An Intercultural Theory of the Comic Spirit:
Insider/Outsider Dynamics and Representation in
Theatre and Performance

Olakunle Animashaun

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Declaration

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Date: 31 May 2021
Dedication

This work is dedicated to my Parents, Late Chief T. Adisa Animashaun, and Mrs Sarat Animashaun, and to my jewels of inestimable value, my wife, Mrs Temitope Animashaun and my children, Oyindamola, Olayiwola (Dadi) and Olamide. I could not have been able to do this without your encouragement, immense love, and inspiration at all times. I am nothing without you all. Thanks for your unalloyed support.
Summary
This dissertation commences with an enquiry into the origins of comedy in Greek fertility rituals and nature, drawing upon theories of play, ritual, and community to explicate case studies that have been decidedly sourced from different cultural contexts. The objective is to articulate principles of comedy across time and culture in order to stimulate new insights into its intercultural aspects. Some social coding within group interactions is arguably rooted in ancient Greek comedy, especially as a site of two opposing tendencies. Some of these social codes developed from the ritualistic and later metamorphosed into cultural structures and sets of rules or norms that evolved into comedy as a vital social and cultural phenomenon.

The idea is to develop a new intercultural theory of the comic spirit, identifying this with an affirmative force of life, and the cognition of laughter’s function regarding social and spatial distance. The comic spirit has the capacity and the proclivity to perpetuate life through friction, especially as it pertains to how joking behaviours, socially defined categories and structures serves to establish ties, create solidarity, and also serve as a means of hierarchy-building. These potentialities of comedy to engender convergence and dichotomy, or even in some instances, further political agendas are found in the following texts:

- *Death and the King’s Horseman* (Nigeria, 1975) by Wole Soyinka
- *The Playboy of the Western World* (Ireland, 1907) by John Millington Synge
- *The Playboy of the Western World* (Ireland, 2007) by Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle
- *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* (South Africa, 1972) by Athol Fugard

Four of the case studies have been chosen based on their origins in formerly colonized countries, and also based on their play with tradition and modernity. They have been analyzed in detail in the dissertation by unravelling their social and cultural significance and particularities, in the context of the society from which they emanated. At least two of the modern plays (by Synge and Soyinka) self-consciously play with and problematize the genre of comedy as a decolonizing strategy through their play on ‘time’ and ‘place’ at a defining liminal moment in the life-cycle (i.e. death).

The methodology relies on textual analysis and interpretative analysis in order to probe the historical, cultural, and social context of the case studies. The foundational conceptual inquiry of the research is integrative in terms of the
perspectives from different cultural experiences. These comprise of academic theories, practical analysis, and pedagogical perspectives, rooted in hermeneutical phenomenology. This has been complemented by an iterative interaction between extant literature and analysis of the case studies. The dissertation suggests a new understanding of the case studies in relation to their conception as comedy that is contingent on the degree of cultural exigencies, the strength of plot, the thematic structure, and the potentialities of the characters in the texts or performances, where applicable.

This study also presents an historical interrogation of the deployment of state and institutional power especially in relation to identity, nationalism, and race, ranging from the activities in the arts, media, theatrical productions, and comedian performances. The study confirms humour as a safe haven where the controversial topic of race is being addressed in contemporary Irish society. Ultimately, the study demonstrates how cliché can be used to insinuate stereotypical connotations, and also how immigrant experiences have been used as a means to negotiate cultural identity and representation.

The study theorises a critical understanding of the interculturalism-from-below concept with a consideration of the immigrant perspectives. Through the logical reasoning of an interculturally driven engagement, relationships that could be construed as potentially conflicting in terms of interests and allegiances are also examined from the prism of social interactions and differentiated capacities. These are evidently explored in the different instances of the investigation by the dissertation into the collaborative efforts on interculturalism by theatre companies and their desire to incorporate different and sometimes opposing cultural voices towards participating on projects of intercultural relevance in Ireland.

This dissertation has been structured in two sections. Section One (comprising Chapters 1–4) examines the origins of comedy historically and etymologically, followed by the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the thesis, from phenomenology to postcolonialism. Contemporary productions dominate the focus of the second section (Chapters 5–7), exploring intercultural dimensions, grassroots integration strategies, and the status of the migrant as “other” in UK and Irish contexts. It concludes by evaluating the significance of stand-up comedy in a multicultural setting, drawing the discussion into a social context beyond the theatre.
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The successful completion of the doctorate would not have been possible without the assistance of the following people. I am very grateful to my supervisor, Professor Nicholas Johnson, for the detailed corrections and recommendations which have enhanced this thesis immensely. Although you took on this supervisory mantle at the latter part of my Trinity College journey, your insights were not only invaluable, but indispensable into bringing my ideas to fruition. I am incredibly grateful for your kindness and encouragement. Thank you for the many inspiring moments of reflection and new avenues of inquiry. Thank you for the sustained optimism and the viable opportunities for future collaborations.

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Without any doubt the PhD process has been one of the most challenging things I have ever done in my life. The journey has been a long and difficult one and my experiences in the college have shaped me in many ways. The PhD process placed a huge financial, social and health burden on me and this resulted in considerable amount of stress for myself and my family. By the end of my first year, I was already struggling financially, especially with the school fees and sundry matters. I needed time off from studies to sort my life out. Through my then-supervisor Prof Weitz, I made an “off books” request to the Graduate studies, but unfortunately, the request was not granted, as according to them, “Off books is not permitted for financial or work-related reasons.” This put me under enormous pressure, resulting in a further deterioration of an already
stressful situation, ultimately leading to me and my family becoming homeless. At some point, living and sleeping in the car was our only choice. In spite of it all, I am still standing, still alive, still hopeful.

I am completely humbled and indebted to Prof. Brian Singleton, Dr. Sharon Lockyer, Ms. Chrissie Poulter, Dr. Sarah-Jane Scaife and Dr. Paula Quigley. My appreciations also goes to Dr. Melissa Sihra, Professor Aideen Long, Dr. Matthew Causey, Ms. Ann Mulligan and Ms. Rhona Greene. Thank you all for your help. My profound gratitude goes to the Dean of Graduate Studies, Professor Neville Cox and Ms Helen Thornbury, the then Administrative Officer at Dean’s office, for their intervention. How can I thank them enough? In the midst of my crisis, Helen personally bringing me to the Student Counselling Service office will forever be etched in my memory. Thanks to Annemarie Naughton and Orla McLoughlin, both of the Student Counselling Service office for your words of encouragement.

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Introduction

This dissertation articulates theories of comedy across time and culture in order to stimulate new insights into its intercultural aspects, using case studies ranging from Ancient Greece to twentieth-century Africa, to Ireland in the present day. This approach necessitates a renewed awareness of the decidedly Western orientation of the comedy concept, in which the comic character is often assumed to be a flawed human being whose main purpose is to make us laugh by their actions or exuberant inanities. This has been evidenced, in some instances, through the work of Menander (343–291 BC) and Plautus (254–184 BC), in which the comic resolution is centred on the individual's triumph or 'happiness'. Historian Erich Segal suggests that “from the point of view of influence, Menander is arguably the single most important figure in the history of Western comedy.”

These traditional conceptions of comedy will be examined in relation to a new understanding that is contingent on the degree of cultural exigencies, the strength of plot, the thematic structure, and the potentialities of the characters in the texts or performances, where applicable. Through the logical reasoning of an interculturally driven engagement, relationships that could be construed as potentially conflicting in terms of interests and allegiances are also examined from the prism of social interactions and differentiated capacities. The aim is to attempt to develop a cross-cultural theory of the comic spirit, identifying this with an affirmative force of life, and the cognition of laughter's function regarding social and spatial distance. This cross-cultural theory will establish the comic as having the capacity and/or proclivity to perpetuate life through friction, especially regarding how joking behaviours, socially defined categories and structures serves to establish ties, create solidarity, and also serve as a means of hierarchy-building. The conditions under which the comic spirit thrives can be found in most

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1 Menander was a Greek dramatist and a well-known representative of Athenian comedy. He wrote over a hundred comedies but only succeeded in winning the prize at the Lenaia festival eight times.
2 Titus Maccius Plautus, commonly known as Plautus, was a Roman playwright of the Old Latin period. His comedies are the earliest Latin literary works to have survived in their entirety. He wrote Palliata Comoedia, the genre devised by the innovator of Latin literature, Livius Andronicus.
human societies, from the ancient Greeks to our contemporary societies. To ascertain this requires a familiarity with the ancient forms of comic drama, conventions, and performances. Therefore, the initial commencement of this enquiry into an intercultural theory of comedy will draw upon theories of play, ritual, and community. This will then serve as a tool for the explication of playtexts that have been decidedly sourced from different cultural contexts.

In order to build such a movement into the thesis, it is necessary to establish the particular point of origin in terms of how Greek comedy originated from fertility rituals and other different forms of relation with nature. These types of rituals or their semblance are to be found across the planet in different forms, but always expressing a similar attitude towards nature, i.e., the death of the old, the birth of the new. The theatre scholar Andrew Stott suggests that: “the relationship of comedy to agrarian fertility rituals is most clearly seen in Aristophanes’ play *The Acharnians* (425 BC),” which he argues can be regarded as “the oldest comedy in existence.” The connection between comedy and agrarian fertility rituals that exemplify various aspects of Dionysiac ritual is predicated on communal survival and continuity. The ritual element of the evolution of comedy, further enhanced by the significance of carnival, is epitomized in the activities of the farmer Dicaeopolis, the main character in Aristophanes’ play, whom Stott suggests: “mounts a phallus on a pole and celebrates his ‘Country Dionysia’ by making offerings of cake and asking the god to bless his sexual adventures with the neighbour’s slave: “For now is the time to be merry, with pleasure for one and/all” (Aristophanes, 1973:61).”

The exploration into the sinew of communal life and inner instincts of life with the focus on the discussion of the comic and its ancient Greek foundation is important in order to foreground the genre’s progress. Further in the dissertation the comic label will encompass theoretical inquiry from a range of phenomena that explore the connections between humour and laughter in an intercultural setting. These include an awareness of the significance of humour, jokes, comic

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imagery, and indicative social implications. Comedy evolves from the ritual aspects of a secular carnival practice grounded in the idea of play. Play evokes laughter, and the freedom that comes with laughter can be used to engender social and spatial distance.

This scope of the comic spirit, when identified with a force of life, conceives of comedy as a manifestation of vitality. This theory proposes that instinct, as opposed to intellect, offers the most reliable and coherent forms of advancement of life within the line of evolution. The force of the instinct is considered as capable of dealing with the movement and flux that are characteristic of life. Intellect deals with the inert matter, whereas instinct deals with the force of life and is thus equipped to embrace it. Laughter is instigated presumably as a result of a comic’s instinctive awareness. The comic spirit in this instance is understood as that which may facilitate societal flourish or decline, especially as it provides a safe approach to visualize an enormous range of social, psychoanalytic, corporeal, and cultural tensions.

Comedy Case Studies

The concept of social codes within group interactions is arguably rooted in ancient Greek comedy, especially as a site of two opposing tendencies. Some of these social codes developed from the ritualistic and later metamorphosed into cultural structures and sets of rules or norms that evolved into comedy as a very importantly vital and social and cultural phenomenon. The potential of comedy in these contexts entwined with the capacity to either constrain of engender life underscores comedy’s ability to also engender divergence and dichotomies, or to further certain agendas are found in the following texts:

Introductory synopses of the case studies and some background narratives of their plots will be focused on in the following paragraphs. The case studies are analyzed in detail within the dissertation by unravelling their social and cultural significance in the context of the society from which they emanated. It is important to emphasize that the choice of the case studies and their intercultural phenomena are intentionally based on certain principles, the rationale for which will be subsequently addressed further on in the dissertation.

**The Acharnians by Aristophanes**

*The Acharnians* (Greek pronunciation: “Akharneis”) is the earliest of the eleven surviving plays of the ancient Greek playwright Aristophanes, first produced in 425 BCE. *The Acharnians* is based on the activities of the protagonist, Dicaeopolis, a pragmatic Athenian citizen, who is also a farmer. In his bid to end the Peloponnesian war, which was already in its sixth year, Dicaeopolis miraculously obtains a private peace treaty with the Spartans, in spite of stiff opposition from some of his fellow Athenians.

The playwright’s intention is historically interpreted as seeking to convince the Athenian public on the need to find a drastic solution to the very costly war. *The Acharnians* is an anti-war/pro-peace play and not a pro-war play, and Dicaeopolis, the main character is presented as a conciliatory figure with a deep concern for the common good of his Athenian society. It is important to mention that this point of view has been rejected by writers like Christopher Carey and others. For example, in *The Purpose of Aristophanes’ “Acharnians*”, Carey suggests that: “Whatever Aristophanes thought of the Peloponnesian War, I see no reason at all to suppose that he wrote Acharnians to persuade the Athenians to make peace.” However, Carey’s position notwithstanding, his caveat on the assumed intention of Aristophanes on the Peloponnesian War is also insightful, especially in view of his statement that he would not go as far as stating, “that the

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play has no serious purpose at all. I believe that the play fulfilled an important role in Athenian society in 425.”7

Establishing the peace objective of the play as its core theme demonstrates Aristophanes’ preference for peace instead of continuous war. Other themes include the need to curb the excesses of power, the illustration of the psychological, social, economic implications of protracted war, and the necessity to fix the damaged legal system and its lawyers. It is also pertinent to state that the play also represents the author’s spirited response to the denunciations against his previous play, The Babylonians, by politicians like Cleon, who had reviled it as a slander against the Athenian polis.

Death and the King’s Horseman by Wole Soyinka

Death and the King’s Horseman (1975) is about a horseman who must face death in order to fulfil his duty to his community. According to Yoruba tradition, the death of the king must be followed by the ritual death of the King’s horseman as well as the King’s dog and horse, because, it is believed, that the horseman’s spirit will help the King’s spirit in its ascension to the afterlife. Otherwise, the King’s spirit will wander the earth and bring harm to the community. The plot revolves around whether the horseman is brave enough to pull off the ritual suicide. The play is based on an actual event that took place in 1946 and it explores the concept of the sanctity of life pitting one person’s life against that of the survival of the whole community. It examines the venerated communal ethos of Yoruba cultural worldview, predicated on the idea of order and balance.

Elesin is imprisoned on the order of Pilkings, the colonial administrative officer in the town, and this prevents him from completing the ritual, and this is tantamount to the disruption of the cosmic order of the universe. In the author’s note at the beginning of the play, the playwright warns against the story being considered from “the facile tag of ‘clash of cultures’ and urges the reader/audience to set colonialism aside in favour of an engagement with the play’s “threnodic essence” because: “The Colonial Factor is an incident, a

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catalytic incident merely.” However, because this assertion appears to be at odds with the central movement of the play, the exhortative statement notwithstanding, the problem of alterity becomes manifest and tenable, considering the cultural differences and the disposition of the Western characters to exemplify the strangeness of the native Other.

Further examinations of the intercultural encounters between some of the characters provide an agency for a contrapuntal interrogation of cultural values in which the supposedly ‘primitive’ African is pitted against the European ‘modern.’ The thesis will therefore attempt to explore this bifurcation element in the play, especially in terms of the good culture versus the bad culture narrative. The idea being that Western epistemological emphasis on this differentiation has been hierarchically sanctioned and purposely aimed at asymmetric binaries of categorizing Yoruba cultural beliefs as inferior.

**The Playboy of the Western World by John Millington Synge**

*The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), by Irish playwright John Millington Synge is set in Michael James Flaherty’s shebeen in Mayo, near a village in the west of Ireland. A young man named Christy Mahon wanders into the shebeen one night, claiming that he has just murdered his father.

Christy: I killed my poor father, Tuesday was a week, for doing the like of that.
Pegeen: *With blank amazement.* Is it killed your father?
Christy: *Subsiding.* With the help of god I did surely, and that the Holy Immaculate Mother may intercede for his soul.
Philly: *Retreating with Jimmy.* There’s a daring fellow.
Jimmy: Oh, glory be to God!
Michael: *With great respect.* That was a hanging crime, mister honey.⁹

Michael Flaherty, Pegeen’s father offers him a job at the shebeen, so he could protect his daughter at night. Pegeen develops a romantic interest in Christy, even though she is engaged to Shawn Keogh, described as a faint-hearted farmer. The Widow Quin tries to seduce Christy to no avail, even as she enters

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⁸ Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King’s Horseman* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 2014), Author’s Note, 3.
him into in sports competition in the village. Christy is delighted at the genial nature of the people towards him, enthusing that, “I’m thinking this night wasn’t I a foolish fellow not to kill my father in years gone by.” Being a good raconteur, Christy continues to impress them with his story, garnishing it with exaggerating details. They hail him, referring to him as “a lad with the sense of Solomon”, “the peelers is fearing him”, “he should be great terror when his temper’s roused” etc.

Subsequently, Old Mahon, who Christy claims he killed, shows up in the pub looking for his son and lamenting his betrayal. Christy decides to kill his father once and for all. The stage directions describe that he strikes his father out of sight and comes back into the shebeen. Thinking he has succeeded in properly killing his father once and for all, he expects the villagers to embrace him as they had done earlier, but instead, they turn on him. They condemn his action and decide to hang him. Mahon rescues his son from them. Both father and son leave to wander the world with a newfound confidence, and Pegeen laments: “Oh, my grief, I’ve lost him surely. I’ve lost the only Playboy of the Western World.”

At its inaugural staging in Dublin in 1907, Synge’s play caused a riot on the first night, as many people protested what they deemed an unfair portrayal of themselves, especially regarding the play’s ‘immodest’ references to Irish womanhood. Some Irish nationalists considered the play’s performance on the Abbey stage as an affront to public morals and an insult against Ireland. By the third night the protests had spilled onto the streets of Dublin and the Dublin Metropolitan Police (DMP) had to be deployed to stand guard in the auditorium of the Abbey Theatre.

Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World* can be considered from an Irish revivalists’ point of view, and the nationalist movements of the nineteenth century, especially their strategy of invoking Ireland’s historic and mythic past to forge an Irish national identity, and ultimately accentuate the Irish nation’s distinguishing attributes divergent to the English identity. The Irish literary revival championed by W. B. Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory and J. M. Synge consciously proclaims Irish nationalism by recouping mythologies in order to acquaint the

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citizens with Gaelic heritage through frequent repetition or prolonged exposure to the traditions helped make the case for independence. This is linked to a kind of performative exigency similar to Turner’s elucidation of Richard Schechner’s idea of “staged” and “social” dramas exemplified in a “figure eight placed in a horizontal position and then bisected through both loops.”  

This bi-directional flow of performative energies and cultural basis for the comedic genre therefore provides both context and content for redressive rituals in order to re-instate social harmony or to demarcate the limits of mutual exclusion.

**The Playboy of the Western World by Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle**

Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle’s version of Synge’s play premiered at the Abbey Theatre, Ireland’s national theatre in 2007, to mark the occasion of the one hundred years after the first staging of the original. Both Adigun and Doyle set their version in a modern-day working-class area in the west of Dublin, as against the west of Ireland, the setting of Synge’s original play. Christy Mahon is reimagined as Christopher Malomo, a well-educated young man from Nigeria, who is on the run after he believed he ‘killed’ his father with a pestle used for pounding yams. “I raised the pestle and it fell on the ridge of his skull. He went down at my feet……like an empty sack. Dead.”

Adigun and Doyle’s Christopher uses his wits to navigate the criminal underground world of Dublin city. An interracial romantic relationship develops between Pegeen and Christopher, as Pegeen rejects Sean, her fiancé, who is described as having an unfounded fear of his mum. Adigun and Doyle’s cross-cultural collaboration presented the opportunity to engage with the discourses pertaining to race and identity, while also offering other avenues for further intercultural interactions in Ireland. It was hoped that their collaboration would engender other cross-cultural enterprises through which the critical issues of race, racism, immigration, and national belonging could be examined vigorously in a robust and beneficial manner to all.

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However, this optimism was marred by a protracted legal battle initiated by Adigun and his company Arambe Productions over the rights of the Abbey Theatre and Roddy Doyle to produce the play in 2007 and 2008. Charlotte McIvor insightfully suggests that: “......the thorny fall-out from Adigun and Doyle’s adaptation dramatizes the difficulties of staging the ‘New Irish’ experience in a landscape of uneven power dynamics and loaded histories.” The ensuing protracted legal wrangling from the imbroglio of a supposedly intercultural enterprise moved Brian Singleton to suggest that: “Sadly the project’s main drive to foster inter-cultural understanding was upstaged literally by an ownership agreement that threatened to derail the whole project.” Singleton and McIvor’s comment on the dispute pertinently illustrates the missed opportunity to further encourage and also engender indigenous/immigrant cross-cultural interaction within the Irish theatrical mainstream.

**Sizwe Bansi Is Dead by Athol Fugard**

*Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, written by Athol Fugard, is set in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth. Devised by Fugard and two South African black actors John Kani and Winston Ntshona in the 1970s and published in 1972, the play dramatizes the experiences of a photographer, Styles, and his compatriot, Sizwe. The action begins in a photography studio in which Styles, the owner of the studio, delivers a monologue while reading newspaper headlines aloud, about a car plant expansion with no increase to the pay-packet of the employees. This piece of information reminds Styles of his own experiences when he worked at the Ford Factory. He narrates the incident when Henry Ford the Second, the owner, came from America to visit the factory. He describes his experiences at the factory working without protective gear and clothing as unsafe and risky, especially in the hazardous environment of: “the dangerous hot test section without an asbestos apron and fire-proof gloves” as the authorities would not replace their

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protective gear. This made him to establish his own photographic studio: “a strong room of dreams.”15

As Styles continue his monologue, harping on the significance of dreams and aspirations and how having a photograph is an homage to one’s identity, Sizwe Bansi enters to have a photograph of himself taken to be sent to his wife along with a letter. When Styles asks him for a deposit and the name that he wants to book the photos on, Sizwe hesitates before claiming that his name is Robert Zwlinzima. Styles asks him what he will do with the picture, and Sizwe replied that he intends to send it to his wife. Styles takes his picture, and Sizwe’s image is frozen momentarily until the camera flashes; and he steps out of the pose to dictate the letter that will accompany the picture to his wife. He informs her that he, Sizwe Bansi, is dead, and the action happens in flashback and improvisations for the reader/audience to witness the events that transpired before his arrival at Styles’ studio.

Sizwe Bansi Is Dead makes a strong statement about the injustices in the South African society of the apartheid era. The play opens up possibilities for theorising the inherent biopolitics, especially in terms of the restrictive laws that require black people to carry identity cards with them all the time. The play also reveals the hopeless and bitter reality of trying to exist in a country that refuses to recognize the humanity and dignity of the black citizens in South Africa. It denounces racism absolutely, and also explores the question of what constitutes tyranny.

The contrapuntal interrogation of cultural values

Despite their different cultural origins, these case studies reveal commonalities and counterpoints that are often illuminating. The exigencies of the circumstances surrounding the opening night of Synge’s The Playboy of the Western World and the riots that ensued thereafter, if compared to the realities of the world of the villagers, and their interventions in Soyinka’s Death and the King’s Horseman is indicative a cultural identity safeguarding strategy. The

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*Playboy of the Western World* is largely motivated by the restoration and preservation of the folk-cultural texts of the Gaelic-Irish peasant as against the British colonial blatantly invasive cultural inclinations. These types of opposing contradictory frictions can also be found in the context of the interaction between the two opposing cultures in *Death and the King’s Horseman*.

The people’s action at the Abbey Theatre in 1907 is analogous to the release from social norms experienced by Athenians during the festive period, as recorded in the foundational historical linkage of Comedy to the Greek culture, which will be focussed on later in the dissertation. It is similar to the antagonism between inhabitants of the countryside and the city, and Dionysus and his fellow Athenians who would rather want war with the Peloponnesians to continue. The interactions between some of the characters provides an agency for a contrapuntal interrogation of cultural values, and if this is to be considered for the Adigun and Doyle’s version of Synge’s play, the former exemplifies the ‘invasion’ of the indigenous national space in twenty-first-century Ireland while the latter leans towards the uniqueness of the Irish identity.

This focus on the interpersonal and socio-cultural interactions of the different characters in the case studies and in real life scenarios, will be explored through the different concerns of comedy mainly through an intercultural framework, especially in terms of its possibilities for mutual collaborations and capacity to engender dichotomies. This aspect of comedy’s facility is also well integrated in *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*. One of the many examples from the play, which is examined considerably later on in the dissertation is Styles’ comical narration and role-playing of his experiences working in a factory. The character’s action inculcates the idea of laughing at the oppressor, and the interactive instances of laughing together with your own kind. This type of laughter attains meaningful significance when weaponised against oppressive situations. The humour is used to draw attention to serious social issues as the playwright exposes the darker aspects of the society and enables the reader to critically examine the circumstances surrounding the play.
Methodology

The thesis relies on textual analysis and interpretative analysis as its methodology in order to probe the historical, cultural, and social context of the case studies. The foundational conceptual inquiry of the research is integrative in terms of the perspectives from different cultural experiences. These comprise of academic theories, practical analysis, and pedagogical perspectives, consistent with the grounded theory method. This will be complemented by an iterative interaction between extant literature and analysis of the case studies. As Kathy Charmaz suggests: “We need to situate texts in their contexts (…) Texts that tell the story behind other texts at least suggest the social context for the analysis.”16

In *Communication Research*, Frey et al. posit textual analysis as a method used by researchers to describe and interpret the characteristics of a recorded or visual text.17 In this vein, this dissertation will attempt a thorough study and analytical examination of all the case studies and an empirical analysis of the stage production of the Adigun and Doyle’s version of *The Playboy of the Western World* at the Abbey Theatre, the semiotic analysis of the interculturality of the production of *Death and the King’s Horseman* at the British National Theatre, directed by Rufus Norris, the performative interculturalism of the stage production of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* by Camino Productions. The dissertation will also explore the humour impetus of the performance analysis of two immigrant comedians at different locations in Dublin, Ireland.

Researchers use textual analysis to describe and interpret the characteristics of a recorded text, especially in terms of the content, structure, and themes of the texts. Through the lens of meaning-making theories like semiotics or phenomenology, the characters have been discussed in this thesis based on the Intercultural connections and the significance of their actions. Semiotics, as a form of textual analysis, has been employed extensively in this

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work to interpret codes and signifiers and also to understand different aspects of the texts in terms of signification and hermeneutic connotations. This is in line with Jostein Gripsrud’s idea that: “Semiotics invites us to examine texts not just for their obvious content, for what they have to say. It also gets us to think about representations; that is, about how texts show us events, objects, people, ideas, emotions and everything else that can be signified.”

The philosophical foundations of the inquiry into meaning and context in the different aspects of this dissertation have been influenced by the semiotic theories and analyses of Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Marvin Carlson and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s criticism on the phenomenology of perception. Analytic criticism has been applied here in a systematic method in order to describe, analyse, interpret, and evaluate the persuasive force of the messages embedded within the case studies. Ferdinand de Saussure’s ideas are documented in his book *Cours de Linguistique Générale*. Saussure coined the term *sémiologie* while teaching at the University of Geneva from 1906 to 1911. According to Saussure, a sign is made up of the signifier, which may be in form of sound or image, combined with the signified, i.e. the concept. He suggests that no word is inherently meaningful, and that a word is only a “signifier” i.e., the representation of something; therefore, it must be combined in the brain with the “signified” or the thing itself, in order to form a meaning-imbued “sign.”

Roland Barthes (1915–1980) suggests that a sign refers to something which conveys meaning, for example, a written or spoken word, a symbol, or a myth. Referencing Saussure’s work, Barthes emphasizes the distinction between signifier and signified, that the signifier serves as the material vehicle while the signified connotes the meaning. In other words, the signifier is the image of something, while the signified is what it stands for. Consequently, the sign thus

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19 Ferdinand de Saussure’s book, a collection of lecture notes taken by his students at the University of Geneva between 1905-1911 was published posthumously in 1915.
becomes the object that combines the signifier and the signified into a meaningful unit.

From the playwright to the reader to the social context of signification, sign systems encompass production of the sign to the reception of the sign. Semiotics and phenomenology present ideas towards building cross-cultural knowledge in order to scrutinize the complexities of racial, ethnic, and cross-cultural differences by fully engaging questions of historical context and the trajectories of power in human societies. Marvin Carlson suggests that: “One of the things that makes semiotics analysis so potentially important for the study of modern intercultural analysis is that if it considers the entire process of sign usage, both its production and its interpretation, it can deal precisely and clearly with this sort of multiple, even contradictory signifying operation.”

Also, in terms of the relationship between a text and its context, Bonnie S. Brennen suggests that: “Understanding the importance of context to the interpretation process, researchers seek out insights regarding the historical, cultural and economic relationships that exist between a text and a specific society at a particular time.” Sometimes, this entails an observational study of people in their naturally occurring environment, especially with the aim of understanding the cultures, challenges, motivations for people and their society. This implies a qualitative observational process of using subjective methodologies to equate differences. However, it must be emphasized that this idea as relied upon in this thesis does not involve measurements or numbers, but instead focusses on different characteristics within the case studies and the social milieu, especially in order to aid our understanding of historical, social, and cultural contexts.

