is that we can rewrite the plots of our lives and biographies; we can find healing in our country. This can happen in the safe environment of the theatre, sitting in the dark, being part of that community that an audience is, engaging together with life on stage' (cited in Twijnstra & Durden 2013: 31)

'Mzansi stories' is a theatre production that was created by second and third year drama students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus in 2014. The production group consisted of three directors and twenty-seven students. Twenty-four of these students were born in post-apartheid era. The production was engendered by a visiting American theatre director, Jon Leiseth, who collaborated with two South African directors; Ntokozo Madlala and Louise Buchler to direct the piece. He was curious about how post-apartheid young South Africans perceive themselves and their country twenty years after independence. He was told that 'they're lazy, entitled, they don't value their freedom'. This raised a curiosity and interest to create a piece of theatre that would explore what this generation have to say about growing up 'free' – what were some of their personal stories, their hopes and fears for the future of South Africa. There was also a curiosity about whether or not the legacy of Nelson Mandela and other freedom fighters was being honoured through the actions of this generation.

The production then traces a very complex journey of young people as they try to find themselves within the new socio-political and economic landscapes of *Mzansi*. It is not a single chronological story with a clear beginning, middle and end; but a collage of multiple narratives strung together by a common theme! It finds its expression in multiple mediums

such as dance, physical theatre, dialogue, monologues, spoken word, prose and song. It is a beautiful weaving of the various performance forms with the young people's narratives about themselves, their families, and their country into a colourful tapestry of celebrations, questions and declarations about *Mzansi*.

Mzansi Stories is truly a representation of the voice of post-apartheid generation. The production was created through a workshop process which involves collaboration between actors and directors in the theatre making process, as such the making of the play is a group effort, 'as opposed to being written by a single playwright in isolation' (Fleischman 1990:89). Workshop theatre is a popular theatre making approach among South Africans developed in the late 70's 'The plays that emerge are… (dependent) on various kinds of research conducted by the members of the group and they often draw as well on the personal experiences of individual members' (Orkin 1995:9). Thus *Mzansi Stories* workshop theatres have been from inception creating space for deconstructing and reconstructing the Born Free voice. This affirms Fleischman's (1990: 113) argument about workshop theatre as 'a form which has managed to capture the energy and dynamics of a society undergoing transformation'.

As a way of gathering material for the play, the director commissioned all actors to individually engage on a creative task reflection on what it means to be a South African, how do the actors and/ the people around them feel about being South African and living in South Africa in 2014. This was to be presented in various creative forms such as a poem, a movement, a three dimensional collage, etc. Everyone was required to contribute materials and ideas that would later form part of the performance. The presentations were highly emotional and reflected very mixed feelings about South Africa. These were mostly negative with some sprinkles of hope in between. These ideas were then refined and developed in rehearsal. The result is a play with exactly twenty scenes with probably as many themes as the scenes themselves. It was hardly edited by the directors, except for one or two significant sections. Therefore the text remained unadulterated and raw, exactly as it was written by the young people. The actors played multiple characters, their bodies are the primary tools for communicating meaning and there is hardly any use of elaborate scenery and properties. This makes it easy to investigate how the Born Free identity was portrayed, has been

constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed by young people who are its recipient.

Throughout the play, Mzansi Stories, there is a demonstration of profound awareness by the Born Frees of their identification as a certain category or generation juxtaposed against previous generations. They hold their Born Free privilege in high regard, as expressed by one of the characters in the first episode:

> *Being a Born Free baby is really an honor as I didn't have to experience those horrible times…. The best part is the freedom we have compared to other African countries…* (Mzansi1).

The play also demonstrates an awareness of the dominant representations and narratives about the Born Frees, as captured in the following lines:

> *A lot of criticism has been levelled at the 'Born Free' generation.*
> *We've all heard it,*
> *Perhaps we've even said it.*
> *'They're lazy, they're entitled, they don't value their freedom*
> (Mzansi1).

They are also aware of the expectations on them and, to an extent, their predicament as a generation defined relative to the political history of South Africa, where, political freedom, though pivotal, was not the panacea for the several challenges in their lived experience and knowledge of South Africa. This is captured in these words of a rather sombre character:

> *This is Mzantsi, the bottom yet I'm trying to get to the top. I'm happy here but at the same time sad. I'm excited and enthusiastic but at the same time angry and frustrated. A promise land filled with broken promises, this is mzantsi. Is this soil fertile enough for me to achieve my dreams? A generation under pressure, can we do it? Can we save mzantsi or will we allow it to enslave us?*
> *Enslave us with its chains of corruption, its hand cuffs of greed and its jail bars of illiteracy. Change is what we need but pocket change*

> *is what we a living off. Unemployment haunts this generation, a broken nation that not even the great Tata Madiba could mend.*

In this line, there is a clear ambivalent experience of the new South Africa by the young people which is happy and simultaneously sad; excited and enthusiastic and at the same time angry and frustrated. This struggle emerges as a result of the failure to realise a just and equitable society that was promised in 1994. This is the site of contestation against the notion of Born Free – a notion that appears to lack equitable access to resources that can enable the majority of young South Africans to realise its essence. For the purpose of this article we analyse two themes from Mzansi stories as follows.