The intercultural dimension of this thesis necessitates the different approaches that have been relied on, including mixed-method methodology. Because the universal experience of humour is located in societal contexts,

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various types of methods/frameworks are necessary in order to ascertain the strength of each hypothesis. Discussing the idea of closer integration of research methodologies, Sharon Lockyer makes the case for mixing methods in research. According to Lockyer, “Many social and behavioural sciences have reaped the benefits of mixing methods.” The argument is substantiated with her claim that: “To date a consideration of the theoretical, methodological and practical benefits that mixed-method research offers humour researchers is missing in methodological literature.” This, according to Lockyer, is because “Mixed methods offer researchers a number of theoretical and practical opportunities.”

Citing Tashakkori & Teddlie, Lockyer opines that “Although the range of methodological tools available to humour researchers is wide, monomethod approaches to the analysis of humour are in abundance, whether quantitatively driven”, even as she laments the dearth of methodological papers that have attempted to examine the use of mixed methods in humour research. Lockyer further cites the Babad article which “suggests that combining natural observations, self-reportage and sociometric testing is crucial to enhancing the validity and reliability of findings on people’s sense of humour.” Though Babad’s article attempts to address this fissure in humour research, unfortunately, according to Lockyer, it “did little to initiate debate surrounding the use of mixed methods in humour research.”

Using the reasoning of Lockyer’s argument above, this thesis has explored the triangulation concept, especially in accordance with Sandra Mathison’s idea for the need to develop research methods in which alternative methods can be used to “tap different domains of knowing” as they may encourage or allow

24 Lockyer, 56.
25 Lockyer, 56.
26 Lockyer, 56
27 An important clarification that must be made here is that the usage of the mixed methodology concept is mainly in order to derive ideas from different theoretical backgrounds. This is not to be confused with the main ideas by some researchers to mix between qualitative and quantitative research methods.
expression of different facets of knowledge or experience. Triangulation is also considered as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources. The argument can be made that the mixed method may allow a convergence of different kinds of data on the same phenomenon or issue. One of the benefits of the mixed method may also include the fact that the different methods may likely address different aspects of the research, especially with the added advantage of the opportunity of the ideas complementing each other. Todd et al. suggests that: “If you arrive at the same results with both of your methods, then it gives increased confidence that the results you have found are genuine and reflect something real about the topic under study.”

Michael Patton also posits the triangulation concept as a process by which researchers may use multiple approaches to analyzing materials from different sources in order to enhance the integrity of a research study, especially in terms of the qualitative aspect of the research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena. Patton argues that: “The logic of triangulation is based on the premise that no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival explanations.” Patton traced the term “Triangulation” to land surveying, in which a knowledge of “a single landmark only locates you somewhere along a line in a direction from the landmark, whereas with two landmarks you can take bearings in two directions and locate yourself at their intersection.

Like Patton, Norman Denzin also suggests that triangulation refers to the application and combination of several research methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon. Denzin traced the triangulation concept, in terms of the action of drawing a triangle, back to the Greeks and the origins of modern geometry. For both Patton and Denzin, the logic of triangulation is based on the

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premise that no single method ever adequately solves the problem of rival explanations. They both suggest that studies that use only one method are more vulnerable to errors linked to that particular method.

Incidentally, the triangulation idea was subsequently abandoned by Denzin in the 1989 edition of his work, because he later believed that it has the potential to influence personal biases from single methodologies. Like Denzin, Norman Blaikie also has some reservations about the mixed method of research. In A Critique of the Use of Triangulation in Social Research, Blaikie suggests that an approach based on triangulation may become “a hotch potch of mixed methodology with no underlying rationale” for the choice of methods. He added that another disadvantage of triangulation is that the researcher can attempt to make inconsistent materials to become compatible in order to produce a more coherent account.

Arksey and Knight, on the other hand, argue that whilst qualitative methods reflect views that knowledge is provisional, uneven, complex, and contested, triangulation allows the research to have more depth. However, following Patton’s and Denzin’s typology, this thesis employs theoretical triangulation and between-method triangulation. For example, adequate consideration has been given to the realities of the world of the cases studies, from the historical antecedents of the Greeks to the world of the contemporary plays in terms of comedy’s ability to engender dichotomies. The encounters between some of the characters attain an intercultural expediency for a contrapuntal interrogation of cultural values. This is mainly because the opposing contradictory frictions can be found in the context of the interaction between the two opposing cultures. Also, following on from the criticism above, and after immense deliberations, the decision was made from the outset of the thesis to guard against any shortcomings from the concept. This hopefully has been

33 Blaikie, 115.
achieved by leaving space for uncertainty and doubt through the reflective approaches that has been adopted throughout the work.

The phallic processions of the ancient Greek festivals of Dionysus testifies to the obvious creative energy that accompanied such celebrations. This ritual/carnival origination of the comedy genre also epitomizes its life-affirming possibilities. Nonetheless, the genre can also be analogized in terms of a constant pitting of two sides against another, either in the form of man against his inner self, or the societal conventions serving as obstacles to his hopes, or one group of people pitted against another group of people in the society. This dual symbolic binary is what Corrigan suggests comedy is, as in: “The constant in the comic view of life or the comic spirit: the sense that no matter how many times man is knocked down he somehow manages to pull himself up and keep on going.”\(^{35}\) The constraints and constant struggle leave man with no choice but to engage in activities that provokes laughter. Comedy is therefore considered as a major representation of the vital impulse to life and the encouragement of possibilities. Its function, while life affirming, is also corrective, because it awakens thoughtful laughter. Sophie Quirk’s idea of comedy as “an important form of social comment and dispute” makes it imperative as an avenue for steady or even occasional stream of alternative ideas provides additional – new – values for a society to consider.\(^{36}\)

However, while the term ‘comedy’ may be defined in relation to the above postulations, and various definitions have been attempted in other parts of this work, the term ‘comic’ requires further expositions in terms of the supposed relationship to the genre, especially as a nomenclature for the individual that use humour to induce laughter to make a statement about everyday life occurrences.\(^{37}\) Jefferey Henderson suggests that these characters, known as comic poets, “did more than indulge themselves and their spectators in harmless

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\(^{37}\) The origin of the term ‘Comic’ can be traced to Athenian democratic dispensation in which comic poets perform political satires for the main purpose of influencing would-be voters.
griping. They systematically and vehemently involved themselves in the most important issues of the day. This clarification is necessary to illuminate the relationship between comedy as a genre and the comic/comedian as an embodiment of the character, and the function of each entity, especially within an intercultural context. Stand-up comedy is a deliberate attempt to create humour by the comic, which in this instance refers to a stand-up comedian whose presentation often comprises of telling jokes, role-plays, and doing voice impressions.

As a genre, comedy’s contribution to racial discourse is incontrovertible. The comic/comedian reinforces intercultural performance studies by creating an environment where race can be spoken about directly. In an intercultural context comedy may be used to query power relations, examine perceived injustices, and challenge stereotypes. It is able to impact intercultural interactions particularly because of its propensity to attrac attention to issues. The stand-up comedy form is a veritable means of exploring racialized facets of popular culture as well as uncovering some of the ways in which race works within an intercultural perspective. The comic artist’s purpose is to hold a mirror up to society to reflect its follies and vices, in the hope that they will, as a result, be mended.

This work engages and also contributes to intercultural scholarship by combining comedy theories to articulate social criticism that allows marginalized voices and social issues to be explored and therefore examine dominant narratives of oppression using humour. In this context, humour is defined both by its major descriptive characteristics, in terms of situational awareness and understanding of context. Meier and Schmitt espouse the comedy’s power for marginalized racial and ethnic groups, to communicate their grievances. In their book *Speaking Up, Speaking Out: Stand-Up Comedy and the Rhetoric of Social Change*, comedy’s function as a source of social commentary and alternative views, counterculture and resistance was discussed.  

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The focus on the two stand-up comedians enables us to examine their individual commentary on everyday life experiences of the immigrant in Ireland and therefore engender attitudinal change towards them. The suggestion can be made that their aim, ultimately, is to engender an intercultural sharing of ideas within the community. This statement is tenable especially considering Quirk’s suggestion that “all comedians participate in a process which challenges and renegotiates societal norms, whether or not they, themselves, intend or acknowledge it.”

My new intercultural theory of comedy that emphasizes the importance of the concept of the interculturalism from below therefore takes all these into consideration, by combining immigrant experiences and perspectives.

**Structure and Argument**

The arguments in the thesis have been presented in seven chapters divided into two sections. The first section is titled: Reconsidering Comedy: Origins, Meanings, and Functions, while the second section is titled: The Dynamics of Representation and Humour in Contemporary Societies. In the first section, the chapters proceed by means of a methodological triangulation; beginning with the origins of comedy historically and etymologically, the discussion then moves on to address the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of the thesis, from phenomenology to postcolonialism, using specific instances from the case studies to illuminate the discussion. In the second section, contemporary productions dominate the focus, exploring intercultural dimensions, grassroots integration strategies, and the status of the migrant as “other” in UK and Irish contexts. The concluding chapter evaluates stand-up comedy in a multicultural setting, to draw the discussion into a social context beyond the theatre.

Readers will notice that the theoretical approach of the dissertation includes both literary interpretation and performance analysis. Especially in Section One, dramatic literary criticism has been done by examining in detail the theme, style, setting, historical context, or political context of all the works focussed on in this dissertation, allowing comparison of the works at a textual level. As the argument...

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progresses, especially in the second part of the dissertation, there is a noticeable inclination towards performance analysis, as the focus shifts to exploring more concrete spatial, embodied, political, and contextual features of specific case studies, in order to add the social context to the layers of text that have hitherto been analysed.

**Section One — Reconsidering Comedy: Origins, Meanings, and Functions**

Chapter One starts with an exploration of the history of the term ‘comedy’, with further investigation into the classical roots of the comedy genre, especially in terms of the representation of agrarian and seasonal cycles and the opposition between the urban and the rural. The inquiry continues with the examination of its connection to ancient rites of fertility and god worshipping, and the struggles between ancient Greece’s changing countryside and the relation with urban civic life. The chapter will demonstrate that the comedies of Aristophanes are illustrative of such phenomena, as some of his plays are modelled on seasonal changes and agrarian rituals and have ample connections with the rites of Dionysus.

The chapter concentrates on Aristophanes’ play *The Acharnians*, especially on its usage of humour as a dramatic device. Although the play undoubtedly has some religious and ritualistic elements, some of which Aristophanes takes advantage of, there are lots of intentional use of dramatic strategies like exaggeration, inversion, and comic play on words. The chapter thus identifies Dicaeopolis, the central character in *The Acharnians*, as a comic character who exemplifies the important elements that reveal the comic character as imbued with a creative force that helps to organize the vital impulse. While some of the points to be discussed here may have been treated in past academic studies, at least in some form or the other, however, the hope is that some of the arguments here will call attention to certain features in the foundational origin of comedy, and hopefully, this will help to show some of the surprising connections with the discourse on the new intercultural theory of comedy that the dissertation suggests.
Chapter Two explores some of the theoretical foundations on which the thesis has attempted to base its arguments, beginning with a critical analysis of the vitalist theory of Henry Bergson and Suzanne Langer. It presents a contemporary reading of comedy through Bergson and Langer’s vitalistic concept and the connection with instinct, intelligence, and *élan vital*. It examines the notion of progress as exemplified in Bergson’s analogy of the concept of small and occasional explosions corresponding to acts of creation. It focusses on Bergson’s concept of absentmindedness where two disconnected meanings converge which results in humans’ perception of a situation as humorous. The chapter also explores Molière’s *Tartuffe* (1664), because according to Bergson, it is replete with examples of the comic effect. The idea is that the comic rhythm when conditioned by *élan vital* becomes a device that shields, protects, and encourages growth.

The chapter continues by examining other major theoretical and conceptual frameworks relied on in the thesis. These include the concept of the social functions of laughter, especially pertaining to the works of Rose Laub Coser and her idea of social/spatial distance. One of the primary focus of Coser’s ideas is the concept of socially defined categories and structures, role theories and how individual/group theories affects the concept of self. Coser’s work on humour and the manner in which joking behaviour serves to establish ties, create solidarity and also as a means of hierarchy-building is considered ground-breaking. By exploring the relationship between workers and patients in a hospital environment, Coser observes a noticeable sharp power differential between the hospital authorities and their patients. Coser’s research concludes that the hierarchical social structure of the hospital dictates the direction of humorous remarks in a ‘downward’ pattern.

The chapter also delves into Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin’s theory of carnival and the carnivalesque, which is considered a relevant tool for comedy in terms of transgressive behaviour. Bakhtin’s idea of the carnival as the “people’s
second life, organized on the basis of laughter”⁴¹ considers folk humour as important element of carnival and therefore significant to human actions and interactions. Bakhtin’s argument is that “Carnival festivities and the comic spectacles and ritual connected with them had an important place in the life of medieval man.”⁴² Hence, it must be understood as a cultural phenomenon of immense importance for the development of comic narrative. Bakhtin concludes that carnival laughter suggests an affirmation of the freedom that it instigates deliberately for its “temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order.”⁴³

Chapter Three explores the case studies with attention to their postcolonial and intercultural contexts, especially the aftermath of the British empire and the legacy of imperialistic incursions and the destabilizations of the political and cultural sovereignty of colonized states. The chapter attempts to connect the experiences of some of the characters in the plays to the societies they represent, especially from the perspectives of the colonized. Some of the plays can be considered as narratives that grapple with the trauma of (post)colonialism as well as the ensuing struggle to recuperate shattered identities. The effect of the trauma experienced by the characters implies that because of their experiences, they require humour to get by. Through an analysis and interpretation of some of the characters’ motives and actions, the chapter exposes the utilization of their inherent ‘power to transform’ using humour as a liberation/survival strategy.

Chapter Four deepens the analysis of the contemporary case studies by focussing on the Carnivalism and Vitalism in Soyinka, Synge, and Fugard. It explores the historical and socio-economic factors that contributed to the development of the themes in the selected plays. The chapter examines the creative attributes of these plays, delving deeper into their comic agenda and the motivations of some of the characters. It examines the carnivalistic elements and

⁴² Bakhtin, Rabelais., 5.
⁴³ Bakhtin, 10.
the vitalistic impulse in *Death and the King’s Horseman* in relation to the idea of the comic as a dynamic force for rejuvenation. As the archetypical embodiment of the comic hero, Elesin is the transitional figure that crosses the gulf between destruction and creation. His passion and zest for life are restorative elements of the transformative laughter of the carnivalistic concept.

The chapter explores the influence of Bakhtin’s carnivalistic concept of the transformative power of laughter discernible in Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World*, especially in terms of the contextual background to the play, including the riots at its first production at the Abbey Theatre in 1907. Considering that Bakhtin conceives of carnival as a form of resistance, the quasi-celebration of the individual and the collective action in the play can be considered as carnivalesque, especially in terms of Bakhtin’s description of the “fool” characteristics. Christy is identified as a trickster character, a carnival King who wears the mask of the fool in order to encourage the temporary “crossing of boundaries” because as suggested by Bakhtin: “The mask is related to transition, metamorphoses, the violation of natural boundaries.” The suggestion is that Synge’s use of the grotesque motifs is intentional in order to present a carnivalesque vision that exposes the Rabelaisian element in Irish peasant life.

The chapter also examines the different attributes and socio-cultural aspects of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, its apartheid connection, and the attendant effect on black people in South Africa, focussing on the *élan vital* and carnivalesque concept in terms of the survival element and the vitality of the affirmative action of name switching, which makes Bergson’s and Bakhtin’s ideas integral to the play. The vital impulse in the underlying humour enables the characters to endure setbacks with relative equanimity. It is therefore pivotal to the indomitability of the human spirit as the primordial force that helps to keep the characters ‘alive’ within the context of their situations. Bakhtin’s carnivalistic concept of the combination of communal humour and transformative laughter, as

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well as the restorative powers of human communication and social organization, are evidently prevalent in *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*.

The focus on specific instances of the carnivalesque and vitalism in some of case studies moves along to examine examples of where comedy reclaims its political potency in addressing situations of oppression using the critical race theory and Rose Laub Coser’s idea of in-group versus out-group divisions operating in *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*. The role-play technique employed by the characters is used to invite the reader/audience to become part of their world, bringing all together in close contact for a discerning appraisal and examination of the issues at hand.

**Section Two — Rethinking Interculturalism: The Dynamics of Representations and Humour in Contemporary Societies**

Chapter Five examines the interculturalism in *Death and the King’s Horseman*, first from a textual analysis perspective, followed by a detailed performance analysis of the production of the play directed by Rufus Norris at the British National Theatre in 2009. The detailed analysis of the intricacies of Soyinka’s text and the Norris production examines the encounter between two different cultures with distinctive ideologies, and the misunderstanding that ensued from the encounter. The analysis of the Norris production also explores the logic of creativity, choice and experimentation of ideas, objectivity of theatrical images and the cultural implications of this supposedly intercultural project.

This ethical interrogation of the aesthetic and symbolic presentations that the production attempts to portray therefore considers the ramifications of the images produced on the British National Theatre stage, especially in terms of the missed opportunity for an in-depth historical articulation or depiction of colonialism and the effects of the political, social, and cultural intervention in the affairs of African people. The chapter suggests that despite the innovation of the production, the Norris production of *Death and the King’s Horseman* may not have adequately fulfilled intercultural theatre’s concern of bridging the interstices of the foreign and familiar in the society.
Chapter Six considers the contemporary intercultural adaptations of *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* as grassroot integration strategies. It starts by examining the different versions of *The Playboy of the Western World* that have been produced in contemporary times, noting that the universal appeal of Synge’s play lies in its interest in the power of the imagination, its fascination with violence, and the tensions of insider/outsider. The chapter also explores the differences and similarities between Synge’s original play with the various contemporary versions of the play that are available.

The exploration expands to the origin of the Irish national theatre and its influence in the present theatre landscape in Ireland. It interrogates whether the national narrative has accommodated an intercultural positioning with the focus on the Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle’s version of *The Playboy of the Western World*. It then conducts a critical analysis of the 2007/2008 production of Adigun and Doyle’s version (Directed by Jimmy Fay) from a semiotic and phenomenological perspective. This analysis takes into consideration the intercultural interactions between the indigenous and the immigrant communities in Ireland at both institutional and societal levels.

The chapter also examines the process and staging of the contemporary reimagining of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* at the Project Arts Centre Dublin in 2008 by Camino Productions and the production company’s attempt at contributing to the social discourse in Ireland. Amongst many other reasons, Camino Productions was set up in 2007 with the intention of changing negative narratives about immigrants and contextualizing the problems being faced by both new-Irish and indigenous citizens. The chapter engages the means by which the company re-worked the play in a contemporary form, using the theatre space to engage with current social issues pertaining to identity and belonging. This engenders new ways of thinking about or problematizing questions around the race, class, identity, and inclusion through the concept of ‘interculturalism from below’. The chapter discusses in detail the dramaturgical processes used for the *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* production.
Chapter Seven examines the intercultural dynamics of representation in the society, especially in terms of how representations in the media and arts sectors in Ireland have fuelled anti-immigrant sentiment within Irish society. These negative portrayals have the potential to instigate or stoke-up Irish people’s apprehensions of the undesirable immigrant “other”, whose presence is viewed as detrimental to the wellbeing of the Irish state, thereby justifying resentment towards them. The chapter also examines some of these representations in the Irish political terrain and how some Irish Politicians have the tendency to “scapegoat” African Immigrants in Ireland for personal political gains. Consistent with the aforementioned negative depictions in the press, the politicians' uncomplimentary misrepresentations of immigrants in the Irish society and the implications of labelling a group of people is considered as means of sustaining asymmetrical power relations. This history of mythic representation of the “other” as an object of ridicule, and the uneasy history of stereotyping on stage discussed in previous chapters is expected to instigate an evaluation of the truly intercultural ambition of contemporary Irish society. Chapter Seven concludes with an analysis of the stage performances of two immigrant comedians and how on different occasions, these two comedians have used subversive, satirical, and sometimes self-deprecating humour to call attention to racism, to challenge myths and misrepresentations about immigrants in Ireland, not only as a means to “get back”, but also most importantly, as an intercultural tool to extend handshakes across the divide. This is an analysis of the performances of comedian Tiny James (James J. Akpotor), and Fabu D (David Owotade), at different times and venues across Dublin, Ireland. The suggestion that stand-up comedy is an avenue for the unspeakable to be spoken in a way that is acceptable is exemplified in both comedians' work, as minorities using comedy to challenge assumptions about the “Other”.

**Major Contributions to Knowledge**

Although there are several important scholarly works on the comedy genre and humour as an important element of the genre, there is a relative dearth of
research on comedy/humour from an intercultural perspective. Also, there is a relative lack of attention to the importance of context to the interventions of comedy/humour in racially charged scenarios or circumstances. Specifically, in relation to Ireland, there is no study at present that focusses on humour trends and implications as an intercultural tool in contemporary Irish society. There is also a paucity of in-depth studies of humour in the organization and deployment of state and institutional power, especially in relation to the control of bodies via discourses of identity, nationalism, and race. Therefore, this study is unique in the sense that it presents an historical interrogation of the deployment of state and institutional power especially in relation to identity, nationalism, and race, ranging from the Athenian era to contemporary societies.

The study also contributes to cross-cultural research in intercultural studies that have been the focus of theatre scholarship of Brian Singleton’s interculturalism and social justice studies, Charlotte McIvor’s intercultural performance and migration studies, and Nicholas Johnson’s theatre performance and literary criticism in experimental, intercultural, and other forms of “applied” scholarly works. Most particularly, the study draws on inspiration and guidance on humour studies from the works of Eric Weitz’s brilliant contributions to comedy and humour criticisms, and other critics in the field such as Michael Billig, Giselinde Kuipers, Sharon Lockyer, John Morreall, Rose Laub Coser, and more. The study contributes to the body of work from these scholars, particularly from an intercultural perspective, especially in deriving clues and insights on the social function and role of comedy/humour in societies generally, and in Irish society in particular. This takes into cognizance the idea of humour being an intercultural and pedagogical tool for its communicative, social, and psychological effects and its ability to engender bonding or exclusion in the society.

Evidently, a lot has been written in the past about each of the case studies, however most of these are not particularly from comedy genre studies. For example, past critical engagements on Death and the King’s Horseman have been mainly from the perspective of the genre of tragedy. This thesis engages the case studies exclusively and intentionally from the comedy genre position. My new intercultural theory of the comic spirit/comedy suggests comedy as a
bona fide agency to approach the case studies. The comedy genre therefore becomes a legitimate device to use in a consideration of the works away from the tragic that some of them like Death and the King’s Horseman have been positioned in the past.

The thesis conceptualizes comedy and humour through intercultural interactions, with the theatrical elements comprising the text, stage, interpretation, and the implied and contextual themes of each of the case studies and mediated intercultural interactions within each society. This study suggests humour as a thermometer of cross-cultural interactions and experiences, and some of the conclusions from the study reveal insights underlying the role of humour in different encounters, both within each text and in real-life situations like those explored in chapters Seven. My new intercultural theory of comedy therefore suggests the importance of the concept of the interculturalism from below, with the important detail of the recognition to be combined with the idea of the recognition of the perspective of the immigrant in the Irish society.

The study confirms humour as a safe haven where the controversial topic of race is being addressed in Irish society. The centrality of the interactions of the varying notions of culture and the conceptual symbolic collaborations at the different levels of the society have been identified through this study. The outcome of humour production, content, and appreciation in ethnically diverse communities that has been explored in this work has shown that humour also has the ability to merge different elements of cultural understanding of a communicated phenomenon, either in the form of a dialogue in a theatrical production, through performances by comedians, and in situational jokes in everyday interactions.

The study demonstrates how immigrant experiences have been used as a means to negotiate cultural identity and representation. It also shows how cliché can be used to insinuate stereotypical connotations. For example, if one should combine the insights and conclusions in Chapters Six and Seven, it can be concluded that members of a group will often call on humour forms as
mentioned above to communicate implicit expectations and rules concerning the kinds of behaviour that are considered acceptable within the group.

The investigation into the collaborative efforts on interculturalism by theatre companies and the desire to incorporate different and sometimes opposing cultural voices towards participating on projects of intercultural relevance is particularly insightful. The dissertation’s contribution to the field is further enhanced by the opportunities for spaces of inclusion by acknowledging the spectator as producer of meaning, as seen in the works of Camino Productions. Nonetheless, it is important to emphasize that despite the many insights from this work, the research on humour from an intercultural perspective definitely warrants future attention.

**Rationale for using comedy to treat the case studies**

On the rationale for the exclusive use of comedy in analyzing the case studies, the argument can be made that when comedy first developed, it expressed the need for a stable community, because this was most urgently required for the harmonious survival of man at that time. Therefore, it can be suggested that the idea of life’s continuity and the ability to engender differences is at the heart of comedy. This idea has been established in *The Acharnians* and also suitably demonstrated as a commonality between the modern case studies. The focus on the wellbeing of the society, the apparent need for stability, and the capacity of comedy to interrogate epistemological categories and cross-examine realities, evident in the case studies, is most certainly manifested in the characters.

The natural proclivities and unbridled embrace of the carnivalesque by the characters (especially the main characters), implies a signification that is suggestive of a proximate origin of human creativity. This aspect of the comic figure is perhaps better understood in terms of its unique consideration linked to rebirth or renewal. The rejuvenation concept exemplified in the cyclical element of birth, death and rebirth and embodied in human creativity for communal wellbeing, at the heart of comedy, is common to all the case studies focussed on in this work. In *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, the symbolic ‘death’ of Sizwe and his
subsequent identity change to Robert is in this sense comic because of the opportunity for renewal.

Christy’s rebirth and his awareness of his potentials in *The Playboy of the Western World*, understood as an evolving metaphor for renewal, is rejuvenating especially as an affirmative experience. In *Death and the King’s Horseman*, the renewal element as an essentially functional factor for restoration and rejuvenation is signified as ostensibly imperative for the inclusive community spirit. Elesin’s avowed responsibility to his community is vital to maintaining the integrity of a civilization. This community rejuvenating, contradiction enhancing, and insider versus outsider propensity, provides us with a reading of the case studies that gives credence to the purpose of comedy as theorised by this thesis.

This strategy is underlined by the conceptual frame denoting birth, death, and rebirth as implicitly comic. Comedy in this sense does not consider death as fundamentally tragic. This is against the terminology of language that interprets the tragic and comic in aesthetic terms and therefore relies on the depiction of the genres of comedy and tragedy, being considered in opposition to one another, resulting in the creation of hierarchies and boundaries that have traditionally seen comedy to be relegated to an inferior position. This in turn seems to have sustained a paternalistic preoccupation with particular considerations, therefore intensifying the inordinate interests in the tragic figure, catharsis, and nobility.

This has probably bolstered that inclination to deny some works from being considered from the prism of such a ‘lesser genre’ like comedy because of its assumed gaucherie that is unsuitable for such level of intellectual scrutiny. For example, *Death and the King’s Horseman* has often been, or is likely to be explored by some critics, mainly in terms of the tragedy motifs or largely from the playwright’s critical assertions on the African cosmic world and mythology. Some might argue that this emphasis was necessary because of the need to engage with the culture-specific elements of the play, but it also had the effect of limiting the scope of critical questions asked of the work.
This thesis has challenged these inordinate emphases on the play by proffering different analysis away from just the threnodic, as it and some of the other case studies, have been explored through the prism of comedy and interculturalism, and this have shown them in a different perspective. This is because the study considers comedy as a movement that performs a dialectical exchange between the world of social inhibitions, restrictions and prohibition and the symbolic world of possibilities with the attendant leverage to galvanize the comic spirit, which in turn engenders potentials within the community.

**The theoretical drive of the dissertation**

The following are some of the theoretical pedestals on which the discussions of various topics in the thesis have been founded, providing a clear path in the discourse especially in terms of the comic impulse to life, postcolonial engagement with history, identity and the social construct, and other relevant issues. The first of these is the vitalism concept and its connection to life’s creative soul, especially as indicative of a comic strategy for individual/communal considerations. The academic oeuvre of Henri Bergson and Suzanne Langer is of immense assistance in this regard, particularly the tenets of the vitalistic theory of both philosophers.

The social control element of humour is exemplified in Bergson’s theory, ascribing a social corrective onus to humour and laughter. The social role analysis of humour and the different types of ideas that emerged in the twentieth century include the functionalist approach, the conflict approach, the symbolic interactionist approach, the comparative historical approach, and the semiotic and phenomenological approach. All these are imbued with control mechanisms expressing the common value system of human consciousness and have thus been reflected in the general direction of the argument of this work.

Ideas and concepts relating to the work of Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin and Rose Laub Coser have also been relied upon in order to investigate the impacts of laughter, especially in terms of its social functions. While the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, particularly his concept of carnivalesque, is very relevant in exploring the possibilities of transgressive behaviour, the focus on Coser’s
theories pertains to the concept of socially defined categories and structures, role theories and the concept of self, and their effect on an individual or a group. An example is Coser’s concept of “joking down” where a hierarchical “superior” subgroup in a social group attempts to maintain social control through humour, as everyone makes fun of the hierarchically “inferior” subgroup. Coser argues that this type of joking reflects the social hierarchy and helps to maintain the social order by keeping people in their place. This exemplifies how humour can create a perception that a specific group with shared values, the in-group, is united, whilst simultaneously almost able to create dichotomy between groups of people from within the same or different cultural backgrounds.

The critical race theory paradigm has featured immensely in this dissertation, in order to explore the racial elements and race interactions in the contemporary plays. Critical race theory has been used to query the legality and morality of any form of social engagement in order to interrogate policies and practices to uncover the overt and covert ways that racist ideologies, structures, and institutions create and maintain racial inequality. This idea places race at the centre of analysis where the bio-political social conditioning has been indicated to be operating, especially in situations where particular groups of people are rendered absent or present by specific methods. Stephan Scheel suggests that Michael Foucault introduced the concept of biopolitics as: “a new form of power that is concerned with governing populations in a way that maximizes their life potentials and economic productivity.”

Giorgio Agamben continues further on biopolitics with his discussions on the thanatopolitics of Nazism and the concentration camp as the biopolitical paradigm of the modern, in which: “the pure, absolute, and impassable biopolitical space (insofar as it is founded solely on the state of exception) – will appear as the hidden paradigm of the political space of modernity.” Agamben conceptualizes the homo sacer as being reduced to “bare life”, and thus deprived

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of any rights, and that the camp resembles “the hidden matrix of the political space in which we are living.” Agamben’s conception of biopolitical power draws on Carl Schmitt’s conception of sovereign power. Archille Mbembe also highlights the destructive dimension of biopolitics with his concept of necropolitics. Drawing on Foucault’s notion of state racism, Mbembe suggests that racism establishes a “biological caesura” between those who must live and those who must die, because of its biopolitical element: “such a power defines itself in relation to a biological field—which it takes control of and vests itself in.” Roberto Esposito’s biopolitical perspective, positioned between Agamben and Mbembe’s ideas, broadens the understanding of the twenty first century’s biopolitical-economic ordering of life and death. The relationship between life and politics is, according to Esposito, pervaded by a logic of immunization that seeks to preserve life but, through these attempts, reduces life to nothing but biological existence.

There are many other prominent theorists on biopolitics who are not referenced here; however, the notable commonality to those alluded to above is in terms of the nexus between biopolitics and national identities. Therefore, in relation to immigrants in a foreign country, biopolitics proclaims that national identity-making implies disciplinary practices of controlling and regulating human lives as a precondition for aggregating a population into a single collective body. Because identity produces strong ideological impulses, biopolitical instruments used as manipulative tools by the state thus serves to regulate the identities of the ‘Other’ by being grounded in bodily discourses concerned with managing lives, oftentimes through undesirable representations, negative cultural classifications, inimical demographic policies, and other covert practices of inclusion or exclusion. In *Death and the King’s Horseman*, Pilkings and his wife

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50 The concept of the “Other” develops from the work of phenomenologist Emmanuel Levinas. Integral to Said’s Orientalism discourse, the Other concept has been inherent in postcolonial theory from its inception. The Other opposes the self or the same, and, equally, creates the self/same through its symbolism of that which the self/same is not.
Jane’s contrived ideologies of imperialistic superiority is manifested in their pontifications on the backward attitudes of the natives. This is also evidenced through their constant biopolitical excoriations of the natives. In the new version of *The Playboy of the Western World* by Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle, the ridiculing of Nigerian society with the statement that fraud is a subject in the curriculum of primary schools in Nigeria is an implicit way of authorizing views about a country of almost two hundred million people, implying that it is a country of degenerates, which presumably is to be negatively contrasted with the rational, disciplined, and morally superior Irish society.

The concept of interculturalism is fundamental to this thesis, especially in terms of its explorations of racial and cultural interactions, and by extension the multiple layers of identities in the themes and settings of the case studies. With the exception of *The Acharnians* by Aristophanes, all the other plays are imbued with numerous avenues for an intercultural analysis, either in terms of the interrelationships and affinities between characters from different cultural backgrounds, or the dichotomy of the characters’ insight and awareness of the other character’s differing cultural attributes and exigencies. It is therefore imperative to examine the different dimensions and aspects of intercultural relations and the direction in which the concept has been considered and its applicability in the grassroots community theatre practice in Ireland.

Intercultural theatre can be defined as the form of theatre that makes use of more than one cultural tradition or/and encourages collaboration between personnel from divergent cultures in the research, process, and presentations of a theatrical production.\(^{51}\) In order to fully comprehend the trends of intercultural theatre today, it is imperative to have a reasonable understanding of interculturalism, both in terms of purpose and ethics. Patrice Pavis observes that it is indeed problematic to offer a clear concise definition of interculturalism due to the range of approaches it encompasses and its myriad of possibilities. He then enumerates the diverse positions that foreground it as a cross-cultural

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\(^{51}\) This is my own definition in the simplest understanding of intercultural theatre. It is to be considered as a working definition or as an ideational point for exploring the concept.
contested site for both theory and practice. Pavis suggests the intercultural as the creation of a: "hybrid form, by consciously and voluntarily mixing performance traditions traceable to distinct cultural areas."\textsuperscript{52} In the same vein, Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert assert that: "Put simply, intercultural theatre is a hybrid derived from an intentional encounter between cultures and performing traditions."\textsuperscript{53} Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins define interculturalism in this sense as: “the meeting in the moment of performance of two or more cultural traditions, a temporary fusing of styles and/or techniques and/or cultures.”\textsuperscript{54}

Multiculturalism, another spectrum of the cross-cultural interaction idea, recognizes multiple cultures effectively existing in a society, albeit with policies introduced to recognize diversity and foster integration between these different cultures, while also insisting on maintaining their equality. Multiculturalism generally encourages policies that enable different cultures to live side by side, none of which take precedent or have higher value. While it has been touted as enabling minority cultures to be maintained and not swallowed up or assimilated by the majority culture, it is often claimed as being predisposed to creating a fixed and ascribed set of identities, which in turn may give rise to divisions and tensions.

Like multiculturalism, interculturalism acknowledges that any democratic society has a historically developed and shared culture of interaction. However, it goes further to not only recognize differences within the community, but also valorises the different cultures for authentic cultural integration and integral development of society. This is evidenced in its capacity to: “concentrate on openness to the other, active respect for difference, mutual comprehension, active tolerance, validating the cultures present, providing equalities of opportunities, fight discrimination.”\textsuperscript{55} Interculturalism is usually preferred in cross-

cultural discourses, because sometimes communication between different cultural identities can appear paradoxical, and thus requires recognition of both the similar and the differences between cultures or groups within the society. This, according to Martha Nussbaum is why: “The interculturalist, they argue, has reason to reject the claim of identity politics that only members of a particular group have the ability to understand the perspective of that group.”

In terms of stage productions, there has been a shift from exoticist/Orientalist presentations of other cultures in the early 1900s to productions explicitly including personnel from different cultures, and marketing that as a good thing, since the latter half of the twentieth century. Some of these productions often involve American or European Theatre Practitioners/Directors working with the cultures and mythologies of geographical areas of the world with distinct cultural traditions from European/Western cultures, or countries with low economic capital. These productions are generally large in scale with huge financial backing of big corporations. The most famous examples of these types of productions are the nine-hour adaptation of the Indian epic *The Mahabharata* in 1985 by Peter Brook, Ong Keng Sen’s *Lear* in 1997, and also Ariane Mnouchkine’s *L’Indiade* in 1987. The scholarship that arose in response to these works has been varied; there are those in support, considering it as typical creative cultural collaborations that seek new frontiers of human alliances, while some consider them as avenues by Westerners to extort and appropriate native cultural heritage to suit Western agendas. The crux of the differing opinions practically pertains to either rights of representation, or even the modalities to consider in terms of the ethics of content and embodiment.

The dichotomy of voices that championed these divergent opinions encouraged further debates on the intercultural dynamics and the significance of historical, linguistic, and racial insights. These debates still continues till this day. These voices include Edward Said, Daphne P. Lei, Marvin Carlson, Rustom

57 World War Two (WWII) may be considered as a kind of threshold in the century’s thinking around other cultures. Also the decolonial waves of the 1960s also provided an avenue for this more inclusive interest.
Bharucha, and many more. For example, Daphne Lei’s contribution of Hegemonic Intercultural Theatre (HIT) is insightful as she argues that the dominant form of intercultural theatre in the contemporary world is still confined by: “a specific artistic genre and state of mind that combines First World capital and brainpower with Third World raw material and labour, and Western classical texts with Eastern performance traditions.” She suggests further that the biggest problem with this phenomenon is that “HIT limits and interrupts cultural flow from the East”, which ultimately consolidates Western discourse.

On his part, Said’s criticism of Interculturalism calls into serious question the early modern representations of intercultural encounters involving European and American theatre practitioners and their use of the Eastern cultures as a form of tool. Said’s idea of the relationship between colonial knowledge and the exercise of imperial power, which by implication can be regarded as representations of domination through aesthetic forms, are well documented in his book *Orientalism*. He argues that the almost obsessive nature of Westerners with Eastern cultural elements can often make it seem like a historiographical paradigm about the relationship between imperial and representational authority in the colonial era. He condemns condescending Eurocentric preconceptions about Arab people and culture, as it only serves as justification for colonial and postcolonial efforts to dominate the people and influence their culture.

The ‘intercultural’ interactions between the West and the East, according to Said, are akin to political intellectualism borne of deep-rooted bias, which incidentally may have stemmed from the need to create a specific type of difference between them. As a result, the prejudiced interpretations of the Eastern world have been shaped by the cultural attitudes of European imperialism. Therefore, much of the Western study of Islamic civilization can be considered as a form of psychological exercise in the self-affirmation of “European identity”, and further suggests that an endemic Western prejudice

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against the East has congealed into a modern ideology of racist supremacy, a kind of anti-Semitism directed against Arabs and Muslims.\textsuperscript{60}

Another interculturalism critique, contiguous with Said’s argument but from a different perspective, is Rustom Bharucha’s idea of interculturalism as a political tool. Bharucha urges intercultural scholars to look outside the performance space, to think beyond the content of the aesthetics in order to determine the ethics of a production. These suggestions and more are documented in his two books, \textit{Theatre and the World} and \textit{The Name of the Secular}. Bharucha emphasizes the need for an acknowledgement and confrontation of the discriminations of interculturalism, especially the historically inscribed significance of economic, national, and linguistic boundaries, and particularly its “affiliations to global capitalism”. In \textit{Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture}, Bharucha, talking specifically about interculturalism in the theatre from a specific Indian perspective, argues for the need to “contextualize our research within the inner necessities of our history”\textsuperscript{61} from which both the pending and looming issues of globalization are examined through the prism of interculturalism, intraculturalism, multiculturalism, and secularism. He characterises the intercultural theatre as a “voluntarist intervention circumscribed by the agencies of the state and the market.”\textsuperscript{62}

Bharucha asks the pertinent questions of the ethics of representation in the theatre and seeks to know if there are alternative modalities of representing the ‘Other’ with responsibility and engagement. Using Peter Brook’s production of \textit{The Mahabharata} as a typical example of the imbalances in intercultural interactions both from a cultural level and creative level, Bharucha points out the puzzling auditory impulses the gaps between the language of the script and the lingo-phonic qualities of the performers delivering them invoked, because according to him, in the process of the performers speaking in English, their voices are ‘reduced to accents, almost incomprehensible at times [...].’

Ultimately, Bharucha poses the question: “How does one begin to respect – and not just tolerate – cultural differences? Can economic inequalities be included in one’s respect for cultural difference?”

Brian Singleton added his voice to the discussion by indicating how the term ‘intercultural’ has been overgeneralised for its “unequal binarizing of source and target cultures.” Singleton further suggests that if one should take into account the changing dynamics of cross-cultural exchange, interculturalism illustrates what can be described as “a sharing and mutual borrowing of the manifestation of one theatre practice by another” which unfortunately, can inadvertently result in “the annihilation of indigenous pre-modern practices by a rapacious First World capitalism.” In reference to some of the submissions from the “Interweaving Performance Cultures” conference in Berlin convened by Erika Fischer-Lichte, Singleton suggests that the most obvious first step was to displace the term ‘intercultural’ because: “Clearly, a rethinking of the terminology was necessary.”

In “Introduction: The Pursuit of Otherness for investigating of the self” Singleton appraised the ‘intercultural’ in terms of the political implications of Euro-American orientalism by characterizing intercultural performance from the prism of “a floating, unstable view of ‘global’ cultures not defined by nation-states.” He argues that interculturalism does not intend to represent the Other’s culture as much as draws from foreign materials to allow for internal cultural change. Essentially, the new terminology “signifies a revision of a cartographic location of

63 Bharucha, The Politics., 2.
all cultures, seen through a kaleidoscope of exchange, borrowing, bartering, and appropriation, dependent on the subject position of the borrower.\textsuperscript{68}

Singleton’s appraisal of Ariane Mnouchkine’s \textit{Les Atrides} can be used as an example of the negation of the argument of a central or dominating culture, as he points out that in her production: “Mnouchkine’s interculturalist Shakespeare, far from feminizing the Orient from a western male gaze, as has been suggested by Adrian Kiernander, points out the very emasculation of Western theatrical forms.”\textsuperscript{69} The sincerity of intent, method of presentation and the respect for the process, is according to Singleton, the distinction between cultural appropriation and cultural hybridism and the hierarchical differentiation between West and East. This can be used to also address the aforementioned queries from Said regarding Orientalism.

Singleton suggests that “The difference lies, however in the treatment of subjects, Orientalism positions the Orient as subjects whereas interculturalism of, say, Mnouchkine treats the Occident as subject.”\textsuperscript{70} He poses the question: “Are Euro-American intercultural theatre practices, then producing ‘imagined’ as opposed to ‘correct’ knowledge of the Orient and by that disguising the neo-colonial plundering as aestheticsm? It is my belief that they are producing neither.”\textsuperscript{71} Singleton warns that “The danger of following Said’s politics and Bharucha’s prescriptions is to produce hermetically sealed metacultures which do not exchange, trade, or evolve.”\textsuperscript{72} He equally advises that “we must remember at all times that the unequal distribution of wealth, power and access to other cultures means that a “culture of choice” might only ever be a first-world postmodern possibility.”\textsuperscript{73}

Another aspect of the interculturalism description that has also influenced this thesis relates to its definition by Ric Knowles as a “site for the continuing renegotiation of cultural values and the reconstitution of individual and community

\textsuperscript{68} Singleton, \textit{Introduction: The Pursuit.}, 93.
\textsuperscript{69} Singleton, 95.
\textsuperscript{70} Singleton, 96.
\textsuperscript{71} Singleton, 96.
\textsuperscript{72} Singleton, 96.
\textsuperscript{73} Singleton, 96.
identities and subject positions.”74 Knowles suggests that of the many different approaches to cultural interaction, the “intercultural” is the preferred term because of its “focus on the contested, unsettling, and often unequal spaces between cultures, spaces that can function as performative sites of negotiation.”75 The specificity in engaging and linking cultures aside, the emphasis on the spaces between cultures as sites for exchanging and forging of new and hybrid subjectivities is interestingly correlative to Erika Fischer-Lichte’s concept of the term VERFLECHTUNG (interweaving) as a preferred substitute for ‘intercultural’. One of the reasons that Fischer-Lichte finds the intercultural inadequate for contemporary discourse is that it assumes an equal power relationship between cultures which have come into contact with each other, ironically the same reason why some in the field have voiced concern or outrightly rejected multiculturalism.

Knowles’s work has been consistently grounded on intercultural interactions, particularly of immigrant experiences and their contributions to Canadian theatre. There is a growing interest in such areas, evidenced in the increasing interest in intercultural theatre in Toronto, Canada. Appraising the intercultural scene in the last twenty years in Toronto, and as perhaps as what can be regarded as his own contribution to the interculturalism discourse, Knowles suggests that:

perhaps the most significant development of the past two decades has been the emergence of a vibrant, interdependent ecology of intercultural performance that crosses cultures and disciplines, challenges the hegemony of whiteness on the city’s stages, and reflects the cultural differences that are visible and audible on the city’s streets and streetcars.76

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Interculturalism-from-below

Knowles’s analysis of the intercultural theatre companies in Toronto classifies them into four categories of those whose work are “more broadly intercultural / those whose programming originates from “their cultural ‘homelands’”/ those dedicated to specific cultural communities / and those whose “new work that speaks across such differences.”77 This last group comprises of those people whose cultural lineage have enabled their binary identities, such as in the case of those who were originally born in or has acquired Canadian citizenship, irrespective of their cultural lineage. Based on Knowles’s categorization, there are many examples of such immigrant-led theatre companies that are at the forefront of intercultural interaction and engagement in Ireland using the theatre structure and process.

The drivers of the uniquely Irish intercultural integrational methodologies were either born in Ireland or have lived in the Republic for a considerable number of years and are proud of their unique binaries of belonging in being Irish, yet still being someone more. The group with hyphenated identities such as Nigerian-Irish, Polish-Irish, or Brazilian-Irish etc., and their mainly indigenous counterpart at the forefront of interculturalism in Ireland, are the focus of Charlotte McIvor’s work of many years in the field in Irish society and theatre studies.

McIvor’s “Interculturalism-from-below” concept as referenced in this thesis is fashioned after Ric Knowles’s work in Toronto. In her work documenting diversity and intercultural integration as a source of innovation and creativity, McIvor focusses on the work being done at grassroots level by Immigrant-led companies in Ireland. In Migration and Performance in Contemporary Ireland: Towards a New Interculturalism,78 McIvor offers new ways to conceptualise and study intercultural dialogue from the perspective of theatre and the arts, suggesting that: “In Ireland, ‘intraculturalism’ (mixing between internally differentiated groups in national space) is interculturalism (implying mixing

77 Ric Knowles, Multicultural Text., 75.
between majority and minority ethnic groups in varying configurations). But it is the concept of ‘from-below’ and its meaning in the Irish milieu that is of central interest here.”

Making a case for the need for new models of interculturalism, McIvor probes the developmental essence of interculturalism, suggesting that there is the necessity for this new model because of the increasingly “global rebalancing of financial and cultural power that is also being shaped by changing technological and intermedial modes of communication.” The inevitability of the new model is also pertinent because: “since the 1990s, the heydays of intercultural theatre’s previous theoretical wave, digital modes of communication and experience have become increasingly pervasive and integrated into social life.” Lastly, McIvor offers the important point of the disparities of access to technologies and the fact that neoliberalism has further collapsed economic time and space, which have resulted in continually increasing inequalities. These concomitant changes have also been largely responsible for making more interconnection of national economies creating a new precariat and new inequalities, at the same time as growing wealth for some. This necessitated the need for interculturalism as a multimodal and more democratic site of encounter.

McIvor examines the work of three migrant-led theatre companies in her book comprising of Arambe Productions, Polish Theatre Company and Camino Productions, noting how each has used theatre as a mechanism through which they are able to express their socio-cultural conditions in exile. The work of prominent indigenous artists like Declan Gorman, Liam Halligan, Donal O’Kelly, Raymond Keane, Gary Keegan, Polish artist Kasia Lech, and Croatian artist Mirjana Rendulic are also spotlighted, as well as the roles played by organisations and agencies like Barabbas, Calypso, the Arts Council of Ireland, and the national agency for collaborative arts in Ireland, known as Create. A critical engagement of an example of this category of work will be attempted.

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79 Charlotte McIvor, Migration and Performance., 86.
81 McIvor, Introductions., 8.
further on in this dissertation. This analysis will also focus on individuals using other forms of creative endeavours than theatre, for example, comedians whose works in Ireland aptly exemplifies McIvor’s description of interculturalism-from-below.

McIvor suggests that these individuals and organisations have used their talents, productions, and policies not only to probe, contest and subvert the notions of belonging, but also to collaborate and synergise with people of different cultural affiliations in order to increase cross-cultural awareness in Irish society. This, she argues, can be seen from the perspective of “casting, adaptation and translation as interculturalism-from-below in the work of migrant-led theatre companies who have not waited for change to happen from above but made it themselves.”

The Researcher’s Contexts

Finally, it is important to reflect on my own personal experiences as a theatre director with over eighteen years of practice within different communities in Ireland. I have always deemed my work as a bridge to different cultural affiliations in Ireland, especially based on the fact that most of the projects that I have undertaken in the past have always been collaborative in nature. This intentionally increases cross-cultural awareness and engenders intercultural dialogue. Some of the past productions from the stables of my theatre company, Camino Productions, include: *Wedlock of the Gods*, by Zulu Sofola; *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* by Athol Fugard; *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe; *Pitfalls* by Kunle Animashaun; and a stage adaptation of a novel by Ebun Akpoveta, *Trapped: Prison Without Walls*, and many more.

Throughout 2014, I was the Artistic Director in Residence at Tallaght Community Arts, Dublin. The residency was facilitated by Arts Council of Ireland, the South Dublin City Council and Rua Red. During my time at Tallaght Community Arts, I worked with many groups of people from the ages ten to sixty.

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years old. Some of the plays that I directed at Tallaght Community Arts include *Fragments*, a devised performance with participants from the Intercultural Drop-in Centre in Tallaght. The play was presented at the Rua Red Theatre, Tallaght in March 2014. It featured performers from Slovakia, Lithuania, Tanzania, Latvia, Poland, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Ghana, Russia, Tibet, and Ireland. I also worked with the Dominic Community Centre Drama Group for about four months. This group comprises of women between the ages of fifty years to sixty years. Their production *A Shadow from the Past* was presented at the Rua Red Theatre, Tallaght in 2014.

Drawing from these practical theatre experiences over the years, I have come to realise the significance of the arts, and the important role that comedy can play in creating or dividing a group. Whether as an actor or as a director, in the over twenty major productions that I have been involved with, interculturalism, (from the perspective of McIvor’s definition) has always being the bedrock of these productions, even as humour is used to channel the plotline and themes of each particular production at the time. In the *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* production at the Projects Arts Centre Dublin, when the actor playing Sizwe Bansi touched his manhood and exclaimed angrily: “I am a human being, I am a man” in apparent vexation of how society treats him which correlates to the condition of thousands of asylum seekers’ condition in Dublin, I observed the audience laughing; however, the laughter in the room was of a different kind. After the first roar of voices, the laughter seems to dissipate as the significance of the actor’s action becomes apparent, especially with the ensuing eerie silence in the auditorium. Moments later, some people could be heard crying. This is an example of how a comic scene can be affecting. Difficult topics can be discussed through a comic scene, yet in the ambience of the theatre ‘haven’, audience members may laugh as well as cry. In fact, they are inclined to laugh if so motivated; however, the laughter, especially its spontaneity, as in the reaction to Sizwe’s cruel situation, though poignant can be reassuring.

Another of the many interesting cross-cultural performances in the same production is where Buntu, played by a white Irish actor, role-plays an African Pentecostal church pastor. The actor’s mimicry of Nigerian accent and
mannerisms gets the audience laughing widely, with applause reverberating through the auditorium. This is probably because the audience recognizes that, in the role-play, the actor, irrespective of the difference in cultural backgrounds, is able to portray the gestures of a typical African preacher superbly. The scene vividly expose some of these Pastors who are ranked to be amongst the richest people in the world, while a significant number of their congregation within their milieu live in abject poverty. The scene serves as an intercultural exploration of facts, but with the gestures in the context of a humorous presentation that are not only entertaining but most importantly enlightening.

Lastly, despite the genuine welcoming nature of many people in Irish society, however, unfortunately there are still some who holds deep anti-immigrant sentiments, and this often presents in seemingly innocuous but profoundly demoralizing anti-immigrant rhetoric. A legitimate fear for African immigrants like myself is the threat and reality of racism. There is a constant tension that still exists in Ireland between the atmosphere of support and welcome, and the deeper forces of the insider/outsider dynamics. There is also the pertinent concern of the justifiable possession of particular jokes, the politicization of jokes, and the appropriacy and particularity of the different aspects of laughter and the way it is employed. These and many more relevant issues are what this dissertation will consider critically through the forthcoming exploration, with extant academic considerations, and drawing on my own knowledge as a theatre practitioner, and my real-world intercultural experiences in Ireland.

The knowledge and awareness that I have gained from working with people from diverse communities makes me energized to continue to find means of initiating more intercultural interactions within this wonderful land of the shamrock emblem, for which I have developed great love and affection. This research, for me, is a testament to my vision for the country as a place of welcome, and hopefully will be considered as a commitment to the flourishing of ideas that benefits the future of the nation.
Section One

Reconsidering Comedy:
Origins, Meanings, and Functions
Chapter One

Comedic Origins: Etymology, Agrarian Roots, Oppositions, and Vital Impulse in *The Acharnians*

The foundational concept of the comedy genre is concerned with epistemological questions about life and interactions in society, and the oppositional characteristics of the complexities of the ‘insider’ and the ‘outsider’ of the sanctioned order. This may be instantiated in how the comic structural forms challenge the dialectical production of meaning through a variety of proposed solutions to cultural tensions. For a further cognizance of these interactions, it is imperative that the origin of the word “comedy” should be explored. Exploring its etymological roots can decisively shed some light on the genre, especially in terms of the capacity to produce alternatives through which representation of the conflicts between the aforementioned complex forces can be made clear. It can also help to contextualize the urban and rural life description of the ancient origin of comedy, most importantly, the significance of humour’s capacity to engender meaning of contexts and connotations.

This capability of comedy as a dynamic force that engenders division and cohesion is integral to the concept of interculturalism that this dissertation proclaims. This is predicated on the theory of comedy that draws on the comic spirit, laughter, humour, and the indicative social implications of the cross-cultural interactions of the ‘insider’ and the ‘outsider’ in diverse cultural interactions. I interpret interculturalism as being about authentic human capacity and societal integral development using humour as a pedestal for such integrational aspirations, and this chapter hopes to explore comedy’s etymological and cultural roots in order to ascertain elements within Athenian society that correlate to intercultural elements in modern societies which also encourage connection while also engendering divergence and dichotomies.

Most early societies lived by an occasional cycle, an ordinary method that is associated with the movement of the sun or moon and which may have been
connected with an awareness and understanding of natural elements, harvest, and the manner in which predators and prey hunt or evade capture. These cycles may be considered as constituting human’s awareness of the temporality of life. Northrop Frye’s theory of cycles and seasons in *The Anatomy of Criticism* suggests that: “the fundamental form of [mythical] process is cyclical movement, the alternation of success and decline, effort and relapse, life and death.”¹ This theory implies that human imagination has helped in creating a literary universe in order to assimilate the alien and indifferent world of nature, modified into archetypal forms so as to satisfy enduring human desires and needs.

Frye’s idea of seasons/cycles involves using different seasonal patterns for different phenomena is based upon the similarities of “movement” between the seven categories of reality and the cyclical and dialectical processes of archetypes. Drama, therefore evolved out of the necessity to devise rituals to deal with things like seasonal changes, or natural occurrences like the moon and the ‘marvel’ of day and night. Spring was for comedy, summer was for romance, fall was for tragedy, and winter was for irony/satire. Spring as comedy implies that the hero starts at a low point and ascends. Summer as Romance connotes that it is during summer that the protagonist will likely embark on adventures in which they subsequently find love. Occasionally, there will be a ritual death that is the tragedy, and this is exemplified in Fall. Frye’s use of “tragedy” does not necessarily imply sadness, but instead, it is to be considered as that which enables the character to descend from the point where the story began. On winter, Frye claimed that winter was marked by content rather than structure, so it is difficult to give an example of exactly what happens; however, because the content during the wintertime was often ironic or satirical, winter represents Irony/Satire.

The word “comedy” is derived from the Classical Greek κωμῳδία κομῳδία, which is a compound either of κῶμος κότος (revel) or κώμη κόμη (village) and ωδή διδέ (singing). It is possible that κωμος itself is derived from κώμη, and originally meant a village revel. Comedy (κωμικός κωμικός from

kōmos, “village festival”, and aeidein, “to sing”) appears to have originated from festivities connected with the worship of Dionysus. According to The World Encyclopaedia, it “originated in early Greek fertility rites and, in modern usage, refers not only to a humorous play or film, but also to the growing tradition of stand-up routines.”

In The Origin of Attic Comedy, Francis Macdonald Cornford posits a theory of the ritual origin of Attic comedy that suggests comedy arose from the revels associated with the rites of Dionysus. “Comedy sprang up and took shape in connection with Dionysiac or Phallic ritual.”

Cornford relied on Aristotle’s consideration of the Dionysian tradition as having a connection to the advent of comedy. In the Poetics, Aristotle argues that comedy originated in phallic songs: “(Comedy) originated with authors….of the phallic songs, which are still in use in many of our cities.”

Andrew Stott suggests that the Greek word Oda is: “uncontroversially translated as ‘song’ and kemos translates as revel, while kōmaï comes from the word for Village.” This puts the idea of celebration and festivity at the centre of the argument of comedy as an essential manifestation of the human spirit. The significance of the revelry logic is perceptible, no matter how one decides to translate either aspect of the above-mentioned words. The song aspect of the advent of comedy and its comic significance will be discussed in further parts of this work, especially as an important element intrinsic to one of the plays to be analysed. However, according to Erich Segal, before comedy can be connected with the song of the country village or the revel, it goes through a stage like sleep.