Born Free Identity as a Contestation of Popular Notions of Identity

In many ways, *Mzansi stories* challenge the dominant ways and sources of identity in South Africa. While we have argued above that the Born Free as an identity is largely an essentializing category imposed on the new generation, *Mzansi Stories,* however, reveals a level of acceptance of this marker by young people who also used it throughout the play as a self-concept. Although, it is an identity into which they were born or grew, they have appropriated it in a way that positions it in contest to the very identification process that produced/reproduces it. In other words, the play challenges the basing of identity primarily on political history through which people are divided into several generations that are tied to historical moments and experiences in their lives, such as clearly demarcated by Mattes (2012): the Pre/Early apartheid, Grand apartheid, Struggle and Born Free generations. These groupings contribute greatly to self-definition and the definition of the other. Members of the struggle generation, for instance, have a strong sense of themselves as a people who had a [political] cause (Malila 2013) and who obtained freedom for South Africa (Nxusani 2012). Thus, providing a basis for comparison, contrast and differentiation against the Born Free generation defined and represented as everything the previous generation was not - without a cause, unruly, and a lost generation, and more (Swartz 2012). Indeed, as noted earlier, the self can only exist and be meaningful if other selves exist (Karkaba 2010: 93). However, *Mzansi stories* challenges this

sourcing of identity from political history. This it does through the very process from which the play emerged, the Born Frees' deep appreciation of their history, the expressed concern for South Africa's present and future, and the diverse aspects of life in South Africa covered in the play which shows the variety of issues the Born Free generation grapple with in order to make sense of their identity as individuals and as South Africans. This calls for a definition and engagement with identity, in contemporary South Africa, which goes beyond political history.

More broadly, *Mzansi stories* raise critical questions regarding identity in relation to time: What is the place of the past in the Born Free identity construction today? What period or cultural experience determines who are to be today? How do they deal with a nostalgic narrative of who they are when they can only make sense of their own uniqueness in relation to the present and future aspirations? Consider the following excerpt from the story of a Born Free in *Mzansi Stories:*

> *I always believed each day will follow the last*
> *I always assumed that my future will somehow connect with my past*
> *But here I am grieving for my culture that my soul belongs to.*
> *Ever since I was born, my cultures have been told to me by my parents…, as storytelling.*
> *They say they used to seat around the fire, eating uphutu (dry pap)….drinking umqomboti (traditional beer) and sharing folktales.*
> *They say they used to practice cultural ceremonies for young girls like me, where they were taught how to be submissive to their husbands.*
> *But I, I never got a chance to experience any of these*
> *And from the stories that my parents told me, I became deeply confused because it leaves me with a question mark, whether I'm Zulu or Swati…* (Mzansi2).

It is common for persons to define themselves in terms of 'belonging' to a certain ethnic group, often considered to impose a certain culture. Thus, culture often finds its way into people's self-definition/categorization. The problem however, as demonstrated in the lines above is an understanding of culture as a thing of the past, especially among peoples whose ways of life were disrupted by colonialism or apartheid. Thus, in an effort to find

themselves again, there is a tendency and/or desire to reclaim the cultures taken from them by the oppressors – to reclaim their identity (Dei 2012). For a younger generation, such as the Born Frees, who were born after a long period of disruption and change, culture becomes a nostalgic reminiscence of the past – real or imagined – told in stories. The question of culture and change, and whether there exists a cultural essence or a 'pure culture' (or a pure self) which can be reclaimed from the past is an entire enterprise of its own beyond the scope of this article. It is sufficient here to note that the above quote, and indeed other stories in *Mzansi Stories* suggest that while culture, as past, can enhance the sense of belonging, it can also create personal confusion on the same question of belonging. Thus, the storyteller moves on to say:

> *I am living an abnormal life,*
> *And I might as well embrace my life the way it is. Because I feel there is more to my destiny than to my past.*

The sense of purposefulness with which these words were expressed suggests a firm resolution to stick to the present and the future as more important and less confusing in defining the self. However, this was followed by seemingly contradictory lines:

> *I am searching for my root*
> *So I need you, and you and you, actually I need all of your to search your roots and acknowledge them, be in accordance.*

'Roots' in this context refer to ancestral cultural heritage. The actor was probably simply drawing on popular rhetoric of one's identity as determined by one's origin. The seeming contradiction and ambivalence attest to the nature of the Born Free identity as sometimes confusing, and a grappling with some of the identifiers society presents to them, especially those that are time bound.

Through *Mzansi Stories*, thus, the Born Free generation calls for identities that acknowledge the past but are focused on the present and the future. Indeed identities by their nature are always in a state of flux (Korostelina 2007:15) and any effort to pin them down to specific periods can only produce crisis and frustration.