Comedy as koma refers to the stage in which comedy is a sleeping song, an ode slowly built up in order to be able to transform what is supposed to remain unchanged and to transgress established conventions.

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As Segal points out: “koma is a rare word with rare connotations, whenever it appears instead of the more common hypnos. It can have an erotic sense of letting go, not merely nodding off.”\textsuperscript{7} It is important to emphasize that this is not a common sort of sleep, nor is it a regular song. It is the sensuality that awakens in the night, letting conventions run loose to reshape social codes and roles. The sleep would thus offer a convenient set for the feelings connected with the comic spirit to come up and blossom freely. Comedy as the song in the sleep invokes important and diverse connotations. The comic as a sleeping song associates dream and comedy, two realms in which the range of what is possible is considerably expanded.

Therefore, according to Segal, “In both dream and comedy, the impossible wish comes true”\textsuperscript{8} and consequently, in both realms, alternative ways of being can be explored. Segal elucidates by connecting the origin of comedy with the experiences of Zeus and Hera in the \textit{Iliad},\textsuperscript{9} alluding to the incident where: “Hypnos, the god of sleep, declares that he has covered Zeus with an especially soft slumber (\textit{malakon koma}), just after Zeus and Hera had made love. The sense of indulgence and release adds a metalinguistic validity to the alleged etymology of comedy.”\textsuperscript{10}

Crucially, it can be presumed that Segal is suggesting the possibility of the diverse derivations of comedy, encompassing different lines of exploration, sometimes intersecting one another. First, there is the outer world of sleep and the unconscious state of the mind. As Segal observes, even in its connection with \textit{komos}, comedy is more about a state of mind and a disposition of the spirit than it is a state ceremony, as the latter is supposed in the former.\textsuperscript{11} Secondly, the \textit{kome} is where comedy takes its forces to outside the limits imposed by urban life to become the country village song. Further analysis of comedy as \textit{kome} suggests that it concentrates the power of creative process attributed to different

\textsuperscript{7} Segal, \textit{The Death.}, 2.
\textsuperscript{8} Segal, 2.
\textsuperscript{9} \textit{The Iliad} is an ancient Greek epic poem in dactylic hexameter, traditionally attributed to Homer and referenced by Segal in \textit{The Death of Comedy}, 2.
\textsuperscript{10} Segal, 2.
\textsuperscript{11} Segal, 7.
manifestations of nature, simplicity of mind, body, and spirit. It embodies the force of life's movement and the human efforts to keep up with it. This mimesis reflects observed movements of nature. Thus, the death and rise of seasons are now internalized and re-enacted as a cosmic force. Taken as such, comedy underscored the idea of the country as a place that has vividly stood where excess could be carried out and transgression would find its way of existence.

The country, as opposed to the emergent city in Ancient Greece, appears as a synonym for freedom and loose behaviour. But it is also where the first festivals and celebrations to fertility gods takes place. This relationship between the Greek City/State and the freedom found outside its limits is summed up by Segal that: “In the ancient world, freer behaviour could be sanctioned when it was geographically beyond the jurisdiction of the city fathers”.\textsuperscript{12} This statement by Segal is important, as it focuses on the cultural milieu that favoured the rise of comedy in its first and elemental aspects. Besides its etymological roots pointing to comedy as a country village song, the dawn of the comic is intimately linked with its relationship, mainly of an antagonistic nature with the city. Moreover, comedy originated in opposition to urban values and structures and is affirmed as a result of rural environments, vibrant outside city limits and away from the controlling eyes of authorities.

In \textit{The Republic} (380 BC), Plato defends the need to establish a form of control over humour and comic manifestations that are performed within the limits of the city. To Plato, the liberating power of the comic and poetry in general seem dangerous to the city. In Plato's declaration is the information about the comic as an unconscious desire, awakened by the sleep, drinking, breaking rules and transgressing limits. Plato hinted at the idea of the comic as an unconscious state of letting go and opening the soul to all sorts of uncontrollable pleasures and feelings. This would be one of the main reasons for Plato's attack on poetry. It can be suggested that outside the city limits, poets and artists of different kinds

\textsuperscript{12} Segal, \textit{The Death}, 4.
would find an escape to the types and forms of control like the one suggested by Plato.

Plato cautions that it is during the dream state when rational defences are low that is a perfect moment for the revel to kick in and take control over the most fundamental operations of the soul. According to Plato, the desires: “are awakened in sleep when the rest of the soul, the rational, gentle and dominant part, slumbers, but the beastly and savage part, replete with food and wine, gambols and, repelling sleep, endeavours to sally forth and satisfy its own instincts.” Interestingly, the main objective of Plato in this criticism of poetry was to condemn or proclaim strict guidance to unbridled deep human instincts. The question is whether this was to avert any consideration for reasoning. Nonetheless, Plato establishes the important attributes of what will be the main drive of the genre, such as the representational force and its conflictive relation with reason and intellect.  

However, the unleashing of the comic through drinking responds only to one of the ways through which the manifestation can occur. The ecstasy of the followers of Dionysius and the feeling of a deeper and larger connection with the cosmic order will at times serve as a trigger for the comic spirit to reign. Following this connotation, comedy assumes an important and decisive role, incorporating excesses and the possibility of inverting social roles and codes. It also states a return to roots and puts forth the promises of new beginnings, mostly through a release from the established order. This aspect is connected with comedy as komos, the song of the revel in which disorder of behaviours is exacerbated and celebrated as both a ritual and a rite to the fertility gods.

On the other hand, Aristotle may have considered the Dorian tradition between comedy as a country village song and the exaggerated song of the revel, but as some academic research including that of Ian C. Storey, Arlene

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14 The place of the representation, as it shall be made clear further on in this dissertation, is central to the development of comic drama from the old rituals of fertility.
Allan,¹⁵ Jeffrey Rusten,¹⁶ and Alan Hughes,¹⁷ etc., has acknowledged, Aristotle’s choice is the former as the origins of comedy. Nonetheless, it must be stressed that although Aristotle acknowledged comedy as a country village song, he was clearly aware of its antecedents as an essential part of agrarian festivities and rites, both considered as two important roots for the comic, both deeply interconnected.

Cornford suggests that taking the comedies of Aristophanes as illustrative of such archetypes, the first Attic comedies were modelled on seasonal changes and agrarian rituals.¹⁸ This connection, according to Cornford, manifested in the plays under different forms, having as a common denominator a primeval magic intention. Cornford suggests that they were: “designed to bring about and further by the familiar means of sympathetic or mimetic representation — the death of the old year and the birth or accession of the new, the decay and suspension of life in the frosts of winter and its release and renouveau in spring.”¹⁹ If considered along the line of the representation of agrarian and seasonal cycles and the opposition between urban and rural life, it is reasonable to suggest that the evolution of comedy is connected to natural movements.

It must be understood that at the time of the commencement of comedy, Greece was undergoing a drastic transformation in its social and cultural structures that would undeniably affect the relationships and natures of both rural and urban spheres. The war in Peloponnesus would, for instance, provoke a strong influx of the rural population that was now migrating to the city due to difficulties imposed by the war. This is clearly exemplified in many of the plays written by Aristophanes, depicting the loss of old ritualistic practices and the new urban configuration exacerbating other values. The country was gradually being emptied, and this, according to Mathew Bevis, is consequential as an implication

¹⁷ Alan Hughes, Performing Greek Comedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 84.
¹⁹ Cornford, The Origin, 58.
of its emergence as a lost utopia. The longing for the past imagines a cultural space away from the urban city in which social problems bedevilling the society can be worked through.

Such longing for a lost and rural paradise is what Stott calls the pursuit of ‘green worlds’ in comedy, citing as an example William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye make use of Shakespeare’s romantic comedies to illustrate “green world” as: “the archetypal function of literature in visualizing the world of desire, not as an escape from “reality,” but as the genuine form of the world that human life tries to imitate.” Admittedly, the idea was not directed at an Ancient Greek context; nonetheless, it reveals much of the functioning of the comic. The green retreats stand in many plays as a possible escape from the chaos found in urban and civic life, perhaps mostly impeccably described, in its ancient form, by the Cloudcuckooland from Aristophanes’ *The Birds* (Aristophanes, 414BC).

Stott posits that green worlds: “are wish fulfilment locations, always rural, often enchanted” and often represent such longing for the freedom experienced in close contact with nature and the sense of metaphysical belonging that comes from it. However, this reality is founded only temporarily and only possible because “the normal business of the town is suspended and the pleasurable pastimes of holiday prevail”. This reaffirms the nature of the comic as standing between two poles - tension and release, holidays and the normal duties of life, an ambiguity that constitutes a central aspect of comedy. The difficulties and control that are found in the city are at the root of the release and license that the country suggests, and the comic explores. With the comic license and release

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23 Cloudcuckooland is the name of the city from an Ancient Greek comedy play, *The Birds* 414BC, by Aristophanes. It translates to the city built by the birds. The plot of *The Birds* is based on the actions of Pisthetaerus, a middle-aged Athenian who persuades the world’s birds to create a new city in the sky. This allowed Pisthetaerus to gain control of all manners of communications between the gods and humans. Ultimately, Pisthetaerus is miraculously transformed into a bird-like god figure himself, thus replacing Zeus as the pre-eminent power in the cosmos.
penetrating into urban and civic spaces, they redefine their limits and make citizens reconsider their relationship with their environments.

Taken as a temporary world, this green universe, often charged with myths and old beliefs, serves as an experimental place where solutions to problems faced in the urban world can be worked on. The experimental nature of this world, created by and for the comic, is indeed one of its most remarkable features; the rules and laws of the city are therein no longer valid, and one can freely explore the other world of unconscious desires and needs.

Cornford proclaims the connection of comedy with hymns, festivity, and celebration.  

Although strongly denounced by many scholars nowadays, nonetheless, as confirmed by contemporary authors such as Segal and Stott, elements of Cornford’s work can still be regarded as a landmark research work of its time. One of the writers that has problematized some of the conclusions made by Cornford is David Wiles, most specifically those regarding a uniform line of continuity in dramatic representation, going from the Greek to modern times. One of the main issues of such interpretation, according to Wiles, is that the openness to ritualistic practices are presented in utterly different ways between Ancient Greece and modern times, as many will underplay the reverence given to the ancient wooden statue of Dionysius and its spouse, and the procession around the city: “It mattered little what stories people told about the gods in a comedy and what people believed in their hearts. What did matter was reverencing Dionysius’ ancient wooden statue, processing on the right day, and appointing a woman of true Athenian lineage as his official spouse.”

In that sense, it is important to note the confluence of meanings of both “comic” and “comedy”, as this may open the road for further discussions. It would be congruent thus to take the Greek origins of the theatre as the sole and sure depository of ritualistic practices still to be found in modern plays. Therefore, it is no understatement that any questions regarding the relationship of Greek drama in general with religious worshipping must consider the fact that the comic

emanated from activities surrounding the song of the revel which in turn is connected to religious rituals. Recognizing the importance of ancient drama festivals, especially to the city of Dionysia, is important to fully comprehend the evolution of Greek comedy as well as understanding some of its most renowned features.

Wiles gives an account of the relation between the cult of Dionysius and the dramatic universe: “Dionysus was associated with shifting mental states, a feature of wine drinking as much as theatre, and with the emotions that derive from being in a crowd. It was not the content of the stories that constituted the Dionysiac ritual, but the act of masked impersonation before a crowd”. Of importance is the reference to the presence of a crowd, which in this instance affirms the communal element of comedy. The masked impersonation aspect is a vibrant and discernible element of the carnivalesque, which will be treated in detail as an important aspect of the comic characteristics of the case studies.

The Dionysian antecedents of Greek drama are found in ample number of examples in some of Aristophanes’ plays. For example, in Frogs (line 405), the Greek god impersonates Herakles in order to go down to Hades, the underworld, and bring back Euripides. A few lines before that (367), Aristophanes takes the word to himself and claim that comedy is an important lineage that can be traced back to ancestral rites of Dionysius, “Or any politician who bites off the pay of the poets for being ridiculed in the ancestral rites of Dionysus. All these I warn, and twice I warn, and thrice I warn again, stand aside from our mystical dances; but as for you: arouse the song and the night-long dances, that belong to our festival here” (367–371). This implies that dramatic representation of characters must consider the nature of the Greek gods and therefore the central characters and characteristics must be acknowledged.

Moreover, the dissolution of boundaries can be considered as an important element of the comic. This must not be seen as a simple suspension but must be taken as a temporary dissolution. It is during this instance that a new form of logic is expected to be instituted, forcing an alternative way of thinking.

27 Wiles, Greek Theatre, 30.
These characteristics have led some scholars to affirm about Dionysius that, “He is the god who breaks down boundaries (youth/age, male/female, human/animal, emotion/intellect), who confounds the norms, who drives women from the city to the mountain (in Bacchae), and who brings his own wildness and wild followers into the heart of the city.” This whole configuration, granted and instigated by the adoration of the Greek gods, will ultimately lead to the regard given to festivals as carnival, especially in terms of the inversion of values and substitution of codes.

Aristophanes and Old Comedy — The Acharnians (425 BC)

The Acharnians by the Athenian playwright Aristophanes is one of the oldest of his eleven surviving plays. The main character, Dicaeopolis, attempts to secure a peace treaty with the Spartans, during the Peloponnesian War. First, he outwits the Athenian Assembly, a belligerent general, and even the playwright Euripides. He is able to convince the Chorus and the coalminers that the war is not in their best interest, and then obtains the peace treaty with the Spartans. After obtaining the peace treaty, unsurprisingly, Dicaeopolis’ first order of business is the observance of the Rural Dionysia, a popular religious festival that is organized by various Athenian demes. A central feature of this festival was the procession of a ritual phallus followed by a sacrifice to Dionysus.

The ritualistic practices known as Phallophoria, include a performance in which a pole, taken as a phallus, would be carried in a procession, and then stood erected, symbolising the fertility of the next harvests. Kenneth Rothwell offers an interesting description of the Greek traditions involving “men wearing ears, walking on stilts, swathed in cloaks, and standing on their heads” and “costumed non-phallic dancers” with grotesque padded garments, singing the phallika “phallic songs.” The main character Dicaeopolis spends a considerable amount of time drinking, then he proceeds to mount the phallus on a pole that was carried by a procession. He is celebrating the country Dionysia and therefore joins the

cult of the god of wine. He makes offerings of cake, in accordance with the food offerings, and asks Dionysius to bless his sexual adventures.

Stott’s comment on this activity is insightful: “Comedy, then, is a secularized version of a ritual that was so entertaining that it could not be allowed to die out.” As Dicaeopolis and his family celebrate the peace treaty with a private celebration, they are set upon by the Chorus, a mob of aged farmers and charcoal burners from the Acharnians, who hate the Spartans for destroying their farms, and in turn also hate anyone who talks peace. They are clearly not amenable to rational argument, so Dicaeopolis grabs a basket of Acharnian charcoal as hostage and demands the old men leave him alone. They agree to leave Dicaeopolis in peace if once he agrees to hand over their charcoal. He surrenders his “hostage”, but still wants to convince the old men of the reason behind his action.

He offers to speak with his head on a chopping block, as long as they will hear him out, though he is a bit apprehensive, especially because he had been dragged to court by Cleon because of “last year's play”. He then proceeds to the house next door where the renowned author Euripides lives. He has come to ask for help from Euripides for his anti-war speech and also to borrow a beggar’s costume. Attired as a beggar and with his head on the chopping block, he makes his case to the Chorus of Acharnians for opposing the war. He proclaims that the war started because three courtesans were abducted and that as the war drags on, some people are profiting from it, and those people will not want the war to come to an end.

Half of the Chorus is won over by his arguments and the other half remain adamant. A fight breaks out between the opposing camps, and the Athenian general Lamachus, who lives next door, comes out to intervene and stop the fight. Dicaeopolis used the opportunity to query Lamachus about why he personally supports the war against Sparta, demanding to know whether Lamachus is supporting the war because he is getting paid or because of a sense

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of patriotism. The chorus on hearing more details became convinced by the arguments put forward by Dicaeopolis.

Dicaeopolis then returns to the stage and sets up a private market where he and the enemies of Athens can trade peacefully, and various minor characters come and go in farcical circumstances, including an Athenian informer or sycophant who is packed in straw like a piece of pottery and carried off to Boeotia. Soon, two heralds arrive, one calling Lamachus to war, the other calling Dicaeopolis to a dinner party. The two men go as summoned and return soon after. Lamachus enters with two soldiers on both sides who assist him in walking. He is in pain from injuries sustained in battle. Dicaeopolis merrily leaves with a dancing girl on each arm. Everyone exits, and the play ends.

In discussions of the history of ancient comedy, Aristophanes’ works has frequently been used by scholars as an exemplification of that period. The Acharnians is therefore understandably important, mainly because of its nomination of comedy as a major representation of the vital impulse to life and the encouragement of possibilities, which are some of the basic arguments that are the focus of this research work. According to Segal, Aristophanes' production displays a deep interest in the body and joy and not exactly on state and politics, although the latter comes into play when in relation to specific aspects of the relation between polis and countryside.31 For example, although the ritual element of the Phallophoria is very apparent, Aristophanes intentionally links it with the salient socio-political issues of Greek society in his era. These include the issues of politics, the issue of the unending but very costly Peloponnesian war, and the possibility of a peace treaty.

Having included the religious and ritualistic elements, Aristophanes then makes use of the dramatic devices of inversion and exaggeration, in order to make apparent the comic element in these religious activities. Also, according to Rothwell, the dangling phallus “is intentionally ridiculous geloion and implies that

it was worn to be funny and the object of laughter.”

This is a good example of two important elements in Aristophanes’ comedy: bodily gesture and obscene humour. The two are brought together with the right amount of devotion and seriousness necessary for the performance of a ritual.

Cornford suggests that in the Phallic songs are major elements of comedy: “The Ode and Antode normally contain an invocation, either of a muse, or of Gods, who are invited to be present at the dance, the divine personages are always selected with reference to the character of the Chorus.” The Ode is a performance that instigates the hero to follow his will and reject the motives of the first attack, whereas the Antode is the performance in which the defeat of the Antagonist is promoted. In The Acharnians, this is represented by Lamachus, the one who confronts the Agonist or the Hero. Both Ode and Antode are performed by the original twenty-four members of the chorus. These are then split into two halves, with each part devoted to the defence of each of the champions. These elements highlight the importance of the dynamism in the aforementioned idea of tension and release, and also the idea of attack and elevation that are central elements in the comic universe.

Aristophanes’ comic production unites the above opposites, prompting Storey and Allan to proclaim that: “From complicated metrical and lyric parodies and allusions based on a good knowledge of tragedy or contemporary ideas, he descends to physical slapstick, bowel humour, colloquial and obscene language.” As stated earlier, one of the features of The Acharnians is the combined exploration of serious rituals and obscene language humour. This is demonstrated when Dicæopolis asks the Megarian what he has to sell and the Megarian replied “mystery piggies” pointing at his young daughter:

Megarian: Hail! market of Athens, beloved of Megarians. Let Zeus, the patron of friendship, witness, I regretted you as a mother mourns her son. Come, poor little daughters of an unfortunate father, try to find

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something to eat; listen to me with the full heed of an empty belly. Which would you prefer? To be sold or to cry with hunger?

Daughters: To be sold, to be sold!

Megarian: That is my opinion too. But who would make so sorry a deal as to buy you? Ah! I recall me a Megarian trick; I am going to disguise you as little porkers, that I am offering for sale.\textsuperscript{35}

The humour in this scene is created by several factors. Before meeting Dicaeopolis, the Megarian trader decides to play a trick on Dicaeopolis by convincing him that his own two daughters are pigs. He confides his plan to the audience, and this added to the humour in the scene between Dicaeopolis and the trader. Dicaeopolis himself used a similar trick on the Acharnian Chorus. When he arrived at the house of Euripides pondering what the best plan would be to persuade them, he confided in Euripides and the audience of his plan to deceive the Chorus by wearing a pitiable disguise:

Dicaeopolis: What do you bring then?
Megarian: Little sows, like those they immolate at the Mysteries.
Dicaeopolis: Ah! very well, show me them.
Megarian: They are very fine; feel their weight. See! how fat and fine.
Dicaeopolis: But what is this?
Megarian: A sow, for a certainty.
Dicaeopolis: You say a sow! Of what country, then?
Megarian: From Megara. What! is it not a sow then?
Dicaeopolis: No, I don't believe it is.\textsuperscript{36}

The humour in the scene is further underlined by the obscene play on the word, ‘Sow’ defined as an adult female swine in the dictionary. The interaction between Dicaeopolis and the Megarian in this scene relies on the incongruity of the word and the prior awareness of the set-up by the Megarian, as he had already planned with his two young girls. The inherent humour being communicated in

\textsuperscript{35} Aristophanes, \textit{The Acharnians}, Translator uncredited. (UK: Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, 2002).

\textsuperscript{36} Aristophanes, \textit{The Acharnians}, 2002.
this scene is the reader’s awareness of the implied meaning of the word and the situation as it unfolds.

However, what some might consider as a deceptive characteristic of Aristophanes’ comic activities, i.e. making use of low and bodily humour with sexual overtones, could rather be considered as an inventive and highly productive feature of the period, especially in terms of the way it challenges the audience with intellectual references. It must also be pointed out that Aristophanes’ usage of the dual elements of bodily humour and sexual overtones offered the opportunity to convey the old rites of fertility inferences in a dramatized form of mimetic representation modes in relation to nature. Most importantly, it keeps the audience absorbed in the activity. Also, Aristophanes imbibes the old traditions and ritual-laden aesthetics into the performance in an attempt to rejuvenate old traditions and rites that were in process of disappearing. Dramatizing these rites becomes a narrative strategy through which they can be consolidated within the society.

Dicaeopolis takes Athens as a depository of life’s experiences, from which he takes stories that are infused into the play, especially on issues that affects the life and wellbeing of his compatriots. The conviviality and jocular state of mind of the characters must therefore be understood from the psycho-social perspective. Aristophanes makes use of the argument of some of the characters in The Acharnians, especially Dicaeopolis’s, to make a commentary on issues of leadership and the legal system, while also providing ample opportunity to comment on the intellectuals and state officials of the time. In the play, different aspects of Athenian life are presented on the stage to show how opinions are formed, and collective actions are instigated. A typical example is when the chorus enters and declares its intention to attack the man who would betray his city and strike a separate treaty:

Chorus: Come, let us seek the rascal; let us look everywhere, carrying our stones in our hands; let us hunt him from place to place until we trap him; I could never, never tire of the delight of stoning him.

Dicaeopolis: Peace! profane men!
Chorus: Silence all! Friends, do you hear the sacred formula? Here is he, whom we seek! This way, all! Get out of his way, surely, he comes to offer an oblation.

[Dicaeopolis tenders his arguments].

Chorus: It is he, he himself. Stone him, stone him, stone him, strike the wretch. All, all of you, pelt him, pelt him!

Dicaeopolis: What is this? By Heracles, you will smash my pot.
Chorus: It is you that we are stoning, you miserable scoundrel.
Dicaeopolis: And for what sin, Acharnian Elders, tell me that!

Chorus: You ask that, you impudent rascal, traitor to your country; you alone amongst us all have concluded a truce, and you dare to look us in the face!

Dicaeopolis: But you do not know WHY I have treated for peace. Listen! Chorus: Listen to you? No, no, you are about to die, we will annihilate you with our stones.
Dicaeopolis: But first of all, listen. Stop, my friends.37

This scene of the altercations between the chorus and Dicaeopolis as he is being threatened, the subsequent action of the splitting of the chorus into two groups, and the eventual resolution exemplifies the constant battle between old winter and new summer. The act of stoning or the intention to stone, undertaken by the chorus, can be considered as the initial aspect of the agon, i.e. the conflict or contest that must be worked through for resolution. Dicaeopolis is treated here as symbolic of Old Winter that must be evinced so life of a New Summer can prevail. For this, the chorus is divided into two halves, one side pro to Dicaeopolis, and the other side contra to Dicaeopolis. Incidentally, in the process of convincing the chorus, Dicaeopolis infused his speech with lots of humour to inculcate the vital spirit. Eventually, he converts one half of the chorus with his plea for peace.

The scene also serves as an example of the comic essence of communal connectivity by illustrating the intervention that engenders the sanctity and conviviality of life, rejuvenation, progress, and communal interaction, all elements of comedy. It also symbolizes the concept of the comic spirit as an enabler of the vital spirit for the creative force. Further analysis of the comic strategies in the

The aforementioned scene between Dicaeopolis and the chorus is instructive. The reason for the quarrel at the beginning of the play is significant. Not only does it prepare the ground for the action that will follow, ending with the final resolve, but it also points at the general structure of old comedy, in which the plot is composed of series of events, pieced together with the main objective, which is to highlight the debate through which the quarrel will be resolved. This aspect of *The Acharnians* is an important similarity between it and the case studies focused on in this thesis.

There are also many instances of both physical and verbal comedy that depend heavily on humour in another of Aristophanes' plays, *The Clouds* (423 BC). This is more apparent in scenes such as when the astronomy students expose their buttocks and also the way Socrates enters the arena, most notably the inherent humour in the language of the character “Worst Argument” and his manner of always attempting to speak in a pompous but very licentious manner. Aristophanes explored the possibilities of comedy by exaggerating features of Socrates that are presented in the comic space. The multiplying effect is the opportunity to address important social issues within the Greek society.

One of the important aspects of personal humour is the fact that it offers a convenient escape. In the instance of the community it offers a scapegoat, through which the tensions and imbalances occurring within the community can be distilled and purged. Elesin, as the custodian of the people’s tradition in whom the progress of the community has been entrusted serves this purpose with brazen humour in Soyinka’s *Death and the King’s Horseman*. The Greek word for the one who is the target of the personal humour is *Komodoumens*. The astronomy students and Socrates' characters in *The Clouds* are *Komodoumens*. An example of a similar instance can be found in *The Golden Bough* by James George Frazer in terms of the dramatization of an agon, from which the comic hero emerges as an exemplification of the affirmation of life. Frazer's work

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39 Agon (Classical Greek ἀγών) is an ancient Greek term for a conflict, struggle, or contest. The contest could be athletics by nature, or in the context of chariot or horse racing. In artistic terms, the context could be in the form of music or literature at a public festival in ancient Greece.
stands as an important repository of examples and manifestations of lost rites, although it must be stated that this thesis does not subscribe to some of his conclusions.40

Nonetheless, his work is valued especially in terms of the different manifestations of religious thoughts and beliefs. More importantly, rather than evoke his conclusions, it is fruitful to see how the examples he uses in one way, or another provide some understanding of the structure of the origins of comedy and the constitution of the comic spirit. Frazer also gives the account of the central “Esquimaux” of North America that is worth mentioning here, even if briefly.41 By the end of autumn two groups are formed, each one representing winter and summer. Each group holds the extreme of a rope, each group trying to take the other one to its side. If those representing summer win the game, good weather is to be expected through winter.

In the same vein, an old ceremony carried out in the region of Silesia had a strong dramatic component, not so dissimilar from the type being practised by the “Esquimaux” people, in terms of their belief about its potency. The participants accompany the rituals with songs such as, “We have carried Death out/We are bringing the dear Summer Back/The Summer and the May/And all the flowers gay”.42 It was common that both winter and summer were impersonated by different groups and personal insults directed toward those representing winter.

The aforementioned scene between the Dicaeopolis and the Chorus, and the eventual splitting of the Chorus into two groups is significant in this regard. The seemingly combative interaction, vital to the comic essence of the play is

40 There are myriad of reasons why questions arose about Frazer’s work. First, there are issues concerning his methodology for gathering the information for his book. Some of these consisted of combining works that were gathered through non-scientific methods, and also the issue of relying on third-person accounts of cultural practices. Frazer did not claim to have spoken directly to people of the cultures about which he wrote, but instead he relied on other researchers’ findings and on questionnaires that he gave to people who travelled to other lands. Because his findings were not based on observations from anthropologists trained to understand what they were seeing, scientific interest in his writing declined. One of the most damaging aspect of Frazer’s work is that his work may be seen or considered from the distorted view of imperialist perspective.


42 Frazer, 288.
further illustrated towards the end where the agonist and antagonist meet different fates. The statement by Lamachus: “Ouch! Ah! Ouch! The horrible ice of my pains is worse than hell. The enemy’s lance has lanced me to the ground”! when juxtaposed with Dicaeopolis exclamation: “Give me a kiss, my golden lassies: this one smack on the kissser, the other lolling her tongue in my mouth, because of the drinking bout I won.”

In a comic sense, the contrasting images of both interactions are expository instances comprising both physical and verbal humour. Both scenes ensure a standard but important structure of comedy, in which the plot is composed of sometimes intricately connected contrasting actions pieced together for effect.

It is pertinent that the ritualistic roots of comic drama has been acknowledged, especially with the idea of comedy as the song of Komos. The research carried out by both Burkhert and Frazer shows how people were driven towards the enactment of ceremonies that represented instinctive forces of survival and dealt directly with the perceived powers of nature. These studies have shown how comic drama sought to re-enact the essential structure of ancient sacrificial rites of fertility, and the close contact with nature, which they tried to understand and whose forces they try to control in some way. The elemental force of those rituals was the inherent movement of nature and the seasons with which they tried to interact. Furthermore, if one agrees that ancient drama, especially in its comic form, has developed from a necessity to keep those primordial rites alive and to incorporate them into a more rigid structure, it goes with it that comic drama expresses the force of life.

Finally, having spent a considerable amount of time on the nature of the emergence of comedy, it would be a remiss not to mention, even if briefly, the importance of the joke in this development, especially in terms of the subversive and radical nature of comedy. Bevis wondered whether this might have been an exaggerated claim over time; suggesting that: “Comedy is about more than jokes, and it needn't always arouse laughter.”

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capable of being identified with an inner human impetus. The joke element presents opportunities for resistance against the orders of an established authority and can enable subversive performances. Through shared communal codes and linguistic signifiers, concepts of identity at national, community and individual levels can be created or debunked. This corroborates Bevis’s assertion that “several forms of thought and expression that are not necessarily jokey or laugh-out-loud funny vocabularies of ‘folly’, for instance, or ‘fertility’, or ‘the absurd’ - seem to move within the orbit of comedy”.45

In the Poetics, Aristotle discusses the capacity of the comic to alleviate social tensions and to incorporate, through the inversion it allows, for a certain sense of belonging. He suggests that the main characteristic of the comic is to focus on one person and make public the ridiculous small flaws, satirising small vices of the character of the person.46 This not only reaffirms the temporary character of the comic, since Aristotle will defend that harmful flaws should not be chosen, but it also hints at suggesting the sense of openness of speech that is allowed from the dissolution of boundaries, granting freedom to spectators and participants to some extent. This is illustrated in the consideration of the concept of Parrhesia.47

In the 20th century, the French philosopher Michel Foucault attempted to tackle the Greek notion of parrhesia, focusing on its political consequences as a controlling mechanism.48 Although from a completely different register, Foucault’s research defines the concept in terms of instances when codes are subdued, and free speech is allowed. This idea finds its greatest manifestation in comedy. Parrhesia, therefore, can be considered as an important feature in comedy, especially in terms of allowing characters to speak, reinforcing the comic

45 Bevis, Comedy, 5.
46 Aristotle, Poetics, Translated by Malcolm Heath, (USA: Focus Publishing, 2006), Section 1449a, 32-37.
47 The term parrhesia is borrowed from the Greek παρρησία parrhēsia (πᾶν "all" and ῥῆσις "utterance, speech") meaning literally "to speak everything" and by extension "to speak freely", "to speak boldly", or "boldness". The term first appears in Greek literature, when it was used by Euripides, and may also be found in ancient Greek texts towards the end of the fourth century and during the fifth century B.C. It implies not only freedom of speech, but the obligation to speak the truth for the common good, even at personal risk. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Parrhesia. (Accessed: 22/11/2019).
inversion and the dissolution of usual boundaries. It also establishes an environment open to the dialogue, being at the roots of a main trait of Greek comedy.

**Conclusion**

The exploration of the etymological and cultural origins of the word comedy in this chapter has ascertain that comedy is born of both religious activity and social activity. This has been confirmed in terms of its connection to ancient rites of fertility and god worshipping, and the struggles between ancient Greece’s changing countryside and the relation with urban civic life. The examination of the relation to festivals, sacrifice and Phallic songs is important because these are all collective cultural forms of experiences that bring the comic spirit to its centre. The festivals in which the ancient Greeks participated offered an important instrument to the *polis* in order to alleviate social tensions through the dissolution of normal duties and obligations.

Comedy is important in conveying the representation of seasonal changes, agrarian elements, and ritualistic practices, deeply connected to the place of humans within their environments. The comic seems to gravitate between two poles, i.e., the religious and the social. Although it is culturally specific, it also has the ability to carry a universal human force within which is dialectical, for interaction, conflict, and progress. Either way, it is evident that both aspects of religious and social essence are communal. Both allow stimulating communal experiences.

This is clearly exemplified in many of the plays written by Aristophanes, depicting the loss of old ritualistic practices and the new urban socio-cultural configurations exacerbating other values. The country was gradually being emptied, and this, according to Mathew Bevis is consequential as an implication of its emergence as a lost utopia. The longing for the past imagines a cultural space away from the urban city in which social problems bedevilling the society can be worked through. Taken as a temporary world, this green universe, often charged with myths and old beliefs, serves as an experimental place where solutions to problems faced in the urban world can be worked on. The
experimental nature of this world, created by and for the comic, is indeed one of its most remarkable features; the rules and laws of the city are therein no longer valid, and one can freely explore the other world of unconscious desires and needs.

Without effacing difference across societies and histories, human symbolic culture arises from the material conditions of human life. As Segal declares: “Thus, though comedy changes form from one culture and period to the next, there remains a truly universal aspect to the comic process itself.”49 The comic experience has over time been adopted by even seemingly unwavering cultures, mostly by promoting a central core of its force, the comic impulse, which is essentially human, and is thus manifested in different aspects of life’s realities. Certainly, these realities change from one culture to another. For example, in the aspect of this study focussing on ancient Greek comedy, the focus is more on revealing some ancestral and primeval aspects of the comic.

This chapter’s inquiry also considered the historical significance of comedy and its connection to Athenian democracy, where the public opinion of voters was remarkably influenced by the political plays performed by comic poets as seen in the activities of Aristophanes. Likewise, stressing the relation of the agon with mimetic rites of combat between Old Winter and New Summer answers important questions regarding the evolution of the comic spirit as a force of life. That is why it is imperative that one should attempt an exploration of the vitality and creativity concept especially regarding the central idea of comedy as the continuous consideration of what it means to be human. This has been attempted in this chapter first by a theoretical approach focused on ancient festivals and elements of sacrifice, and then on a commentary on the text of The Acharnians. As Angus Morton Bowie points out, the centrality of the agon in the comic production of Aristophanes and in Old Comedy in general makes it clear that the course of action should be considered from the perspectives of a

dynamic force between spectators and characters; the former must evaluate arguments and counterarguments incessantly, until the end is uncovered.50

_The Acharnians_’ usage of humour as a device for dynamic force is instructive and this, amongst many other elements, is one of the similarities between it and the other case studies. _The Acharnians_ is undoubtedly imbued with religious and ritualistic elements, some of which Aristophanes take advantage of. There are also lots of intentional use of dramatic strategies like exaggeration, inversion, and comic play on words, which basically suggests a carnivalesque crux of the play. The affirmation of the comic spirit as imbued with a creative force that helps to organize the vital impulse is another important aspect of the relevance of _The Acharnians_ and its continuities with the new intercultural theory that this thesis espouses.

This becomes even more pertinent with a consideration of the concept of the intercultural that draws on the comic spirit and theories of laughter, humour, and the indicative social implications of the cross-cultural interactions of the ‘insider’ and the ‘outsider’. This is another important similarity that _The Acharnians_ shares with the case studies. The comic spirit in this instance is to be understood as equipped to impact social interactions between different groups of people from different social or cultural backgrounds. Aristophanes’ _The Acharnians_ encourages connection, but it also engenders divergence and dichotomies, in the same manner in which the case studies engage with the intercultural elements within the social and cultural context of their respective societies.

Another relevance of _The Acharnians_ to contemporary society is in terms of it being a powerful indictment of unnecessary war today as it was relevant over two thousand years ago, when it was first produced. _The Acharnians_ not only offers an interesting entry into understanding comedy from its roots in fertility ritual and collective god worshipping, but it also, by its use of agon and chorus,

hints at a possible evolution of the genre into the political sphere, and this will be discussed in greater detail in the case studies of this dissertation.

The next chapter continues to build on the theoretical pedestal on which this thesis will discuss its arguments. The chapter explores the scope of the comedy genre through different theories of the comic impulse as it derives from the instinct for harmony and rhythm characteristic of human consciousness. This is explored through the vitalism concept and its connection to the comic impulse as an indication of “a humour strategy” for individual/communal appraisal. It also explores the structure and intention of humour in terms of the nuances and the resulting effect on the target. The chapter will focus on the work of theorists like Henri Bergson and Susan Langer in this regard, especially in terms of how laughter has a corrective purpose, which is to steer the comic character back into conformity with his society when logic and conventions have been abandoned. The analysis will then lead to an examination of the work of Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin and Rose Laub Coser in order to further investigate the implications for laughter, especially in terms of its social functions. The concept of Identity / social Identity in relation to social structures and individual behaviours will be examined with focus on how “jocular” gripes help to determine “in-group” and “out-group” positions.
Chapter Two

Comedic Concepts: Instinct, Intelligence, and Élan vital from Bergson to Bakhtin

Henri Bergson and Suzanne Langer

There are many definitions of humour or indicators by which humour may be recognized in a text, in performances, and in everyday life that have been dealt with by scholars in the past. Some of these include submissions by Rod Martin et al., describing humour as a broad term that refers to anything that people say or do that is perceived as funny, and geared towards making others laugh.¹ The suggestion is that perceiving humour involves the mental processes both in creating and perceiving such stimulus, and the affective response involved in its enjoyment.

I will suggest that humour can be connected with relief felt at the momentary lifting of one of the many restrictions which the physical and social environment imposes upon the human, though I will be the first to accept that my definition may not necessarily cover the intricacies of the other important markers of being human. Seeming to agree with my suggestion above, albeit from a different angle, is Willibald Ruch, even going further to explore the various types of humorous content that people are inclined towards.² Michael Billig also traces the connotation of the term “humour” suggesting that the term derives from the humoral medicine of the ancient Greeks, which designate the balance of fluids in the human body known as humours: “In the 18th century the “humours” were the bodily fluids which were thought to provide people with their individual temperament.”³

Other theorists consider humour as an important instrument in anthropological, sociological, and cultural research. Arthur Power Dudden argues that to the anthropologist, humour is: “a culturally shaped individual cognitive experience; culturally determined because the sociological factors are the primary mechanisms leading to its occurrence.”

It is important to emphasize that like my submission above, some of the proponents of these theories ultimately lament the inadequacies of these and other various definitions of humour that have been proposed. Towards this end, some scholars — for example Salvatore Attardo — have doubted whether an all-embracing definition of humour could be formulated.

Nonetheless, Martin’s humour definition provides an interesting guidance, especially his suggestion that: “From a psychological perspective, the humour process can be divided into four essential components viz, the social context, the cognitive-perceptual process, the emotional response, and the vocal-behavioural expression of laughter.”

This is mainly because humour is a natural element of most human cultures, especially as a tool through which contextual discourses can be construed and upheld. Michael Pickering and Sharon Lockyer suggest that because of its significance in terms of human interaction, it is unthinkable to ignore humour, especially in terms of its pervasiveness and the deep entrenchment in sociocultural interactions. In their co-authored article, The Ethics and Aesthetics of Humour, they highlight the fact that “Humour infiltrates every area of social life and interaction, even rearing its head in situations where it is not normally regarded as appropriate.”

Having revisited some of these humour definitions above, it is important to explore the corporeality of humour, especially in terms of the effect it produces on the body and mind. This undoubtedly encompasses an understanding of the basic structure and intention of humour in terms of meaning and connotation, and

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the consequential effect on the target. Further, this chapter focusses on the vitalism concept and its connection to the comic impulse, especially its implications as a strategy for individual/communal appraisal.

Vitalistic humour can be defined as the vital impulse that emphasizes an alternative way of seeing the world through the affirmation of the comic spirit. It entails a deep awareness of the confrontation and continued contestations between the human and the mechanical or the living and the material. To further explore the vitalistic humour concept, the academic oeuvre of Henri Bergson and Suzanne Langer will be of immense assistance here. Bergson posits that the human intellect has developed in the course of evolution as an instrument of survival. Langer’s philosophy considers human life as a continuous process of meaning-making through symbolic forms.

In Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic (1900), Bergson argues that humour is a social tool through which society’s iniquities are exposed in order to engender a positive change. With comedy, humanity slightly scolds itself for being ineffectually adaptive. Bergson’s phrase “the mechanical encrusted upon the living” considers the soul as having the ability to stimulate matter, but instead of the human mind becoming ebullient, it instead dulls the body into mere automatism. This, according to Bergson, is because matter has the characteristics of a machine. Bergson’s Laughter begins with the germane question: What does laughter mean? It then continues with a series of questions regarding the effect of the funny on the human body, as exemplified in the vitalistic theory. The theory suggests that one of the main differences between organic and inorganic elements of living is the idea that the latter does not contain the “vital force” of life. This is the basis for the emergence of the vitalism theory.

In the nineteenth century, biology and physiology were the subject of controversy between two schools of thought, the ritualistic and the mechanistic. The ritualistic school of thought suggested that the nature of life is a consequence of a vital force peculiar to living organisms and different from all other forces found

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outside living things. The mechanists believed that these processes were controlled by the laws of physics and chemistry. However, according to American writer, historian, and philosopher Will Durant, Bergson refutes both these theories, instead favouring the vitalistic evolutionary theory, which affirms that the evolution of the universe is due to the driving force of the *élian vital*. William Sahakian also asserts that Bergson posits this force as a vital impulse to be considered as life or consciousness and grasped only by man’s intuition. Where the intellect can apprehend only static truths, the intuition can understand the life process itself.⁹

**Vitalism: Instinct, Intelligence, and *Élan vital***

Vitalism emerged as an alternative to mechanist theories such as those put forth by Renée Descartes (1596–1650). In his *Treatise on Man* (1648), Descartes discusses the functioning of the human body as being remarkably close to that of a machine. His book begins with a detailed description of the definition of the human body, explicit in its mechanical arrangement of the internal organs. Descartes uses mechanic metaphors in order to communicate his view of the organization of the human body, comparing its functioning to artefacts such as clocks and fountains. This paradigm was later examined and addressed by Bergson in the long criticism directed at mechanist theory in his theory of life evolution.¹⁰ The crux of Bergson’s reasoning is that the history of the evolution of living forms is a history of their capacity to adequately survive in new environments.

In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson highlights the importance of having a full or an in-depth understanding of life before proffering any valuable consideration or possibilities of it. Bergson’s idea rests on two poles, ‘intelligence, and instinct’. He suggests that: “There is no intelligence in which some traces of instinct are not to be discovered, more especially no instinct that is not surrounded with a fringe of intelligence.”¹¹ Intelligence and instinct, according to Bergson, are not to

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¹¹ Bergson, *Creative*, 150.
be taken one for one another, but instead must be considered as “opposite and complimentary,” especially because of their particular characteristics and features exclusive of each other. Bergson claims this can be witnessed in the animal kingdom, where “the most perfect instinct of the insect is accompanied by gleams of intelligence, if only in the choice of place, time and materials of construction.” The awareness of life and instinct is what helps organisms to adapt to the environment. This life-affirming argument by Bergson is encapsulated further in the following sentence: “Now the life manifested by an organism is, in our view, a certain effort to obtain certain things from the material world.” Two central ideas are implicit in the passage. First, it points at a dynamic force between life and matter, between the organic and the inorganic. Secondly, it places the idea of effort at the centre of the evolution. This latter is important in terms of the subversive nature of comedy.

Consequently, any attempt to tackle life as a vital object of analysis should be centred on the instinctive force of the \( \text{élan vital} \), apprehending time, past and present as a force moving towards the future and making it intrinsic to life. Bergson’s argument on comedy is analogous to his concept of small and occasional explosions corresponding to acts of creation. Hisashi Fujita argues that Bergson describes the idea of instinct as like bursts of explosion that represent the movement through which life is pushed forward by the \( \text{élan vital} \) referred to as “the effort […] the spontaneity of life that is manifested in the evolution of the organic world by a continual creation of forms that succeed other forms.”

Therefore, it can be suggested that the creative burst discussed by Bergson is the \( \text{élan vital} \), working through the body, unconsciously, and needing

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12 Bergson, 149.
13 Bergson, 157.
14 Bergson, 151.
15 The statement may be considered as an important question mark for the mechanist theorists, who according to Bergson have failed to offer a satisfying explanation of the world of living forms, but instead, have the propensity to attempt to relegate life to a secondary, if not inferior, position within any given system.
the explosion in order to expand from itself, then becoming an agent of free choices with the capacity for the vitality of life. William Barnard formulates this pointedly: “In our freedom, as embodiments of durée, as expressions of the élan vital, to become more porous and responsive to the promptings of our depths.”\(^{17}\)

Barnard further suggests that through the successive creative explosions, life can become increasingly aware of “knots of unconscious beliefs” and gradually move further into the plenitude of consciousness.\(^{18}\) The most essential aspects of life, the vitality of it, are thus grasped only by the unconscious force of the instinct. It is advanced by a fire that explodes itself continuously, an unstoppable flux that is the movement through which life evolves.

A paradigm of humour, according to the Bergson’s theory, is to be deduced from the activity, or rather the inactivity, of the absent-minded person. What is deemed funny can be linked to the disconnect between the logic of a person’s behaviour and the manner of the behaving, including the way the action is communicated socially. Bergson outlines the various ways that humour may be precipitated. The first one pertains to a situation when something mechanical takes the place of the “natural”. This could be in terms of a costume, social conventions, or rituals. If these things are observed separately from their normal occurrences, this would be deemed comical. The second situation is when a costume is deemed comical because we judge it separate from the person wearing it. The costume is something unnatural covering something natural, the body. Something natural, i.e. the body is also covering something natural, the soul of the person.

The third one involves an action or situation that demands our interpretation of the unfolding event. When the physical appearance or bodily reactions of a person are not in harmony with what we may have determined should be the “normal” in terms of utterances or gestures of that person, we tend to consider this as the “abnormal” and this typical of what Bergson describes as “something mechanical encrusted on the living”\(^{19}\) This ultimately then becomes


\(^{19}\) Bergson, *Laughter*, 14a.
comical to us because we are seeing this physical appearance or bodily reactions separate from the totality of its existence. According to Bergson: “Any incident is comic that calls our attention to the physical in a person, when it is the moral side that is concerned.”

For example, if in observing a ceremony, we find such comedy, it is probably because we are only concerned or concentrating our attention on the conventional automatisms involved and disregarding the significance or important reason behind the ceremony.

Bergson's main theory of the laughable as "something mechanical encrusted on the living" is integral to his idea that: “The attitudes, gestures, and movements of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine.”

Louise Mathewson’s examination of the social significance of laughter is grounded on Bergson's investigation into laughter as a "living thing" because “Every mode of life in its proper nature is ever-moving, never repeating, and whenever we find anything mechanical in human actions or words, we recognize it as non-adaptive and a fit subject of ridicule.”

Bergson's discussion of the nature of laughter, especially in terms of its connection to his theory regarding intelligence and instinct, is the focus of the following section of this chapter. According to Bergson, laughter will appear as a response to the moments in which the vital flux of life is interrupted, being thus a mechanic subversion introduced into the very own vitality of life.

**Laughter as an Expression of the Comic**

Bergson emphasized that laughter should be understood as being strictly human. Laughter, taken as an expression of the comic, only makes sense in human contexts, as it is always a response to something that is human. On the idea that it is possible to laugh at an object, a car for example, Bergson suggests that it is not the lifeless object that is being laughed at. The laughter is probably in relation

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21 Bergson, 29.
to the human connected to the car, or it can be made comic only if it has a human shape, or human attributes: "the human caprice whose mould it has assumed."\textsuperscript{23}

According to Bergson, laughter enables a human being to their humanity. It also has a corrective purpose, which is to steer the comic character back into conformity with his society whose logic and conventions is abandoned when "he slackens in the attention that is due to life."\textsuperscript{24} To Bergson, laughter should be considered as a form of social corrective that may be used to nudge an eccentric person back to conformity. Laughter, Bergson suggests, can be used as a tool of isolation. If somebody is out of line, that person is firstly deemed an ‘outsider’, then laughter is used to nudge the outsider to voluntarily re-join the group.

Bergson’s postulations on laughter are to be understood as related to his discussion regarding intelligence versus instinct. Therefore, it might be proper to follow this discussion with examples from Molière’s \textit{Tartuffe} (1664), especially because of the way that Bergson makes references to the play more than once, referring to it as an important deposit of evidence on the comic effect.\textsuperscript{25} One of the objectives for using Molière’s play here is to illuminate Bergson's thoughts regarding its relation to the comic spirit, and also because the play has many instances of the dynamics and ambiguities related to the comic spirit. This is evident in the way that Molière places the main character, Orgon, between the two forces that constitutes the conflict: the religious devotion and the libertine attitude. The comic effect is created by Molière’s presentation of Orgon as trapped within the automation of his actions and inactions.

The fact that Bergson relies on Molière’s \textit{Tartuffe} to illustrate his idea shows the kind of connection he wants to make between laughter and the comic, especially from the aspect of the play’s departure from what some might consider as conventions of comedy.\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Tartuffe} follows an intricate plan in which the main character is depicted as despicable, but the play also demands our consideration of it being a comedy exploring the mechanical in human movements. Admittedly,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{23} Bergson, \textit{Laughter}, 4a.
\item \textsuperscript{24} Bergson, 60a.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Bergson, \textit{Laughter}, 45a.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Andrew Calder, \textit{Molière: Theory and Practice of Comedy} (London: The Athlone Press, 1993), 153.
\end{itemize}
many scholars have suggested that *Tartuffe* is not a comic play, especially on the same level as other comedies by Molière. Interestingly, some of the case studies treated in this dissertation have also been considered as tragedies by some critics in the past. However, this thesis has explored these works in order to reveal their comic characteristics and the embedded humour connotations in their themes.

According to Bergson, *Tartuffe’s* actions may not initially convey an image of a comic character; it is only by observing his gestures that the comic element appears. Bergson suggests that by our awareness of the characteristics, Tartuffe: “Enters so thoroughly into the role of a hypocrite that he plays it almost sincerely.” This suggests that the comic manifests itself by playing out its action so well to the point of automatizing its functions. In order to make Orgon the main character an odious but comic character, Molière chose an element of his temperament and isolates it in such a way that it becomes a force of its own, especially by tapping into the character’s confusion that is born out of the conflict between the inert matter and the spirit.

Bergson also suggests that any consideration of the comic must always include the ‘absentmindedness’ factor as an important characteristic of the comic, and further clarifies that: “Absentmindedness, indeed, is not perhaps the actual fountain-head of the comic, but surely it is contiguous to a certain stream of facts and fancies which flows straight from the fountain-head. It is situated, so to say, on one of the great natural watersheds of laughter.” The factors of instinct and intelligence are two divergent forces that are also important to take note of, as understanding one leads to the understanding of the other. Bergson posits that: “A comic character is generally comic in proportion to his ignorance of himself. The comic person is unconscious. As though wearing the ring of Gyges with reverse effect, he becomes invisible to himself while remaining visible to all the world.”

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27 Bergson, 45a.
28 Bergson, *Creative*, 159.
29 Bergson, 8a.
More importantly, one should be aware that the comic is also achieved when the attention is not directed towards the actions but rather towards the gestures. As mentioned earlier, laughter is, according to Bergson, a social correction. This means that laughter should be considered as a gesture that is meant to correct the human from distraction from life itself. This is probably the reason why Bergson suggests that one of the central elements of the comic is: “the attitudes, gestures and movements and moves of the human body are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine.”

Gestures must be understood as attempt to comprehend the unknown, especially in terms of discerning what prevail outside the predetermined order of things. A gesture ends up in a certain form of automatism that is brought up into the action.

Since it has already been established earlier in this thesis that the comic element is strictly human, it is imperative to note the necessary conditions for the existence of the comic. Take the case of the “Dancing Jack”, a kind of character that Bergson uses to expatiate on the topic: “There are innumerable comedies in which one of the characters thinks he is speaking and acting freely, and, consequently, retains all the essentials of life, whereas, viewed from a certain standpoint, he appears as a mere toy in the hands of another who is playing with him.” Bergson asserts that laughter is instigated when we identify with the situation that is supposed to evoke the laugh. According to Bergson, in order to understand the “why” of humour, one must determine the social function of laughter. This will be focussed on more broadly later on in the thesis.

**Suzanne Langer on Laughter and its Defamiliarizing Function**

Further comprehension of the vitalistic humour requires moving on, at least for now, from the perspective of Bergsonian theory to the Langerian, with a probable convergence on ideas relating to comedy and laughter. Susanne Langer’s approach to comedy is centred on the idea of comic rhythm, and like Bergson’s it is also centred on the tenets of the vitalistic theory, that considers the vital impulse as an alternative way of seeing the world through the affirmation of the

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31 Bergson, 25b.
comic spirit. Like Bergson’s postulations on the human intellect as connected to survival through evolution, Langer’s consideration for the continuity of human life is also symbolic for survival. Langer argues that laughter has a defamiliarizing function. She further suggests that many comic techniques of drama must break the illusion in order to evoke laughter.\textsuperscript{32} The comic is likened to a break from theatrical illusion, and this forces the audience to search for the meaning inherent in the action. The comic thus serves a purpose in the interpretation.

Langer argues that “the pure sense of life is the underlying feeling of comedy, developed in countless different ways.”\textsuperscript{33} The life force concept, parallel to the comic spirit idea, therefore finds relevance in Langer’s concept of “Comic Rhythm” and her suggestion of comedy as an art form: “that arises naturally wherever people are gathered to celebrate life, in spring festivals, triumphs, birthdays, weddings or initiations.”\textsuperscript{34} To Langer, comic action is to be considered ultimately as an impulse or “rhythm”. This sense of comic rhythm and the vital spirit and creative force that pervades it is protective, encouraging and growth-stimulating, and perhaps best describes the creative energy/strategy of the comic.

Langer conceptualizes the comic spirit as the force that preserves the impulse to life in an inanimate universe, a position with similarities to Bergson. Interestingly, despite the perceived affirmation of Bergson’s failing by Langer, there seems to be a strong sense of non-oppositional but relatable affinity of their theoretical texts and traditions. In \textit{Feeling and Form}, Langer explored the subject of comedy through an awareness of the comic rhythm, which she argues symbolizes vitality. Both Bergson and Langer’s brands of vitalistic humour theory arrive at an ultimate unity of purpose, without denying the energy of the expression of vitality as manifold demonstration of instincts over intellect.

While the Bergsonian concept categorically counteracts any sort of impediment to life, abnegating the importance of inorganic, mechanical, and

\textsuperscript{32} Susan Langer, \textit{Feeling and Form} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), 81.
\textsuperscript{33} Langer, \textit{Feeling}, 327.
\textsuperscript{34} Susan Langer, \textit{Feeling and Form} (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1953), 331.
decaying contaminants of life and well-being, Langer’s life-affirming notions proclaim a harmony of survival certitude based on the capacity for endurance and the impulse for self-preservation and personal growth. In *Feeling and Form*, Langer suggests that: “Formal analogy, or congruence of logical structures, is the prime requisite for the relation between a symbol and whatever it is to mean. The symbol and the object symbolized must have some common logical form.” Langer’s symbolic form theory, which suggests that as humans we laugh in response to life, is congruent with Bergson’s vitalistic theory. A person first perceives a non-ordinary thing, e.g. a painting, a gadget, an unfolding scenario with an intuition, and this according to Langer is because: “Intuition is the basic process of all understanding, just as operative in discursive thought as in clear sense perception and immediate judgment.”

Langer suggests that intelligence contains the knowledge of a form, as opposed to the knowledge of matter implied in the instinct. It then follows that the kind of knowledge concerning life that is produced by the instinct will focus on the defining situations, whereas the knowledge of the intellect, by its very own nature, cannot adhere to things in the same way and therefore expresses itself hypothetically. Charles Wolfe and Andy Wong suggest that this indicates that the intellect cannot get to the vitality of things nor to their vital movement; its function is solely to establish relations, which it does always from without and never from within.

Thus, the comic action is, according to Langer, supposed to reflect the basic biological pattern of life, or life rhythm which, when disrupted, tries to restore itself and the natural balance of existence. Two examples have been offered by Langer to reinforce this life-affirming characteristic of her theory. The first is that of the fish that diligently grows in the shade, i.e. despite the lack of sunshine to provide it with adequate photosynthetic energy required from the sun.

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35 Langer, *Feeling*, 27.
36 Langer, 29.
The second example by Langer is that of the fish that assumes new functions for its other fin after part of its tail has been bitten off.

Both examples above represent the adaptability element of biological life. Langer further elucidates that: “An organism tends to keep its equilibrium amid the bombardment of aimless forces that beset it, to regain equilibrium when it has been disturbed, and to pursue a sequence of actions dictated by the need of keeping all its interdependent parts constantly renewed, their structure intact.”

The above examples also accentuate two important characteristics of accommodation and growth that are the basic principles of the *élan vital* as creative energy. Langer advances the view that humour is the major determinant of the structure of comedy and is essential to any analysis of it. As a substratum of comedy, humour is the vital impulse that encourages the life force to continually develop and generate new forms. When a living thing is affected by difficulties in its life, it tries to avoid or overcome its circumstances by using its life-affirming instinct to stay alive or at least achieve equanimity.