Born Free Identity as a Questioning/self-interrogation and Paradoxical Crisis

There is an assumption that identities neatly fit into the labels used to describe them. However as the play demonstrates, for these Born Frees and indeed most people, identity is more of a question as opposed to a singular fixed narrative. It seems to exist as self-interrogation as much as self-identification. The questions can be primarily about a person's sense of uniqueness and self: 'who am I…?' but also about belonging: 'where do I belong….?' These questions came up several times in the play and it always seems to be an attempt to make sense of my identity in the present in relation to what has been before.

In *Mzansi stories* this is demonstrated beautifully through a song written by one of the two Caucasian actors in the cast. He opens the song by saying:

> *'Oh, where the f… do I belong?'*

The passion and cheekiness with which this question is posed in the play clearly reflects a sense of distance and distaste; confusion and anger; rage and protest; frustration and resentment towards the current location. Then he starts reflecting on how this identity came to be:

> *From the moment I popped out*
> *I thought without a doubt*
> *I was clearly one and the same*
> *But now without my blinkers on*
> *and 25 years along*
> *I've found that I belong*
> *I've found that I belong*
> *To a pink skinned minority*
> *a controversial anomali ….*

Whatever he says about this group to which he belongs does not sound complementary. Also saying that 'I thought… I was one and the same' implies a sense of contesting the sameness to this inherited identity. Because perhaps what I thought then and what I think now is not quite the same. There

is a sense of distancing himself from it even though he acknowledges his initial association with it, even though not by choice. His own admission is that the realisation that he belonged to it only came when he took his 'blinkers off'. Before then, the realities or facts about this identity were not apparent. In short, they only became illuminated with time and maturity. Thus through this song, his own Caucasian roots are brought to question.

It is interesting also, that he chose to write this song in the style of satire, which uses 'humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues*'* (Oxford Dictionaries 2015). Therefore by choosing this form of expression as a medium, he is automatically associating the actions of 'his people' group with stupidity. The cunning factor about satire is that it takes something dark and disturbing and brings parody to it, so that in the process of listening and witnessing as audiences we laugh (perhaps in an exaggerated manner). However as we do that we are also consuming the truth, no matter how ugly that truth may be.

The song continues and he starts othering this group in relation to his own personal position. It seems from his narrative that one can be identified by belonging to a group but not necessarily identifying themselves with that group's ideologies and behaviour choices. Thus he distances himself from the actions of his forefathers:

> *From the beginnings of history till now,*
> *They've (these people that I belong to) managed to pave the way*
> *Pillage rape and savagery, western ideology,*
> *Converting your linguistic ability…*

In this case he is clearly making reference to colonisation and its effects on the so called 'indigenous' of South African soil. He is saying that the fact that 'they (*these people that I belong to*)' colonised black Africans does not make him a coloniser by default. The implications of this are that even though he cannot escape belonging to them by ethnicity and birth right, he cannot and should not be judged as one of them. Thus this paradoxical positioning seems to continue within the play as is indeed, perhaps, felt by most Born Frees in South Africa, whether black or white.

Who is to say that white Born Frees do not have a history of being oppressed and even though theirs could have been a different kind. Perhaps

what was perceived as freedom then has now become a source of oppression in the present, because there is a certain way in which white young people are seen and perceived in contemporary South Africa based on inherited historical factors. This white young man comments on the association of his identity with controversy, violent oppression and dehumanizing ideologies. He refers to dangerous forms of othernization:

> *…now look here you*
> *I'm a professional racist*
> *and I think we should embrace it*
> *use it, multiply it*
> *common get excited*
> *most of us like it*
> *Hitler, Mussolini invited*
> *common lets have a party*
> *open up your mind get naughty*
> *let that racist breeze in*
> *float up to the ceiling*
> *common lets divide;*
> *separate and deny;*
> *break down and defy …*

The interesting factor about this young white actor is that his concern was less to do with apartheid and democracy as did most of his black and coloured counterparts, but more to do with colonisation. This suggests that the Born Free identity construction is not the same for young whites as it is for the young black Africans. As well, contrary to popular perceptions that white identity is stable, powerful and is the one that disrupts that of the other races, it seems that the white Born Free is just as disturbed or dislocated by the events of the past as those of black Africans.

Conclusion

The singular nature of the dominant narrative about the Born Free identity in contemporary South Africa implies a 'finished' construction, with known features and expectations. However our observation through *Mzansi Stories*

suggests that the formation of this identity is not yet complete and what will become remain obscure. In short, the Born Free concept is an identity under construction. The self-reflexiveness of identity construction means that identities can be accepted and rejected, even when they are accepted they can still be questioned and contested. The play Mzansi Stories has potential to help us reflect on what young people consider as truth and flux-ness of this identity. Perhaps a new kind of freedom will have to be identified, one that is not bound by politics of race. When this emancipated kind of freedom has taken place, then those who are born into it will truly be 'Born Free'.

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