The vitalist humour element in Langer’s theory suggests that we celebrate the intensely alive. This concurs with Bergson’s theory of *élán vital*, even as both denounce the rigidly non-adaptive. Langer argues that laughter arises from: “a surge of vital feeling” and “a wave of felt vitality.” It is our perception of *élan vital* or “vital rhythm” or “livingness” in the characters that causes us to laugh. The comic is according to Langer, a playboy who is “all motion, whim, and impulse – the ‘libido’ itself, he is Life, he is the Will, he is the Brain.” Some of the characters from the case studies treated in this thesis convey a sense of vital spirit because of their penchant to ignore laws and transgress taboos.

Eric Weitz suggests that Susanne Langer’s concept epitomizes the clownlike as an embodiment of the *élán vital*. Weitz suggests that: “this epitomization of irrepressible spirit and alternative problem solving in the face of

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38 Langer, *Feeling*, 328.
40 Langer, 342, 345, 348.
41 Langer, 344.
deflection contributes a countervailing current to the conservative tendencies of mainstream comedy in general.”42 Some of the characters from the case studies in this dissertation also exhibit the idiosyncrasies of the clownlike figure that Weitz talks about. These includes characters like Styles, Sizwe and Buntu from Sizwe Bansi Is Dead, Eleen Oba from Death and the King’s Horseman and Christie/Christopher from Synge’s The Playboy of the Western World and the Adigun/Doyle’s version of the same play. These “clownlike” characters are, to use Weitz’s suggestion, able to: “participate in the cultural care and feeding of ideas about success and failure, at the same time imparting shadow advice about a useful spirit in which to approach the frustrations of everyday living.”43

“Mechanical encrusted on the living” in Some of the Case Studies

Bergson’s concept of the “mechanical encrusted on the living” resonates in these characters, and this amplifies the humorous resonance of their actions. What instigates humour in The Playboy of the Western World is a combination of many factors. First, the principal character’s tractable attitude at the beginning of the play coupled with his act and manner of boasting that he had killed his father tampers with one’s sense of indignation, as this act contravenes the cultural code of right and wrong that is natural to human sensibilities. Already there is an underlying sense of outrage, but when this is not expressed by any of the other characters, at least initially, this precipitates our amusement.

However, because of the cultural code of right action versus wrong action, one’s sense of moral turpitude continues to become more engendered because of the incongruity at play. The more the Mayo villagers get enamoured of Christy and his story, the more the comic instinct alarm of the reader sounds, notifying the reader that there is potential for the funny in what is being witnessed. This instinct is urged on by Christy’s or Christopher’s (in the case of the Adigun/Doyle’s version) pompous nature of committing patricide. Thus, there is

43 Weitz, Failure, 80.
a conflict of instinct versus intellect. This is because our ‘intellect’ expects us to be outraged but instead, our instinct makes us feel the opposite.

The comic action therefore is epitomised in the celebration of somebody who is celebrating himself because he killed his own father. Our outrage is the basis for the humour we experience. Therefore, it can be suggested that the essence of comedy is organizing the fledging human spirit into a comic spirit that is transcendentally playful. This is clear if one should use the analogy of the clown given by Weitz: “It is also possible to read the clown’s buoyant attitude toward setback as somehow liberating, shrugging off social expectation to shoulder the weight of the world playfully.” Logically, we derive our sense of the humorous from interacting with this character.

Another factor required for the comic personality of the character is the mechanical inelasticity of mind. When Christy Mahon fled his home thinking that he has killed his father, the comic nature of the character’s personality has not been broadly developed. He arrives at the village humbly, and from a humble personality, he becomes increasingly bold. For the comic trait of this character to be apparent, he must lose the “mechanical” in his trait, attain the absentminded nature, and then the character becomes inelastic. In the universe of The Playboy of the Western World, a person asserts their individuality by extricating themselves from the dogmas of conventional life. The inherent humour reveals to us the courageous individual who refuses to compromise their deeds with obedience to society. Bergson sums up the underlying pattern of such a plot as: “the vision of one stubborn force, counteracted by another, equally pertinacious.” Laughter in this instant, pushes back the darkness, the death, the mechanical, and to that extent, we are more alive because of the constant interaction between our instinct and intellect.

The Incongruity Factor in Humour

The incongruity comic theory thrives on the connection between an incident and the expected reaction and involuntary reaction to that incident. Bergson’s idea of

44 Eric Weitz, Failure, 80.
“Absentmindedness as essentially laughable” and also as an important element of the vitalistic impulse of the comic is discernible in the actions of some of the characters in the case studies. An absentminded person is wildly enthusiastic about his or her course of action. The absentmindedness in the character Christy makes the personality trait, hitherto hidden, to become apparent. The inelasticity of the character produces humour because it denies the two forces: tension and elasticity. When Sizwe Bansi contemplates changing his name to Robert Zwelinzima, the character undergoes Bergson’s ‘mechanical inelasticity of mind’ supposedly because of the threat to his ‘existence’.

The characters are able to adapt to situations that threaten their ability to realize the *élan vital*. The vital impulse is defiant of threats to life and instead finds means of affirmation of life by encouraging adaptability. The comic is manifested in the resilience and vitality of the characters in *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, despite the brutality they have experienced under the racist apartheid policy in South Africa that considers them not equal to their fellow human beings because of the colour of their skin. In *Death and the King’s Horseman*, Elesin is (in the vitalistic impulse sense) a comic. His comic description is not ascribing him to the silly or ridiculous, but he is comic because of the way he exudes the vital impetus, the *élan vital*. Although the play deals with what some may consider a complex cultural imbroglio, the principal character Elesin apparently embodies a flamboyantly celebratory mien, perhaps in order to cope with his situation. To borrow a phrase from Robert Corrigan et al. in *Comedy and Form*, the thematic significance of comedy celebrates man’s “capacity to endure.”

Bergson’s association of the comic with rigidity and absent-mindedness can also be analogized through styles of dress especially in terms of how collective habits may instigate comic situations. The mind must break with fashion in order to comprehend the comedy of the situation unfolding. Bergson suggests that fashionable clothes do not make us laugh, because we are used to seeing them, while we automatically make fun of someone who wears old-

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fashioned clothes. This indicator is considered as a humour signifier in some instances, especially in terms of the neglect of particular cultural identity markers.

In *Death and the King’s Horseman*, this scenario is exemplified in scene 2, when the Pilkings dress themselves in Egungun costume. Bergson suggests that it is often in terms of appearance, and in the acceptance of that appearance, that people are placed within an ethnic context. In this instance, humour is created when our sense of cultural inappropriateness challenges the Pilkings’ displays of cultural affiliation and their action of donning the Egungun costume. There is an element of incongruity and a defamiliarization of context. The Egungun costume on the Pilkings, being out of context, may strike the reader as amusing, especially with the readers’ awareness of the Pilkings’ lack of knowledge of the cultural implication of donning such masks. The comic arises from the incongruence created by the clash of what is appropriate or inappropriate role-playing behaviour of the Pilkings.

An item of clothing produces humour because one may assume the piece of cloth on a particular character is inappropriate at that particular time in that particular situation, therefore it elicits a reaction. Incidentally, this reaction might arise because the person witnessing did not realise how carefully they are attached to what they consider to be appropriate, and how completely they have associated propriety with what is natural. Our reaction to clothing worn by somebody is always going to hinge upon our assumption of the ‘right’ apparel for the occasion. We are so accustomed to the ‘correct’ dress code that the garment seems, in our mind, to form one with the individual wearing it.

The example above involving the Pilkings in scene 2 of *Death and the King’s Horseman* also correlates with Bergson’s postulation that people laugh at exaggerated incongruities when these are perceived within the context of what is

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46 Egungun Masquerade is a visible cultural representation of spirits or ancestors of the Yoruba people from the west of Nigeria. The physical costume representing the presence of the spirits from the other world is a masked figurine with flowing colourful apparel. The costume is made up of many different materials like cloth, beads, and shells. To the Yoruba people, the masquerades embodies ancestral reverence. In the scene described above, Amusa refuses to talk to the Pilkings because husband and wife are attired with the Egungun costume. Because the Egungun is a representation of dead ancestors, Amusa fears the ramifications of talking about the dead to the dead.
familiar, and hence considered to be “normal”. Scenes like these can also be found in *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*. In the opening scene of the play, readers are introduced to the character Styles as he narrates the story of his experiences working in a factory. He begins by describing how hot water, brushes, an electric mop, and “God alone knows what else” appear in preparation for the important inspection of the factory.

He reacts with surprise at the safety warnings that have suddenly appeared and laughs. It is apparent that he is laughing at his anxious bosses, because he knows that they are fervently trying to impress the big American boss. At the same time, his laughter highlights the darker side of his reaction. He knows that the white bosses do not care about the workers’ safety and that the fading words on the factory floor that has just been repainted are nothing more than a colourful decoration. When Mr Ford enters the factory, the “mechanical” is deduced especially in terms of the semiotics of his entry into the factory:

In came a tall man, six foot six, hefty, full of respect and dignity…I marvelled at him! Let me show you what he did. [Three enormous strides] One …two…three…[Cursory look around as he turns and takes the same three strides back.] One…two…three…OUT! Into the Galaxy and Gone! That’s all. Didn’t talk to me, Mr ‘Baas’ Bradley, Line Supervisor, or anybody. He didn’t even look at the plant!47

This is what may provoke laughter for the reader, or for the audience in a performance, although, for the audience, many other factors such as acting, stage presence and technical factors, ultimately contributes to the humour. Also earlier before this scene, when Styles' boss, Bass Bradley, instructs him to translate the newly painted instructions on the floor, he not only sarcastically elaborates on the white boss’s thoughts, but also adds his own comment, in order to pass hidden meaning to his co-black colleagues. The humour of this situation contrasts sharply to the underlying sentiment of injustice, and I think this heightens the reader’s sensitivity to the resistance of the black workers.

Applying Bergson’s philosophy of intuition connotes an ability to understand the intricacies of Style’s role-play in the above-mentioned scene.

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Randal and Buchler attempt an explanation of Bergson’s concept of intuition with this paraphrase: “Bergson says that what he calls intuition is nothing mysterious but a faculty which we all at some time have exercised, as when we have grasped, in an illuminating moment, the meaning of a poem or the essence of a character in a novel character in a novel.” As the reader follows the character of Styles in the opening scene, the impulse one gets is in form of a threat to our logic, because the character acts in a manner that may seem illogical to one’s rationality. This ‘threat’ therefore is the reason why our consciousness may consider Style’s actions as being funny. The character’s actions help to trigger our response, and we categorise it as humour, which ultimately produces a laughing effect on us.

Another example is when Styles fights the cockroaches, especially when he talks to them as if they are humans. This threat of ‘acting out’ confronts society, and because society cannot counter with material repression, the character engenders in us both humour and social reflection. Styles’ inelasticity at this point encourages the humorous because of his reliance on our obliging participation in the unfolding drama. Our culpability as readers or audience is apparent by our being amused.

As stated earlier, the comic theory of incongruity thrives on the relationship between an incident and the expected response and instinctive reaction to it. The ambiguity in expectation and result, which is the hallmark of incongruity theory, is what causes the humorous feeling that the reader or audience might experience. In the encounter between Flaherty and Christy in Synge’s The Playboy of the Western World, when the former asks whether Christy has committed larceny, his reply is an example of how incongruous a reaction to an action, or a retort to a pronouncement or situation have the tendency to instigate humour. Christy’s reply to Flaherty in defence of the integrity of his father’s riches is incongruous to the erstwhile condemnation of his father’s brutality towards him.

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Also, in Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World*, the soundscape evoked by Shawn’s description of the noises from the surrounding landscape in Act 1 has the hallmark of incongruity, and this instigates humour. This is clear in his description of: “cows breathing and sighing in the stillness of the air” juxtaposed with moments later when he describes hearing a fellow: “groaning wicked like a maddening dog.” The incongruity of the personification of the cows, and the bestial description of Christy’s groan, is inclined towards humour.

When Pegeen ask Shawn what he has seen, whether it is a man that Shawn sees, his reply that: “I couldn’t see him at all, but I heard him groaning out and breaking his heart. It should have been a young man from his words speaking” is inclined towards humour mostly because of the uncertainties in Shawn’s responses.

When Christy first encountered the people at the shebeen, he is described according to the stage direction as: “a slight young man – very tired and frightened and dirty.” The first impression we get is one of timidity and fear. He begins to relax as the people he meets in the shebeen convinces him that he is safe with them, while asking him numerous questions about his origin: “Was he the victim of bailiffs, agents, landlords; did he indulge in alchemy, marry three wives, fight “wars for Kruger?” Impatient with his seeming concealment of his intentions, Pegeen snaps at Christy: “You did nothing at all” and Christy offered a confession: “I killed my poor father; Tuesday was a week.” When Michael Flaherty accuses him that maybe he is wanted for “robbing and stealing” Christy replied with pride: “And I the son of a strong farmer.” Considered from incongruity theory perspectives, these interactions are examples of how actions and reactions create the humorous. Christy’s replies to the accusations levelled against him by Pegeen and Michael Flaherty are not commensurate, and the incongruity in the phrases produces humour.

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The imagery used by old Mahon to describe his son in Act II implies that Christy is a wimp; however, unbeknownst to Mahon, at this stage, his son has attained a new status. If we juxtaposed the erstwhile wimpy Christy to the now brave Christy, the peculiarity of his before-and-after situation is underscored by the incongruous personalities which ultimately gives rise to a sense of humour. Christy’s description of the Widow Casey in horrific terms with her “limping leg” and “blinded eye” and her “noted misbehaviour” together with his vehement description of her as “a hag with a tongue on her has the crows and seabirds scattered” makes widow Quinn to seem positively angelic by comparison, and this sentient life form comparison creates humour.

In the same manner, when Pegeen describes Widow Quin as: “rearing a black ram at her breast” and “shaving the foxy skipper from France for a threepenny bit,” this statement, juxtaposed with Widow Quin’s mien, provides a fertile plausible ground for humour. Widow Quin, despite the notoriety that Pegeen attributes her, gracefully refrains from using brutal imagery towards Pegeen. In one instant, Christy’s remark about: “two fine women fighting for the likes of me” exemplifies the rivalry between the two and the incongruity of Pegeen’s description of the widow Quin and Christy’s statement may provoke humour.

**Rose Coser and the Social Function of Laughter**

In the previous arguments above, two voices have been identified in the discussion of laughter and the vital impulse as “humour strategies”. The Bergsonian voice emphasize the ability to restrict the risk encountered by life. It denies the inorganic, mechanical, and contaminated within life. Langer’s affirmational voice shows the capacity for strength, determination, and the versatility of life when it is seriously undermined. However, other major theoretical and conceptual frameworks have also been relied on in various parts of the

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53 Synge, 52.
54 Synge, 53.
55 Synge, 40.
thesis. These include concepts regarding the social functions of laughter, influenced by the work of Rose Laub Coser\textsuperscript{57} and her idea of social/spatial distance and Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin’s theory of carnival and the carnivalesque.

This thesis has relied extensively on Coser’s idea focusing on her concept of socially defined categories and structures, role theories and the concept of self, and how these affect an individual. This is in relation to her work on humour and the manner in which joking behaviour serves to establish ties, create solidarity and as a means of hierarchy-building.\textsuperscript{58} Coser’s research focussed on the relationship between workers and patients in a hospital environment. The findings from her research suggest that there was an observation of a noticeable sharp power differential between the hospital authorities and their patients.\textsuperscript{59}

The hierarchical social structure of the hospital, according to Coser, dictated the direction of humorous remarks in a ‘downward’ pattern. The findings indicated that in terms of the joking instance that ‘undermines’, humour provided amelioration by the way in which its threatening aspects were played down. The nature of staff conferences within the hospital setting provided instances for humour to be used to evaluate the problematic situations resulting in improvement of such situations. It was concluded, therefore, that humour functioned to maintain the social organization of the hospital by providing for the release of structurally induced tensions and by socializing patients into the hospital subculture.

The research by Coser also emphasized the importance of ‘jocular gripes’ between patients, especially as it helps to determine group accord and ‘in group’ position. This is because the comic complaints were “based on shared

\textsuperscript{57} Rose Laub Coser (1916 – 1994), was a German-American sociologist, educator, and social justice activist.


\textsuperscript{59} Rose L. Coser, “Laughter Among Colleagues: A Study of the Social Functions of Humour Among the Staff of a Mental Hospital,” Psychiatry 23, (February 1960), 81–95
experience” as against scenarios in which the grievances were devoid of humour or when the humour in the joke is expected to be made apparent through canned laughter. The research confirmed for Coser that humour helps to: “overcome the contradictions and ambiguities inherent in the complex social structure, and thereby contribute to its maintenance.”

Jocular griping therefore helps to establish social relationships through the reciprocal sharing of, and triumph over, fears, difficulties, and anxieties. Similar concerns are also addressed in the work of Anton Zijderveld, and also Lesley Griffith. In the same vein, according to Stanley Cohen and Laurie Taylor, jokes, mockery, irony and sarcasm are means of distancing oneself from life’s activity that can be sometimes platitudinous and thus monotonous. They suggest further that in life, by using such gambits like jokes as a strategy, “the world is put in its place, held apart from ourselves and inspected with varying degrees of dislike and reserve.” The results of the study by Coser bear some relevance with the idea of social distance that can occur between racial groups, especially from a status perspective. It also indicates the complexities of the relationship between roles in interaction and the construction of identity. In her essay ‘Cognitive structure and the use of social space’, Coser argues that conflicts in role relationships force people to take distance both socially and emotionally, in order to evaluate their own stance.

Ralph Turner agrees with Coser, but also goes further to suggest that when conflicts force people to take distance (as suggested by Coser), it also leads to role-taking whereby the person takes the role of the other person in order to anticipate their actions and views, and then they in turn will enter a role-making

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phase from whence they may start to continually produce and reproduce roles themselves. According to Turner: “Individuals perform their roles to others in a social context (role-performing) and take on the role of others in order to anticipate their actions and perspectives (role taking) and continually produce and reproduce roles (role-making).”

Coser’s findings were later to be replicated in another study of humour among staff members in a psychiatric unit. Using a participant observer approach, Joan Sayre observed the use of humour among staff in a psychiatric unit. Although the relative benefits of the different types of humour were not directly tested in this study, the author suggested that, whereas some of these uses of humour seemed to be beneficial in managing anxiety in a socially acceptable manner, the more aggressive forms appeared to promote negative, cynical attitudes toward patients, which might actually have impaired therapeutic effectiveness and contributed to morale problems. Lending his voice to the significance of role-taking in a social context, Turner suggests that: “the dynamic reconstruction and role-making and the resolution of role conflicts are governed by three principles of functionality, representationality, and tenability.”

The study by Coser and Sayre above suggests humour’s role in controlling behaviour and enforcing social norms, especially the ability to reinforce status in a group hierarchy. For example, a person is considered as more likely to crack jokes and amuse others in a group in which that person is a leader or have a position of dominance than in a group in which the particular person has lower status and less power than others. By teasing and joking with one another about their work, the black characters in Sizwe Bansi Is Dead were able to release the antagonisms generated by their competitive relationship and, thus, enabled them to continue their cooperation.

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In a similar vein, humour can also be considered as an invitation to collective laughter by highlighting or stimulating group consensus. In the factory scene in Fugard’s *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, Styles pokes fun at his superiors using humour as a rallying point for other black co-workers. This kind of jocular interaction between Styles and his co-workers draws similar point of inference from one of the findings by Coser that the “jocular griping” of patients “is based on shared experience, it unites the group by allowing it to reinterpret together an experience that previously was individual to each.”\(^6^9\) This qualifies as an example of Adele Marian Holoch’s suggestion on how humour helps those who deploy it to resist victimhood and enact a psychological rebellion against their circumstances.\(^7^0\)

Holoch’s suggestion is particularly true in the case of the characters in *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* as they contest their situation in humorous ways in order to get through their daily struggles. It is therefore safe to suggest that jocular gripes like the one mentioned in both scenarios above are similar to the ones engaged in by the subjects of Coser’s study in a hospital environment, and the findings have suggested that the jocular gripes serve as an ‘integrating element’ between patients and the medical establishment. This is most notable in the way in which, according to Coser: “the patients themselves, by teaching and helping each other to suppress complaints through laughter, help to enforce the norms of the hospital community.”\(^7^1\)

Therefore, as Styles derides the authority by disguising his ridicule as jokes, his ‘audience’ co-workers understand these jokes as parody of the unsavoury peculiarity of the apartheid policy in South Africa. However, the humour of his jokes, perceived as such by the white members of his audience, unaware that they are the target of the jokes, makes the grievances being expressed by Styles to be just what it is, the humorous. Edward Brennan expressed a similar view to Coser’s postulations above in terms of grievances,

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\(^7^0\) Adele Marian Holoch, “The Serious Work of Humour in Post-Colonial Literature” (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2012), 2–16.

\(^7^1\) Coser, *Some Social Functions*, 180.
although, in his own case, it is at the instance of the role of humour in television production. He states that: “Complaints are as unwelcome in television production as they were among Coser’s patients.”\textsuperscript{72} This is because according to Brennan: “Doing ‘good work’ excludes persistent complaints”, which suggest that those who complain will not surrender their personal position to the needs of the team. Hence making funny “substitute complaints” is expedient. Brennan referenced Coser’s suggestion that sharing and making light of complaints can unify a team by allowing it to reinterpret together an experience that previously was individual to each.

On the other hand, the suggestion of “sharing” and “making light” may also be examined under a psychological initiative perspective in terms of such situation being regarded as lack of initiative. Making light of complaints can perpetuate stereotypes. When a grievance is not duly addressed by the person in authority, this run the risk of putting a veneer of normality on an abnormal situation. It is instructive that Coser also suggests that multiple roles enable individuals the ability to express their individuality and thus become able to act autonomously in accordance with or in opposition to normative expectations.

Having referenced Coser’s work in terms of the use of humour in the social construction of role relationships in a behavioural treatment setting, it is imperative to also examine a similar study by Coser, albeit in a different context. This is in terms of the recognition of gender as a constituent element of social structure. Coser argues that sex differences in spatial conceptualization is linked to the different use of space by the different gender. This is explored at great length in her article on how restricted spatial experience is related to restricted social control of gender in spatial conceptualization. Coser suggests that the restriction in the use of physical space by women together with their commitment to the Gemeinschaft\textsuperscript{73} restricts their social space as well, i.e., helps keep their

\textsuperscript{72} Edward Brennan, “Not Seeing the Joke: The Overlooked Role of Humour in Researching Television Production” in \textit{Media, Culture & Society} 33, No. 6 (2011): 822.

\textsuperscript{73} Gemeinschaft is a German word for social relations between individuals, based on close personal and family ties and their community. The \textit{Encyclopaedia Britannica} describes Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft as: “ideal type of social organizations that were systematically expounded on by German sociologist
social relationships on a simple rather than on a complex level, thereby limiting their universalistic relationships in favour of particularistic ones.

The study was conducted with a view to determining why boys do well in subjects like mathematics compared to their female counterparts. Coser argues that there are some basic factors that are needed to excel in mathematics, and women’s orientation from a young age about the homestead and community, i.e. Gemeinschaft, have constituted a sort of restrictions. Apart from the limited use of space, Coser also suggest that the emphasis on particularistic relationships combine to discourage the desire for the abstract thinking which is most needed in mathematics. These limitations, according to Coser, is the likely reason for women’s poor performance in mathematics.

Consequently, Coser suggests that, in terms of cognitive development, the ways girls and boys and by inference, women and men, interact in the field of social relations is facilitated through interaction with persons who occupy a variety of roles and through participation in an ever-broadening role repertoire. The differential use of physical and social space therefore contributed to the different social structures in which boys and girls, men, and women, play out their social roles. Thus, women’s visual-spatial abilities are related to women's restrictions in movement in the physical field. Because women are expected to devote themselves to a Gemeinschaft, more than men, and also be expected to be able to deal with the daily concerns of home and family life, this may surely result in fewer opportunities than men.

The study’s focus on the performance of women in mathematics and related fields is a response to restrictions on women in the field and by extension, the larger society, especially from early stages of their lives. This point is also validated especially if considered from the aspect of women being seen as the centripetal force holding the family together and the pivot around which family

Ferdinand Tönnies in his influential work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887; *Community and Society*). Tönnies’s conception of the nature of social systems is based on his distinction between the Gemeinschaft (communal society) and the Gesellschaft (associational society)” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, inc. Feb 26, 1016. Date accessed: November 11, 2018. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gemeinschaft-and-Gesellschaft.
solidarity is to be maintained and acted out. Coser's argument is anchored on the basis that the multiple, overlapping role sets occupied by individuals in modern society gives them autonomy by allowing them to decide which role they would like to occupy at a given time, thus offering different options for behaviour. This is particularly relevant in the context of immigrants in Irish society in terms of the limitations to jobs and other limitations within the social fabric of the Irish society.

Identity/Social Identity Theory: Social Structures and Individual Behaviours

Also important in the context of the discussion is the twin concept of “Identity theory” and “Social identity theory”. It is important to briefly explain both theories in the context of their relevance to the argument, especially in terms of the understanding behavioural outcomes of different races of people in an intercultural setting. Both theories have been dealt with in separate academic literatures in the past by different authors. There are two perspectives on explaining the social basis of the self-concept and the formation of normative behaviour, with emphases on the multi-faceted self as constituted by society to mediate the relationship between social structure and individual behaviours. Both perspectives have many overlaps and similarities. For example, both theories posit that the self is reflexive, as it can take itself as an object to categorize and classify in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications. This process is called self-categorization in social identity theory, as theorised by Turner et al., and identification in identity theory by McCall and Simmons.

The social identity theory is important because it is a process by which an identity is formed. Social psychologists John Turner and Henri Tajfel are credited to have formulated social identity theory in the 1970s, by introducing the concept of a social identity in order to explain intergroup behaviour. The theory posits that group membership creates in-group/self-categorization and enhancement in

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74 These include articles on Identity theory e.g., Stryker 1968; Turner 1978; McCall and Simmons 1978 and social identity theory, e.g., Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner 1982, 1985; Turner et al. 1987.
ways that favour the in-group at the expense of the out-group. Turner and Tajfel’s study suggest that group favouritism can be necessitated just by such group members categorizing themselves as group members. This is because after the categorization of a group membership, individuals seek to achieve positive self-esteem by positively differentiating their in-group membership from a comparison with that of out-group on some valued dimensions.

Hogg et al.\textsuperscript{78} agree with Turner and Tajfel, adding that group members’ pursuit of distinctiveness, apart from being desired to be seen as positive, also implies that people’s sense of who they are is actually defined in terms of ‘we’ rather than ‘I’. Researchers such as Oakes, Haslam, Turner, Tajfel and Turner have suggested that individuals are likely to display favouritism when an in-group is central to their self-definition and a given comparison is meaningful or the outcome is contestable. The main processes involved in forming this in-group/out-group mentality are connected to the social categorization, social comparison, and social identification.

Tajfel and Turner further suggested three important considerations that encourage in-group favouritism. These include the extent to which individuals identify with an in-group and have been able to internalize that group membership. The second consideration depends on the extent to which the prevailing context provides ground for comparison between groups. The third factor is anchored on the perceived relevance of the comparison, which itself will be shaped by the relative and absolute status of the in-group. There is a significant overlap of the three issues mentioned above, but each of these points to an important narrative node that can help us understand how people perceive and make use of racial comedy.\textsuperscript{79}

As mentioned earlier, humour has the capacity to create solidarity by helping to consolidate the identity of a group. According to Coser: “to laugh, or to


occasion laughter through humour and wit, is to invite those present to come closer. Laughter and humour are indeed like an invitation, be it an invitation for dinner, or an invitation to start a conversation: it aims at decreasing social distance. In a cross-cultural context, humour can be used strategically to “include” and systematically to “exclude” group members, and even break up a group into in-group and out-group divisions. Aggressive forms of humour can also be used as a method of coercing people to “toe the line.”

There is evidence to suggest that racial comedy serves to both reinforce and critique racial and ethnic stereotypes, similarities, and differences. The research by Thomas E. Ford et al, suggests that disparagement humour fosters or introduces prejudice against the disparaged out-group as there are some types of jokes that act: “as a releaser of existing prejudice.” For a racial ‘text’ whether spoken or written, to be deemed funny, acceptable, offensive, and/or insightful, the importance of setting cannot be underestimated. The two important aspects of setting include the social setting in terms of the racial composition of the people involved, i.e. the comedian, target of joke, and the audience. The second aspect involves the physical or institutional setting of where the jokes are delivered, whether it was at a designated comedy venue versus everyday life. Different instances of this scenario will be the focus of the final chapter of this dissertation.

Humour and Socio-cultural Interactions and Bakhtin’s Theory of Carnival

The work of Mikhail Bakhtin, particularly his concept of the carnivalesque, is an important contribution to not just the relevance of comedy in exploring the possibilities of transgressive behaviour, but to also in conceptualizing the importance of joyous celebration and merrymaking as an important pedestal on which the comedy discourse can be approached. Bakhtin conceptualizes folk humour as an important element of the carnival, which he characterized as the

“people’s second life, organized on the basis of laughter.” In a broader sense, the carnival, according to Bakhtin, may present in varying aspects of human endeavours. These include pageants, comic shows, parades, cultural spectacles, marketplace performances, etc. The carnival affords humanity the opportunity to luxuriate in behavioural traits that are likely to be less socially accepted in the society.

To illuminate the carnivalesque from the perspective of practice, I will briefly discuss my own experience as a carnival performer. On the 25th of May in the year 2014, at the Africa Day event held at the Phoenix park, I performed as part of a carnival collective on the streets of Dublin en route to the Phoenix park location for the event. At the Phoenix park, the activity continued and lasted for a couple of hours, and during this time, the group comprising people from different nationalities and mixed gender make-up, embarked on singing, dancing, and jesting sometimes trying out role plays in a manner which is known in Irish parlance as “messing around” or “slagging”, a scenario encompassing name calling, playful antics, sometimes crossing personal spaces and boundaries. Evidently, everyone in the group seemed to enjoy the event. As we sang together, sometimes creating funny lyrics spontaneously, we make images with our body contorting, swivelling round, laughing, and sometimes jumping around ecstatically. The element of “play” was obviously discernible in our interactions that day.

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83 Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 5.
84 Africa Day commemorates the foundation of the African Union, which took place in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia on May 25th, 1963. The 25th of May each year is celebrated internationally to mark African diversity and success, and the cultural and economic potential of the continent. Since 2008, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through Irish Aid has organised a programme of nationwide events to mark Africa Day. Different events are usually held each year nationally including concerts, workshops, panel discussions and parades, with the flagship event in Farmleigh estate, Dublin drawing crowds yearly of up to about twenty thousand people, with similar events in different regions across Ireland. In 2019, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) announced that rather than hold a large event in Farmleigh, it had decided to adopt “a fresh and collaborative” approach which encourages local authorities in Dublin and across the State to organise their own events to mark the day.
The scenario above is indicative of the carnivalesque spirit that Bakhtin discuss in the *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. The element of play and freedom that the carnival group described above participated in is reflective of an aspect of Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque. Bakhtin’s theory of carnival provides us with a theoretical perspective to view this collaborative communal practice in the overall context of the role of humour in human interactions. The carnival factor consolidates the vitality aspect of comedy and its ability to unify or disintegrate social groups, as well as its ability to release tensions, anxieties and provide a non-violent outlet for dissent.

Comedy in this instance can be approached from what Robert Williams describes as play. “Comedy is play”, Williams opined, adding that: “any approach to comedy is bound to be teleological to some extent. / I suggest that comedy is play—paidia.” Continuing further, Williams suggests that: “Seeing comedy as play does not preclude other interpretations. It is only that play is singularly free of ends and purposes, otherwise it would not be play.” Central to comedy is a web of intersecting values drawn from codes, customs, traditions, and cultural preferences deeply embedded in the fabric of the social structures in each society. In the introduction to his book, *Comedy and Culture: England 1820–1900*, Robert Henkle suggests that “Comedy transmits a characteristic vision of life – the comic view of human behaviour”. Henkle draws upon some observations that Frank Kermode has made in his book *The Sense of an Ending*, as according to Henkle, Kermode defines comedy “not in the more limited sense of literary creations, but as notions that people invent to live by, or concepts that they consciously employ in order to explain or structure portions of their everyday lives and activities.”

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85 Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1929).
87 Williams, *Comic Practice*, 16.
This is comedy that encourages communal involvement in order to explore the deepest desires and unique talents to address our legitimate needs as humans, and in harmony with each other in order to ensure the rhythm of life. The idea is that when this rhythm of life is affirmed, human continuity is thus assured. Bakhtin suggests that carnivalesque celebrations like the one described above are common throughout European history. In many African cultures, the “communal involvement” notion can sometimes manifest in the act of conviviality or jollification in some socio-cultural ceremonies. Simple domestic ceremonies like town-hall meetings, weddings, favourable business transactions and even events like funeral obsequies in some African societies can become an avenue for cheerful celebrations. In some instances, the indulgent light mood is encouraged and becomes pervasive that the assemblage is whipped into a carnival frenzy.

Bakhtin compares the carnivalesque in literature to the carnivals of popular culture. He defines the carnivalesque as a literary form that is engendered by humour and characterized by chaos and upturning of social order, but ultimately encourages challenge to authority and traditional social hierarchy. In a carnival scenario, Bakhtin argues that rules, inhibitions, restrictions, and regulations which determine the course of everyday life in a society are suspended particularly in terms of any hierarchical structure or semblance of it. However, beyond the dazzle of carnival performances and festive celebrations lies the passion for communal progress in all spheres of social and cultural life of the people. The carnival can be used to emphasize the cohesion in the society, and also an indication of a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing common goals.

In performance theory, when mood displays are ritualized into mass actions and individual expressions are replaced by exaggerated, rhythmically coordinated repetitive actions and utterances, spontaneous communitas is achieved. In Blazing the Trail: Way Marks in the Exploration of Symbols, Victor Turner explains the concept of spontaneous communitas as a psychological
construct that can be felt or imagined. During these moments, participants “become totally absorbed into a single synchronized fluid event”. Turner posits that in performing rituals, interaction is governed by a sense of: “honesty, openness, and lack of pretentiousness.”

Similarly, Richard Schechner describes spontaneous communitas as involving a temporary state of affectual bonding created through direct interaction. Notions of individualism and individual identity are abandoned and replaced by a sense of collective being. Consequently, within these moments of interaction, the unity felt by those participating transcends differences in role, status, race, sex, or class. Turner’s concept of “communitas” therefore describes participants as members with same purpose, however temporary, as the social entities are temporarily detached from social structures or institutions.

This idea of people with the same purpose is central to Bakhtin’s concept of carnival, especially in terms of the idea of the carnival as: “the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal.” The Carnivalesque approach allows the flouting of authority and inversion of social hierarchies as in the season of carnival, and according to Meyer Howard Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, the same way that, during carnivals people are able: “to flout social norms by ribaldry and to exhibit various ways of preparing what is ordinarily regarded as sacrosanct.”

In this scenario, individuals are free from constraints of ordinary life and get into the anti-structure ‘free flowing’ state which in turn engenders communitas. The essential factor in a communitas is the free-flowing expression of emotion. The concept of ‘letting go’ of inhibitions is very significant in Bakhtin’s theory. This idea of willingness or freewill is what leads to free flow of spirit. There are many instances that the communitas can be seen to be operating within our

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contemporary society. One of these is the carnival parade in many major cities of the world. The *communitas* in a carnival disrupts the hierarchy thereby threatening the hegemony. Bakhtin considers Rabelais' texts from the perspectives of the “culture of folk carnival humour.” This implies that resolution of individual problems must take place in a context that embraces and affirms the whole society. He argues that the idea of “carnavalesque” should not only refer to carnival in its narrow sense (the specific festivals and feast days celebrated over the course of the year), but also to the whole range of popular, festive practices that developed during the Middle Ages.

There are four kinds of carnival process that have been suggested and described by Bakhtin as “sensuous ritual-pageant ‘thoughts’” that the carnival participants encounters. The first one pertains to what he posits as “free and familiar contact among people” as opposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life. This allows carnival participants to interact and freely express themselves to one another. The second element which according to Bakhtin occupies a “special category of the carnival sense of the world” is “eccentricity”. Because of its connection organically with the category of familiar contact; “it permits-in concretely sensuous form-the latent sides of human nature to reveal and express themselves.” This prerequisite allows for behaviour that might be considered as abnormal to become acceptable and considered natural.

The third category of carnival sense of the world according to Bakhtin is the “carnivalistic mésalliances” in which there is “A free and familiar attitude spreads over everything: over all values, thoughts, phenomena, and things.” This allows people of different backgrounds to interact and become united in

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95 Mikhail Bakhtin suggests that the main idea of the carnivalesque may be attributed to the concept of changes and renewal, of death and rebirth.

96 The Bakhtin’s carnivalesque element is further explored in the case studies in chapter five in this thesis.


99 Bakhtin, “Problems,” 123.
purpose, even though the unity might seem like opposite attracts in terms of the composition, comprising young people and old people and varied insight. Carnival, according to Bakhtin: “brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid.”

The fourth element according to Bakhtin is the “carnivalistic blasphemies, a whole system of carnivalistic debasings and bringings down to earth.” Because the carnival is a site of profanity and parodies on things that are sacred, it allows for the subversion and liberation of the dominant authority through the grotesque, humour, chaos, profanities, and irreverent acts. Grotesque imagery is crucial to a discussion on the carnivalesque because the productive and energising element of the grotesque body exemplified a direct opposition to the formal order. This is because according to Bakhtin, the human processes that determines the ability to be human including the process of sexual behaviour, food consumption and even excretion are all “grotesque”.

Bakhtin suggests that: “the grotesque imagery aspect of carnivalesque practices were imbued with images of the grotesque body, images of exaggeration, hyperbolism and excessiveness,” because it is a: “a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body.” Therefore, in the process of engaging in the embodiment of the action being undertaking, grotesque imagery thus facilitates a vibrant communication between the body and the world and also the old and the new. Hence, it can be suggested that in line with the comic spirit, grotesque imagery is able to conquer the sense of fear by equipping humans with

100 Bakhtin, 123.
101 Bakhtin, 123. 
103 For Bakhtin carnivalesque imagery is always dualistic and ambivalent. The carnival unites the two poles of change and crisis, birth, and death, old and young, up and down, and wisdom and stupidity etc. The dualistic imagery is characteristic of carnivals and its contradictions.
the ability to embrace the situation.\textsuperscript{104} Bakhtin uses the act of eating and drinking as an example of one of the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body. The distinctive character of this body is its open unfinished nature, its interaction with the world. In \textit{Rabelais and His World}, Bakhtin concludes that when: “man triumphs over the world,” he “devours it without being devoured himself.”\textsuperscript{105} Grotesque imagery of eating and drinking is characterized as an attribute that deem the individual as having triumphed instead of having a misfortune.

\textbf{Finding the Carnivalesque in Contemporary Laughter}

As previously mentioned, a unique aspect of Irish humour is a term and scenario known as “slagging”. This is a kind of humour targeted at another person in a unique in-group mechanism method. Slagging in Irish society is a form of joke about someone even while the person is present. It is considered a ‘harmless’ type of humour characterised by playful criticism usually directed at someone else. It is a source of humorous interaction that people seem to find funny, including the “butt” of the joke. This aspect of Irish humour is indicative of two important communicative functions of humour, i.e., in terms of permitting criticism to be given, and also the granting of the target of the joke the opportunity to claim in-group membership. It is important to emphasize that slagging is not considered a hurtful type of humour that targets others not present. Indeed, it offers the opportunity of criticism without offence. However, there is a catch; the person being criticized must be culturally aware of this kind of humorous interaction.

Slagging could also be considered as an important tool for cultivating friendship in Irish society. It could make somebody that is new to a group to be quickly accepted into that group if the person shows adequate capacity to understand and appreciate the important significance of the humorous method.

\textsuperscript{104} Bakhtin further cited the example of the church that despite the “serious element” of the religious space of the Middle Ages, the church as an institution had aspects that are connected to practices of carnival and the various forms of festive symbols. Laughter was of central importance to this popular festive imagery, linking together the body in its “grotesque” and communal locations of gathering such as the marketplace, the halls, or places of merriment.

\textsuperscript{105} Mikhail M. Bakhtin, \textit{Rabelais and His World}. Translated by H. Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 281.
If a new member to a group is being “slagged” and the new member takes the joke on the chin, people quickly considers him as okay. Statements like “He’s alright, not a bother on him” might be expressed to indicate the person has been fully accepted into the “in-group.” Nonetheless, the level and intimacy of the slagging could, in a proportional sense, be equated to the depth of friendship. This implies that the closer two people or a group of people are, the more their slagging will be seen to cross personal lines. This may be considered as implying a better friendship relationship between the people involved. This connotes that slagging can be taken as a barometer of measuring depth and level of friendship between people, because someone taking offence at being slagged implies that the person did not consider the person slagging as a close friend that has the temerity to cross personal space.

An approach that seems well suited to this concept is the social penetration theory approach that Miles Patterson suggests as: “a process which refers to the extent to which individuals in a relationship are mutually engaged in sharing aspects of the self.”\textsuperscript{106} Patterson is obviously referring to Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor’s idea of the social penetration theory,\textsuperscript{107} and which correlates with Lawrence R. Wheeless and Janis Grotz’s conceptualizing of self-disclosure as: “any message about the self that a person communicates to another.”\textsuperscript{108} The question is: where does banter stop and slagging begin? One can conclude that at least Irish slagging gives the target an instant chance to react, while targeting others who are not present does not.

It appears that awareness of slagging can have positive effects in cross-cultural interactions within Irish society, especially between the indigenous and immigrants. If newcomers to Irish society fully understand the concept of slagging, the awareness can help in boosting people’s confidence in others and

might even encourage people to blend in and have positive bonding with others within the community. In contrast, unfamiliarity with this aspect of Irish humour can lead to negative effects in cross-cultural communication provoking misunderstandings that can make a newcomer feel insulted or offended which can in turn highlight feelings of isolation.  

Interestingly, this type of humour is equally present in Nigerian cultures. There are similarities between the Irish slagging and a form of humour known as ẹ̀fẹ̀ that can be found in the culture of one of the tribes that constitute the Nigerian nation. Ẹ̀fẹ̀ is a popular humorous interaction within the Yoruba culture from the Western part of Nigeria. It is usually accompanied with activities of spectacle and revue whereby one group of participants will make fun of a person, or even as group confront another group to pass funny comments back and forth against each other.

**Conclusion**

This chapter examined the work and philosophy of both Henri Bergson and Suzanne Langer’s discussion of laughter, placing it in conformity with a more modernistic concept of vitalism. This was explored in connection to life and the creative force as indicative of the vital impulse of comic/humour strategies. According to Andrew Stott, the work of both Bergson and Langer positions comedy at the ontological centre of human existential exigencies. Bergson’s and Langer’s theory of comedy, especially on the nature of the instinct and its connection with the idea of a vital impetus pushing the force of life forward, is parallel to the illustration regarding the origins of comedy in ancient rites of fertility, or the etymological perspective that puts comedy as the song of Komos. Understood as a force responsible for reaffirming the specificity of life, the vital impetus also seems to find correlation in the representations of Dionysus, with its characteristic of the awareness of the self and the openness to alterité (otherness).

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Language competence, cultural awareness, individual affinities, and compatibility are major factors that can affect the quality of humour communication in intercultural interactions.
The chapter also explored other theoretical and conceptual frameworks that were relied on in the study, including Ideas and concepts relating to the work of Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin and Rose Laub Coser, to investigate the implications of laughter especially in terms of its social functions. The Social Integration idea of laughter examined the concept of social/spatial distance, the idea of the carnivalesque, and the implication of the carnival theory in terms of contemporary laughter. The next chapter will explore the postcolonial history of the locations and cultures where the case studies emanated from, and how the colonial experiences and memories are manifested in the characters. It will examine how such memories have an encumbering effect on these characters. It can be suggested that some of the characters in the plays exhibit attitudes similar to a human that has been deprived of the agency for self-identity. Therefore, because of deprivation, these characters are undermined by trauma as they continue to struggle to come to terms with the past.
Chapter Three

The (Post)colonial Connection: Cultural Sovereignty and Identity in Death and the King’s Horseman and Sizwe Bansi is Dead

Some historical accounts and analyses of colonialism tend to ignore the rapacious factors undoubtedly connected to the superior position that the colonizers occupied. Instead, these attempts usually present history from the perspectives of the colonizer’s subjectivities. The accounts often seem reluctant to acknowledge, or even sometimes wilfully ignore, the epistemic violence perpetuated against marginalized subjects. Apparently, there are many examples of mediated historical accounts by colonialists or their scions that have attempted to revisit history in a manner of objectification, suggesting the important and favourable disposition of colonial subjugation on the marginalized groups.¹

A typical example is Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel’s (1770–1831) Eurocentric and pro-colonialist interpretation of the course of history in relation to the concept of freedom. Hegel’s conception of colonialism, even well before the “scramble for Africa” period of the 1880s, implies that because Europeans had so much political and economic dominance over the world for many centuries, they were able to have and enjoy freedom. Therefore, other people in the world can acquire freedom only if Europeans impose their civilization upon them. Allison Stone queries the lacklustre interest of Hegel’s scholars on Hegel’s philosophy about colonialism, as according to her: “There has been less direct consideration of what Hegel thought or what his philosophy implies regarding colonialism, even though the discourses of race, colonialism and Eurocentrism are entwined.”²

¹ In most cases, colonizers tends to exploit such social and political hierarchies for their own benefit, creating a situation whereby indigenous political systems become separate from their customary social functions. This disconnect leads to unnecessary conflict between the citizens of postcolonial states.
Similarly, Albert Memmi argues that: “The deprivations of the colonized are the almost direct result of the advantages secured to the colonizer.” In the same vein, Frantz Fanon recognizes the way in which colonizers usurp the history of the colonized. According to Fanon:

Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native’s brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it. This work of devaluing pre-colonial history takes on a dialectical significance today.

The lasting effect is poignant because according to Memmi: “The most serious blow suffered by the colonized is being removed from history and from the community. Colonization usurps any free role in either war or peace, every decision contributing to his destiny and that of the world, and all cultural and social responsibility.”

The need for contestations of the aforementioned narratives like those of Hegel’s above, especially in terms of documenting the experiences of marginalized societies through a studied engagement with the perspectives of the colonized people the world over, became inevitable, heralding the emergence of postcolonial theory and studies. While many people might be conversant with apartheid policy and brutality against black people in South Africa, some people might not be aware that during British colonial era in South Africa, even before the advent of the apartheid policy by the Boers, black South Africans were marginalised and deprived of human rights by the British colonialists simply because of their skin colour. There is a dearth of literature on the atrocities committed by the British against South Africans, and this recalls the postcolonial notion of the ‘primitive other’ which degrades colonized subjects in Western discourses. Incidentally, even where these colonial discourses are available, the

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6 Boer, (Dutch: “husbandman,” or “farmer”), a South African of Dutch, German, or Huguenot descent, especially one of the early settlers of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Today, descendants of the Boers are commonly referred to as Afrikaners (https://www.britannica.com/topic/Boer-people).
colonial subjects were often described through animal imagery or other derogatory identities.

Moreover, there is usually the tendency in postcolonial studies to privilege only the cultural-political mode of interpretation, sometimes inadvertently failing to register the trauma aspect of the structure of imperial violence during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This inadequacy in exploring the link between the traumatic wound of colonialism and the effects it produces on the colonized leaves a crucial dimension of the postcolonial predicament inadequately explored. The argument can be made that trauma is a valid but obstinate form of experience with cognitive salience, and this is evident in *Death and the King’s Horseman* by Wole Soyinka, *The Playboy of the Western World* by J.M. Synge and *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* by Athol Fugard. These plays have emerged from once-colonized countries; therefore, some aspects of the remnants of imperialist atrocities and the ensuing trauma are evident in the lives of their characters.

In any intercultural interaction, usually, there are symbolic, cultural, and economic forms of capital in operation, not least in the colonial situation with its attendant imperialistic contexts. This is why the plays should be considered as narratives that grapple with the trauma of (post)colonialism as well as the ensuing struggle to recuperate shattered identities. Also, the plays present an opportunity to understand how theatre and performance as cultural practices might offer insight into notion of nationhood and identity and how the fictive world of theatre can be used to unravel the restoration of indigenous dispositions that have been distorted through centuries of colonization.

Two of the plays can be described as a decolonizing device used by the authors to address the sometimes mythic, stereotypical, or fabricated representations of the colonized. Both *Death and the King’s Horseman* and *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* can be regarded as plays that employ the comedy genre as

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7 While post-colonial literary and cultural studies can be credited to have produced many interesting and academically stimulating works geared towards exploring the politico-cultural dimension of post-colonialism, unfortunately, this has not been so in terms of works exploring the psychological or psychosocial dimension of the effects of colonialism.
a decolonizing strategy through their play on ‘time’ and ‘place’ at a defining liminal moment in the integral fabric of their communities. In particular, *Death and the King’s Horseman* is considered as a form of response to the threat of colonial imperialism, especially in the concerns about the evisceration of the African tradition via European domination. Because of these attendant issues, extolling their cultural identity was a strategy by indigenous people in order to define their notion of nationhood both during and postcolonial periods.

In the case of *The Playboy of the Western World*, this strategy is exemplified in the antecedent of J.M. Synge whose works focussed on the rural essence of Ireland. Having denounced religion, Synge tried to fulfil his spiritual emptiness with a deep interest in Irish culture. This is particularly evident in Synge’s declaration that: “Soon after I had relinquished the Kingdom of God, I began to take a real interest in the kingdom of Ireland.”

He was known to have no interest in politics, having earlier disassociated himself from the nationalists of his era who would have loved him to support radical Irish nationalism that was shaping the Irish culture at the beginning of the twentieth century. Synge’s sense of nationalism was to look back and look around at Ireland’s pre-colonial past and rural communities in order to awaken the sense of liberation and veneration of folklore, regarded as one of the determinants of national identity.

It must be acknowledged that there have been controversies in the past challenging the consideration of Ireland as a postcolonial entity. This is due in part to the fact that race is a major issue of postcolonial theory. Some scholars have argued that because colonialism was imposed by white people/Europeans on people from other continents, a European country like Ireland cannot claim to have been colonized. According to Luke Gibbons, the problem with Ireland and postcolonial studies is simply that: “a native population which happened to be white was an affront to the very idea of “white man’s burden” and threw into disarray some of the constitutive categories of colonial discourse.”

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Also arguing for the consideration of the postcolonial status for Ireland, Dawn Duncan referenced Eugene O’Brien’s statement that: "If by postcolonial one means writing from a place that was colonized by another government, then yes it must be. Ireland is an unusual case in that it is a first-world country (some might question aspects of this) and white in racial composition."  

Although Ireland’s postcolonial identity might be complicated, there is no doubt that Ireland is postcolonial as history has shown undeniably that Ireland was a colony, especially taking into consideration the many instances of the Irish engaging the occupying British forces of oppression through resistance and even sometimes guerrilla warfare that claimed the lives of hundreds of people from both sides. 

David Lloyd in Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Post-colonial moment opines that: “The violence of the Irish history is symptomatic of the unrelenting struggle of an Irish people forming itself in sporadic but connected risings against British domination.”

This chapter will examine some elements of the postcolonial history of the societies that the case studies emanated from, suggesting their respective histories as that which is encumbered by suppressed memories arising from the past experiences of violence and the trauma inflicted on the bodies of its citizens. The process by which some of the characters in the plays attempt to deal with their situations merits an appraisal of memory as a testimony for unravelling the trauma of colonial occupation. This renders the plays susceptible to a paradigm that warrants an illumination of the historical trauma including its trans-generational effects and corollary encumbrances. This encompasses the various means by which the playwrights were able to navigate the elements of disorder, passion and identity and the emergence of postcolonial processes of political resistance, the rehabilitation of identities and the re-working of memory. This is in line with the submission by Robert Young’s characterization of postcolonialism


11 The violence unleashed during the struggle for independence would only abate after the Irish have become independent from the British.

as activism and an opportunity to engage in discourse, that are “both contestatory and committed towards political ideals of a transnational social justice.”

_Death and the King’s Horseman_: Rejuvenation and Ambiguity as Important Elements of Comedy

_Death and the King’s Horseman_ by Wole Soyinka is about life and death and the implications of both phenomena. The play centres on intercultural exigencies pitting the life of one person against the venerated communal ethos, predicated on the idea of order and balance of the Yoruba cultural world. The king of the land has died and according to tradition, Elesin Oba, being the late King’s horseman must commit suicide to accompany the king on his journey to the world beyond. Thus, the drama centres around the story of ‘Elesin Oba’ (name literally translates to the ‘custodian of the King’s stables’) who has led a most privileged life in his community, but who also knows that one day he must die unnaturally according to the dictates of tradition. As Joseph, a local man that works as a servant in the local colonial administrator’s household states in Scene Two of the play:

Joseph: It is native law and custom. The King die last month. Tonight is his burial. But before they can bury him, the Elesin must die so as to accompany him to heaven.

_Death and the King’s Horseman_ offers a comprehension of the Yoruba worldview and the people’s collective religious affinity for cultural and historical veneration. In Yoruba cosmology, there are three worlds, the world of the living, the world of the dead, and the world of the unborn. The play focuses on what connects all three worlds in relation to the transition, the pathway through which the different worlds meet and the interactions of the denizens of these worlds. In order to equilibrate the world of the living and the world of the dead, the King’s chief horseman must sacrifice himself and join his king in the passage to the other

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15 Soyinka, _Death_, 28.
world, as the King is being reunited with the ancestors. Initially, Elesin is resolute about his fate and does not seem to offer any major resistance to the sacrifice:

Elesin: This night I'll lay my head upon their lap and go to sleep. This night I'll touch feet with their feet in a dance that is no longer of this earth. But the smell of their flesh, their sweat, the smell of indigo on their cloth, this is the last air I wish to breathe as I go to meet my great forebears.16

Elesin is thus presented as the agent of transformation and “carrier” for the communal harmony in his community. He seems well aware of his obligation, although he is presented as being in a trance-like state of complete spiritual absorption characterized by deep musing. The strategy by the playwright highlighting Elesin as an enabler of collective coherence meant to engender continuity and harmony underscores the cosmic bond between sacrifice and communal cohesion in the community. Elesin surrenders himself as tradition requires, illustrating a willingness and capability to accomplish his duty towards the community. The crux of the conflict in the play is that the important ceremony is thwarted by the interference of the colonial administrator.

The play begins at the market square as Elesin enters dancing in preparation for the ‘journey’ that he is about to embark on. He is accompanied by the praise singer and a retinue of dancers, drummers, and some market women. They engage Elesin in poetic conversations that are meant to give Elesin some support as he embarks on this important task. The conversations also act as a means of reminding Elesin of his obligation and the need to remain focused on the task. Cheryl Sterling suggests that when we meet Elesin at the beginning of the play as he strides forth to meet his destiny, he seemed well prepared to “reconcile the forces at play within the cosmos, to perpetuate the harmonious interactions between humanity and the spiritual sources.”17 This is exemplified in the significance of his movements, in terms of his marked joyful and affirmative posture:

16 Soyinka, 8.
Elesin executes a brief, half-taunting dance. The drummer moves in and draws a rhythm out of his steps. Elesin dances towards the market-place as he chants the story of the Not-I bird, his voice changing dexterously to mimic his characters. He performs like a born raconteur, infecting his retinue with humour and energy.\textsuperscript{18}

From the beginning of \textit{Death and the King's Horseman}, the sense of communal ethos is palpable. Elesin’s body is rendered as a shell for the soul of a larger continuum of spirits on which the entire community’s survival and progress is based. Throughout the play, Elesin’s body is given extraordinary care and attention, because his body is considered as the site for communal safeguard. Therefore, when he made a request from the market women that he wished to be wrapped in nice fabrics, Iyaloja, the head of the market women promptly replied: “Richly, richly, robe him richly, The cloth of honour is alari, Sanyan is the band of friendship, Boa-skin makes slippers of esteem.”\textsuperscript{19} The concerted effort to see the ritual completed is unmistakably discernible. However, inherently rooted within the action is the underlying spirit of comic impulse, the vitalistic impetus that pervades this affirmative incident.

To the non-initiated, the idea of self-sacrifice on which the story depends might seem outlandish. However, Elesin’s characterisation is in accordance with the rejuvenating element of the vital spirit and creative force as life affirming. In the stage directions in Scene One, the seemingly simple description of Elesin as a man of enormous vitality is significant as an awareness of the underlying essence of the character’s vital impulse that underscore the comic essence of the play. Elesin’s sprightly movements and agility prompted the Praise Singer, who despite the fact that he knows the importance of the unfolding events, still asked Elesin where he is hurrying to, and Elesin laughs at the rhetorical ‘joke’ question.

An important comic signifier in the play is the attempt by the English colonial administrator and his wife to stop Elesin’s preparations for his self-sacrifice. This can be considered in dual ways, mainly because of their ignorance of the culture

\textsuperscript{18} Wole Soyinka, \textit{Death and the King’s Horseman} (London: Eyre Methuen, 1975), 11.
\textsuperscript{19} Soyinka, \textit{Death}, 17.
of the locals, or probably because of their apparent disregard for their beliefs. The humour is engendered in the futility of Pilkings and his wife Jane and their abhorrence of the people’s tradition, betrayed by their resolve to stop a ritual that they deemed barbaric. The comic nature of their action is apparent if juxtaposed with their action in subsequent scenes, when they wear the Egungun costume regarded by the locals as sacred.

The comedy of the Pilkings’ ignorance of the native culture is consistent with Elesin’s action, interpreted comically, because despite his vast knowledge of his culture, he decides instead to invest and capitalize on his lasciviousness by delaying the time for his self-sacrifice and take a new wife. This is despite the seriousness of the issue at hand especially when considered in the sense of Elesin as the “carrier” that has been destined to “confront” death which is the recurring motif in the play. Elesin’s role of “carrier” for the welfare and advancement of the entire community is particularly important. Many would have performed the role before him. His seeming delay tactics and his gluttonous exercise of his ‘last wish’ is like him making mockery of his ancestor’s beliefs.

The ‘carrier motif’ theme of the play centres on the notion of the ‘scapegoat’ in which a community sacrifice one of their own to purify their society. This idea works in conjunction with the concept of collectivism in which the collective is entrusted into the hands of one person; the ‘martyr’ who is pre-determined by a special arrangement of self-volunteering or unanimously picked by majority decision in the community. It is believed that the community will be redeemed of its sins, gains spiritual strength together and all facets of life will be rejuvenated within the community.

The ideology of scapegoatism in literature centred on cleansing the society to attain cosmic harmony is a recurring image in some of Soyinka’s works. Apart from Elesin’s character in *Death and the King’s Horseman*, the character Professor in *The Road* and Eman in *The Strong Breed* also fall into this category. Tom Douglas posits that:

The scapegoat ritual was essentially a process of purification, which means in essence that its practitioners felt that they were
contaminated by the transgressions of their daily lives and that the ritual of scapegoating was one that would effectively disperse that contamination and reinstate them as clean in their own eyes and, more importantly, in the eyes of their god.\(^{20}\)

Biodun Jeyifo argues for a rational consideration of the objective of the ritual by establishing an anti-ritualistic discourse to it, suggesting that it is humanity’s acknowledgment of misbehaviour, therefore, it can be argued that the action in the play is suggestive of a strategy by which Soyinka deconstructs the ritual disposition of the play. Elesin’s attributes, according to Jeyifo, may not be considered just from the ritual perspectives alone, as they are not “a necessary part of his qualification for the role of ritual mediator between the world of the living and that of the departed to be simultaneously a speaker, singer and dancer of tales.”\(^{21}\) This is tenable especially in terms of the comic credentials of the play, as Elesin’s vitality can be considered as an embodiment of the vital impulse of comedy. His actions as he approaches the appointed time for the ritual are described in such terms: “He listens to the drums. He seems again to be falling into a state of semi-hypnosis; his eyes scan the sky, but it is in a kind of daze. His voice is a little breathless.”\(^{22}\) Elesin’s vivification, considered from the theoretical perspective of vitalism is the principle on which his community’s well-being is assured.

Nonetheless, that Elesin sees his sacrifice as a duty, whereas the British see his impending death as burden, signifies the character as a scapegoat. Jeyifo may have come to his conclusion because he reads into Elesin’s task as beaming a searchlight on the concept of ritual, in order to reconsider him as indeed a scapegoat for missing his role as an affirmative spirit, whose sacrifice is supposed to align the community with the cosmic order. As Elesin descends the streets, heading to the marketplace, he incorporates the force of life, uniting his community in their duty towards their gods. Soyinka indicates that as the retinue of followers go with Elesin, dancing in merriment and conviviality, more women are attracted and follow them. Therefore, the King’s horseman integrates dual


\(^{22}\) Wole Soyinka, *Death and the King’s Horseman* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1975), 44.
roles of ‘scapegoat’ and the spirit of life. Indeed, it is through the ‘ritual’ of his demise that life can be affirmed and continued.

Derek Wright has suggested that rituals can either restore a former state or aid the ‘transition to a new one.’\textsuperscript{23} In this sense, Elesin is the embodiment of the latter. He can be considered as the agent of transformation. Wright, referencing Soyinka in \textit{Myth, Literature, and the African World},\textsuperscript{24} maintains that the ritual element of Soyinka’s work has the aim to “constantly recharge and keep in motion a vital flux which prevents stagnation and ensures the continued healthy functioning of society and the continuity of the species.”\textsuperscript{25} Elesin’s role epitomises vitalism as the character himself affirms the significance of his duty:

\begin{quote}
Elesin: All is prepared. Listen! A \textit{steady drum-beat from the distance}. Yes. It is nearly time. The King’s dog has been killed. The King’s favourite horse is about to follow his master. My brother chiefs know their task and perform it well.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

As the archetypical embodiment of the comic hero, Elesin is the transitional figure who crosses the gulf between destruction and creation. He is full of energy and very responsive to the people around him. His love for life and conviviality is attested to by other characters, especially the Iyaloja and the market women. Angela Hague suggests that: “In general, however, the comic hero retains a basic core of stability of character while he continues to adapt to the shifting world about him. Thus, the circular and ultimately safe, stable world of comedy results from the comic character’s ability to transform himself at will.”\textsuperscript{27}

Maurice Charney has, according to Joe Winston,\textsuperscript{28} defined the characteristics of the comic as: “cunning, resourceful and could never conceivably be overcome by the material forces he scorns.”\textsuperscript{29} This stability is an

\textsuperscript{25} Wright, \textit{Ritual}, 47.
\textsuperscript{26} Wole Soyinka, \textit{Death and the King’s Horseman} (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 1975/2014), 43.
\textsuperscript{27} Angela Hague, \textit{Iris Murdoch’s Comic Vision} (USA: Susquehanna University Press, 1984), 35.
\textsuperscript{28} Joe Winston, \textit{Drama, Narrative and Moral Education} (USA: Routledge, 2005), 128
\textsuperscript{29} Maurice Charney, \textit{Comedy High and Low: An Introduction to the Experience of Comedy} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 146.
important characteristic of the comic hero. He is “never at a loss for an answer” and can always be considered as an: “enemy of all abstractions, moral principles, seriousness and joylessness.” The comic impulse in Death and the King’s Horseman revolves around the intricate usage of classic comic devices of deception, wit, jocularity, and revel, encompassing the carnivalesque comic spirit. For example, in trying not to renege on his promised duty to his people, Elesin unwittingly commits sacrilege by laying down with a young virgin on the day he is supposed to perform his important role.

Scene Two of the play begins with Simon Pilkings, the English District officer, and Jane, his wife, practicing the tango dance, hoping to perfect their steps for the party coming up later that night at the English club. The comedy in the scene is made clear, even from the onset in the stage directions: “They are wearing what is immediately apparent as some form of fancy dress” and the situation attains a leitmotif of the humorous from an incongruity humour perspective, especially when Amusa, the native administrator policeman, comes in, and his facial expression as described in the Stage Description is reveals a “Obviously a long-standing bewilderment.” The “fancy dress” worn by the Pilkings are the revered costumes confiscated from the local custodians of the Egungun masquerades. The masquerades are highly revered by the natives as they are considered as representing the reincarnated spirits of their ancestors. Already, the scenario offers an odd, unfortunate mix of intercultural polarity in ethics and sensitivity; two Europeans performing an Argentinian dance, the tango, all the while dressed in Yoruba religious costumes.

Being a native, Amusa is bewildered as to the reason why the Pilkings are committing an “abomination” by donning the Egungun costume. He vehemently insists that the couple must take off the costumes, because it belongs to the cult of the dead. The Pilkings refuse to heed Amusa’s plea, and instead become annoyed, reminding him that he is a policeman in His Majesty’s Government. They order him to report the business that brings him to their residence in the

30 Charney, Drama, 152.
first place. Although Amusa had come to inform them about the ongoing incident of the local tradition of Elesin who is about to commit ritual suicide later that night, he refuses to talk to them while still in the Egungun costume. Prodded on by the Pilkings about his intention for coming to their residence, Amusa stammers:

Sir, it is a matter of death. How can man talk against death to person in uniform of death? Is like talking against government to person in uniform of police. Please, sir, I go and come back.32

Despite the fact that Amusa has ostensibly converted to Islam, he still treats the Egungun costumes (and customs about it) with respect, and when Jane tries to trivialize the issue of the cultural significance of the costumes, Amusa reiterates the sacred nature of the costume. She queries Amusa about why he is afraid and reminds him that he was amongst the team that was sent to confiscate the costume from the Egungun worshippers in the first place. Jane is perplexed about Amusa’s fear. Amusa replies:

Madam, I arrest the ringleaders who make trouble, but me, I no touch Egungun. That Egungun inself, I no touch. And I no abuse ‘am. I arrest ringleader but I treat Egungun with respect.33

Amusa’s obstinacy riles Simon Pilkings: “It’s hopeless. We’ll merely end up missing the ball. When they get this way, there is nothing you can do. It’s simply hammering against a brick wall.”34 Both husband and wife eventually leave the room so Amusa can write his report, since it seems he prefers to communicate by writing on a piece of paper. Irritated, Pilkings addresses him: “Write your report or whatever it is on that pad Amusa and take yourself out of here. Come on Jane. We only upset his delicate sensibilities by remaining here.”35 Amusa’s report states that he has come to report that: “One prominent chief, namely, the Elesin Oba, is to commit death tonight as a result of native custom. Because this is a criminal offence, I await further instruction at charge office.”36 Pilkings considers this very absurd and decides to send instructions to Amusa with the order to go

33 Soyinka, Death, 26.
34 Soyinka, 26.
35 Soyinka, 26.
36 Soyinka, 27.
and arrest Elesin. He believes that the arrest is a measure to protect the horseman from himself.

Pilking’s behaviour here is suggestive of the overtly delineated figure of the colonialist as the rescuer of others from their supposed primitivism. The character of Pilking has echoes of Pentheus in Bacchae, as the latter is also determined to stop a process that he regarded as primitive and barbaric, saving its participants from its consequences. In the final encounter between Elesin and Pilking, the former laments that although Pilking may have thought that by arresting him, he would save him, however, inadvertently, his action has caused a situation whereby “The night is not at peace, ghostly one. The world is not at peace. You have shattered the peace of the world for ever. There is no sleep in the world tonight.” Pilking’s reply that “It is still a good bargain if the world should lose one night’s sleep as the price of saving a man’s life” shows his lack of understanding of the gravity of the situation from the perspectives of the natives, prompting Elesin to lament to Pilking that “You did not save my life, District officer. You have destroyed it.”

In the preface to the play, Soyinka makes it clear that the confrontation in the play should not be taken as merely that of a clash of cultures. Therefore, it would not be too farfetched to consider the play from the perspective of failure of responsibility. Elesin has failed to perform his duty, and his failure has cosmic significance. The white officer is a catalyst, but he cannot otherwise have affected the cosmology of the villager’s beliefs. Critics like Craig McLuckie and Iva Gilbertova in separate articles have dealt extensively with this. In his essay, The Fourth Stage, Soyinka defends the colonial factor as merely a catalytic incident. One may be inclined to agree with Soyinka and accept the secondary role of the colonial element, as it can be argued that indeed, it is not the main

\[38\] Soyinka, Death, 67.
focus of the play. However, considering the way that the colonialist’s intervention in the colonies affected the lives of the colonized in many ways, both socially, morally, and psychologically, the argument can be made for the centrality of the colonial intercession and its effect on the action of the play.

Therefore, the fact that Soyinka does not want to connect the peculiarities of the colonialists with the obvious manifestation of metaphysical conundrum and the cultural stasis in the world of the play is interesting. The cosmic proportions set in motion by Pilkings’ intervention is summed by Elesin’s desolate sentence of the peace of the world being shattered “forever”. Eugene McNulty articulates this rather eloquently: “Elesin’s body is stripped of its proper signification in a space filled with the material detritus of colonial presence and practice; his body is also revealed as a kind of palimpsest as Pilkings’ intervention in the name of the (European) Law is implicitly encoded as the latest in a series of corporeal strategies born out of the imperial will to power.”

In Scene Three, when Amusa and two constables arrives at the market square, the women stands around them hurling insults, claiming that working for the white man has cost Amusa his manhood. They grab the constables’ batons being the symbol of colonial power and sexual potency. The ensuing taunts by the young women (some of whom are referred to as girls in the play) at grown men comically reinforces the creative and vital element of the comic spirit in the play. The notions of manhood are promoted in cross-cultural fashion as the women claim that Amusa’s manhood has been rendered ineffective, or not working at all, mainly because he works for the White man. Amusa and the other constables are berated by the market women as “white man’s eunuch.”

Employing the theatrical convention of methatheatre, i.e. a play-within-a-play, the market women surround Amusa and his men, mocking them while enacting role-plays. The role play / performance by the women is not just a play-within-a-play, but a satirical play within a play. By drawing an inference between

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42 Eugene McNulty, “Before the Law(s): Wole Soyinka’s Death and the King’s Horseman and the Passages of Bare Life” Postcolonial Text 6, (2011): 5.
43 Soyinka, Death, 36.
the inferior treatment that Amusa is subjected to by the Pilkings, and Amusa’s insignificance within his own indigenous community, the women seem to suggest that Amusa is always going to be considered a servant of the white master. Metatheatre is a theatrical device in which a play comments on itself drawing attention to the literary circumstances of its own production.

The term “metatheatre”, according to Neil Slater in his book *Spectator Politics: Metatheatre and Performance* (2002), was coined by Lionel Abel in 1963. In a critical analysis of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1609), in his book *Metatheatre: A View of The Dramatic Form*, Lionel Abel described *Hamlet* as follows: “Almost every important character at some moment in the play acts like a playwright, employing a playwright’s consciousness of drama to impose a certain posture or attitude on another.” If one should take cue from the Hamlet’s paradigm, it can be deduced that the market women in *Death and the King’s Horseman* may be considered as playwrights within the play, even if momentarily. In the process of their role-playing and play-acting, the women exhibited provocative dramatic imagination by their insinuation of Amusa’s ‘impotence’, underscored by the dichotomy of his being at the crossroads of duty and identity:

> With a sudden movement they snatch the batons of the two constables. They begin to hem them in.
> Girl: What next? We have your batons? What next? What are you going to do?
> With equally swift movements, they knock off their hats.
> Girl: Move if you dare. We have your hats, what will you do about it?
> Didn’t the white man teach you to take off your hats before women?
> Iyaloja: It’s a wedding night. It’s a night of joy for us. Peace….
> Girl: Not for him. Who asked him here?
> Girl: Does he dare go to the Residency without an invitation?
> Girl: Not even where the servants eat the left overs.
> Girls: In turn. In an ‘English’ accent. Well well it’s Mister Amusa. Were you invited? Play-acting to one another. The older Women encourage them with their titters.
> — Your invitation card please?
> — Who are you? Have we been introduced?
> — And who did you say you were?
> — Sorry, I didn’t quite catch your name.
> — May I take your hat?

— If you insist. May I take yours? *Exchanging the policeman’s hats.*
— How very kind of you.
— Not at all. Won’t you sit down?
— After you.
— Oh no.
— I insist.
— You’re most gracious.
— And how do you find the place?
— The natives are all right.
— Friendly?
— Tractable.
— Not a teeny-weeny bit restless?
— Well, a teeny-weeny bit restless.
— One might even say, difficult?
— Indeed one might be tempted to say, difficult.
— But you do manage to cope?
— Yes indeed I do, I have a rather faithful ox called Amusa.
— He’s loyal?
— Absolutely.
— Lay down his life for you what?
— Without a moment’s thought.
— Had one like that once. Trust him with my life.
— Mostly of course they are liars.
— Never known a native to tell the truth.\(^45\)

The role-play by the women can be argued as a site for the dialogic interaction of multiple voices or modes of discourse. After the women have successfully sent Amusa and his fellow policemen away, Elesin emerges from the wedding chamber, and shows iyaloja the stained white cloth that proves two things. One, the marriage has been consummated, and two, the new bride was a virgin. Thus, feeling revitalised from the strength of his sexual union with his new wife, we now see a new invigorated Elesin. In his lengthy speech almost seeming like delay tactics, Elesin launches into a discursive prattle about his “preparedness” for death.

Later that night at the English club, the comic spirit of the scene is built on different shades of contrast between African and European realities. The Pilkings wearing a 17th century European costume dancing waltz and being awarded the first prize for their African cultural signifier mask forms a powerful image of

anachronism and absurdity. The incongruity in the dichotomy of the bodies in the costume and the actuality of the cultural implication of the incorrect handling of the costume is the trigger for the humour in this scene. For example, the significance of the cultural ignorance on the part of the Europeans is apparent in the following stage directions: “The Prince is quite fascinated by their costume and they demonstrate the adaptations they have made to it, pulling down the mask to demonstrate how the Egungun normally appears, then showing the various press-button controls they have innovated for the face flaps, the sleeves, etc.”

The incongruity of the sentence and its comic inducing element is sustained further on in the stage directions: “They demonstrate the dance steps and the guttural sounds made by the Egungun, harass other dancers in the hall, Mrs Pilkings playing the ‘restrainer’ to Pilkings’ manic darts. Everyone is highly entertained, the Royal Party especially who lead the applause.” The music is also instructive to the comic essence of this scene and the ludicrousness of the setting enhances the humour in the scene. This is exemplified as the “African” police band renders an awful performance of the British anthem, as the risible dance of the Pilkings in the Egungun costume adds to the humour of the setting.

Subsequently, Olunde, Elesin’s son, who studies medicine in England, arrives. Olunde’s travel to England was facilitated by Pilkings, albeit against the will of his father. Olunde had learned about the King’s death and had come home in order to carry out the duties that tradition requires of him as a son of the King’s Horseman. Although obviously educated, Olunde is still strongly attached to his culture. He immediately chastised Jane demanding to know the reason why she has decided to “desecrate an ancestral mask” to which Jane replies: “Oh, so you are shocked after all. How disappointing.” Olunde’s retort to Jane stimulates the humour in this encounter: “No I am not shocked, Mrs Pilkings. You forget that

46 Soyinka, 49.
47 Wole Soyinka, Death and the King’s Horseman (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 1975/2014), 50.
48 Soyinka, Death, 54.
I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand.”

All this time, Elesin has been in prison and has been unable to complete the ritual. As he is led in handcuffs, a dramatic confrontation between father and son ensues. The confrontation is painful for both, as they understand the repercussions of the failure to carry out the ritual to its very end. The Horseman is ashamed and humiliated while his son is disappointed in his father for abdicating his duty to his community. Elesin understands that his inability to perform the ritual is abominable, as this creates a foreboding in the community as the failure to secure the cosmic balance of his society must have consequences.

Elesin: Olunde? He moves his head, inspecting him from side to side. Olunde! He collapses slowly at Olunde’s feet. Oh son, don’t let the sight of your father turn you blind!

Olunde: He moves for the first time since he heard his voice, brings his head slowly down to look at him. I have no father, eater of leftovers.

According to Gibbs, this first encounter between father and son is a cataclysm of inescapable consequences, not only because of Olunde’s rejection of his father, which is entirely in accordance with the system in which both father and son inhabit, but rather because it invariably announces the ambiguity reserved for the ending. The crux of the play centres on a failed horseman: “who has failed his master, his son, his people and himself.” The prison scene is poignantly memorable because it symbolises Elesin’s fall from grace to grass. He is locked in a room where slaves used to be kept. He knows he has failed in his duty to follow his master the King to the other world. Later on, Olunde’s body is brought in, having committed suicide in an attempt to reverse his father’s failure, replacing his father as the new horseman who has willingly volunteered to accompany the

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49 Soyinka, Death, 55.
50 Soyinka, 66.
dead the king to the world beyond. In grief, Elesin strangles himself with his own handcuffs.

The ambiguity of the play’s ending is inescapable. The ritual is somehow concluded, and the continued existence and peace of the community is assured, as Elesin ultimately dies to follow his King. However, before the completion, the delay has, according to Eugen McNulty, somehow collapsed the cosmic balance and the order of things has been disrupted.52 Wright declares that the ending of the play leaves the impression that “there is no Yoruba ‘world’ or ‘universe’ left intact to benefit from the double death, no future for the rite to admit passage into. This points at the importance of the comic spirit for the maintenance of a certain balanced communal order. The unprecedented role reversal of father and son leaves no successor to take up their ritual task and the world stumbles forward into a void.”53 This void is what comedy aspires to realign.

In symbolic and ritualistic form, the delay of the ritual almost presents an abominable trajectory for the community. And although the sacrifice has been executed somehow, Iyaloloja makes it clear that the cycle has not been properly concluded, and that there are consequences for the near cataclysm. Gilbertova suggests that the significance of Elesin’s moral failure is blatantly exemplified in the influences that the Pilkings have over him and by extension his society. Motivated by pride and an ignorance about what they do not know, Pilkings has cut the young shoots off the tree instead of letting the expired ones fall off almost naturally.54 Similarly, Jeyifo suggests that, in the Pilkings is some sort of the confirmation of the colonial power and Olunde’s death is a central element in the disruption that the community will eventually face. The intervention by the Pilkings, according to Jeyifo: “completely undermines the brutal, reified dichotomization of the secular and the sacred, positivist, instrumental rationality

and “mythical thought” and “irrationalism” that is the most service able epistemic foundation of colonial authority.”

The end of the play presents us with complexities of liberation and ambiguity. First, in terms of artistic styles, there are both important elements stemming from both Yoruba ritualistic tradition and elements that have origins in Western drama. While Elesin is a great candidate for enunciation of the comic spirit in the play, the colonial rule and the strong contrast it establishes with the local culture leaves undeniable consequences in the heart of the community. The “balance” that is sought through the ritual performance has been put in jeopardy. The balance with the other world has been shattered as Elesin should have been the one to accompany the King initially, not his son: “The gods demanded only the old expired plantain but you cut down the sap-laden shoot to feed your pride.”

In another vein, Gibbs' take on the ambiguity of the ending of the play is also noteworthy. Gibbs suggests that Olunde’s death is in fact an important resource in order to keep the societal order in balance. This perspective implies that his death saves some honour for his family and is still capable of bringing some harmony to the community. He suggests that: “Olunde has triumphed in death, through embracing death he has salvaged some honour for his family and his death is a cause for rejoicing. His achievement is all the greater because he died despite the opportunity of escape provided by Pilkings: he was, in a sense, responding to the call of ‘his blood.’”

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56 Soyinka, Death, 83.
“There's no way out!” *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* and the Burden of Black Skin

Athol Fugard’s *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* (1972) is mostly based on the experiences of Sizwe Bansi, a black man who leaves his home, wife, and kids in King William’s town to seek employment and better prospects in Port Elizabeth. His inability to get any job and the expiry of his passbook mean that he must leave the town within three days, otherwise he would be imprisoned; therefore, he sought help and refuge at Buntu’s house. One night, as he and Buntu were coming back from a local bar, they found the body of a dead man, covered with a rag, on the street. The dead man’s name is Robert Zwelinzima, and his passbook contains a work permit. Buntu is able to convince Sizwe to switch his identity and papers with the dead man in order for him to survive in Port Elizabeth. This is not an easy decision for him, especially because he has to write a letter to his wife and explain to her that he, Sizwe Bansi, is “dead” because his name is dead, albeit he is still alive, but will henceforth be referred to in another person’s name.

The play opens in the photography studio of Styles in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Styles reads a newspaper aloud, focussing on an article about an automobile plant. He tells the reader/audience a humorous story about an incident that occurred when he worked at Ford Motor Company. He regales the reader/audience about the many aspects of his life including how he became the owner of his own business, i.e. the photographic studio, which he fondly refers to as a “strong room of dreams”.

Soon Sizwe arrives at the studio to have his picture taken. When Styles asks him for his deposit and name, Sizwe hesitates before replying that his name is Robert Zwelinzima. Styles asks Sizwe what he will do with the photo, and Sizwe answers that he wants to send it to his wife, Nowetu. Styles gets ready to take the picture. He directs Sizwe on the best pose, urging him to smile. The photo pose of Sizwe is frozen in time, as the character steps out of the pose to act out the flashback of the events that had transpired in the last couple of days when he arrived in Port Elizabeth leading to the present moment. Sizwe’s
recollections in the letter culminates in the vital information of why he is not to be referred to as Sizwe anymore, because Sizwe Bansi is “dead”.

From the stage directions, the setting of the play is simply described as: “Styles Photographic Studio in the African township of New Brighton, Port Elizabeth/ Underneath this is a display of photograph of various sizes. Centre stage, a table and chair. This is obviously used for photographs because a camera on a tripod stands ready a short distance away.”

To comprehend the issues explored in the play requires an understanding of the society that produced it and the system of government which operated in that society. In the South African era in which Sizwe Bansi Is Dead was first produced, the apartheid system, a racial and discriminatory system which segregated the black majority populace from the white minority group, was the official policy of the state.

South Africa is a country blessed with an abundance of natural resources from fertile farmlands to different types of unique mineral resources. South African mines are world leaders in the production of diamonds and gold as well as strategic metals such as platinum. The country was colonized by the English and Dutch in the seventeenth century and the Dutch descendants are known as Boers or Afrikaners. In 1867 diamond was discovered in South Africa. This subsequently led to an English invasion, which sparked what became known as the “Boer War”. After independence from England, there was an uneasy power-

59 Athol Fugard's background plays a significant role in his appraisal of his society and the steps he took later in life in order to influence the inequalities around him. According to Fugard, “I was born in Middelburg, a small village in the semi-desert Karoo region of South-Africa, on 11 June 1932. My mother is an Afrikaner, my father an English-speaking South African, possibly of Irish descent. I have an elder brother and a younger sister. At the time of my birth my parents owned a small general dealer’s store in the village, but we sold this when I was about three years old and moved to Port Elizabeth, which has been my home ever since. Port Elizabeth is an almost featureless industrial port on the Indian Ocean. It is assaulted throughout the year by strong south-westerly and easterly winds. Close on half a million people live here – black, white, Indian, Chinese, and Coloured (mixed-race). It is also very representative of South Africa in the range of its social strata, from total affluence on the white side to the extremist poverty on the non-white. I cannot conceive of myself as separate from it.”
60 The word apartheid means “Separateness” in the Afrikaans language.
61 The first diamond was discovered on the banks of the Orange River near Hopetown in South Africa by 15-year-old Erasmus Jacobs in 1867. The boy was playing around on his father’s Northern Cape farm at the time and a pretty transparent rock caught his eye. The diamond was named Eureka.
sharing arrangement that operated between the two political groups in authority until the 1940s, when the Afrikaner National Party was able to gain a strong majority. Officials of the National Party introduced the stringent form of the apartheid policy in order to tighten their control over the economic and social system. The main aim was to maintain minority white domination over the majority black population. With the enactment of apartheid laws in 1948, racial discrimination became institutionalized.

The race laws touched every aspect of social life, including a prohibition of marriage between non-whites and whites, and the sanctioning of ‘white only’ jobs. In 1950, the Population Registration Act required that all South Africans be racially classified into one of three categories: white, black (African), or coloured (of mixed decent). The coloured category included major subgroups of Indians and Asians. Classification into these categories was based on appearance, social acceptance, and descent. A person could not be considered white if one of his or her parents were non-white.

The determination that a person was white would take into consideration his habits, education, speech, deportment, and demeanour. A black person would be deemed a member of an African tribe or race. A coloured person is one that is not black or white. The Department of Home Affairs (a government bureau) was responsible for the classification of the citizenry. Non-compliance with the race laws were dealt with harshly. South African author Phillip Hummel gives an account of the situation in his book:

In 1951, the Bantu Authorities Act established a basis for ethnic government in African reserves, known as ‘homelands.’ These homelands were independent states to which each African was assigned by the government according to the record of origin (which was frequently inaccurate). All political rights, including voting, held by an African were restricted to the designated homeland. The idea was that they would be citizens of the homeland, losing their citizenship in South Africa and any right of involvement with the South African Parliament which held complete hegemony over the homelands.62

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62 Phillip Hummel, My Life Growing up White During Apartheid in South Africa (Bloominghton: Author house, 2011), 27.
From 1976 to 1981, four of these homelands were created, denationalizing about nine million South Africans. The operation of the racial classification project required all black people to hold “pass books” containing fingerprints, photo, and required permission to access non-black areas. This passbook must be on them at all times. The implication is that Black South Africans inevitably became aliens in their own country. The government segregated education, medical care, beaches, and other public services, and provided black people with services that were inferior to those of white people. The population register, referred to as the “Book of Life” was at the heart of the planning and practice of the apartheid state.

Eben Dongs, the then South African minister of the Interior, describes the population register in his speech titled: “Introduction to the Second Reading of the Population Registration Bill, 8 March 1950” from the Hansard reports of the era. According to him, the population register is:

A book containing the life-story of every individual whose name is recorded on that register. It contains the most important acts relating to such a person. In some cases, the life-story of the individual is very short. In the case of a stillborn baby it contains only one entry and one page. In other cases, a long life-history has to be recorded in that book. All those important facts regarding the life of every individual will be combined in this book and recorded under the name of a specific person, who can never change his identity. It is only when the last page in that book of life is written by an entry recording the death of such a person, that the book is closed and taken out of the gallery of the living and placed in the gallery of the dead.

Many South Africans fought against the apartheid system through various means, including in the theatre domain. One of the leading voices of dissent against the apartheid policy was Athol Fugard. Eventually, apartheid was dismantled in a series of negotiations from 1990 to 1993, culminating in elections in 1994, the first in South Africa with universal suffrage. However, although the

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64 The Hansard is the official report of the debates and proceedings of the South African Government Parliament during Apartheid era.
apartheid policy has been dismantled, its legacies still shape South African politics and society even up till today.66

The significance of “Book of life” and how it shapes the lives of the characters is revealed when Sizwe and Buntu find a dead body on the street. After some deliberations between them on what to do, Buntu decides to go and retrieve the dead’s man passbook, as Sizwe (Man) reflects on the significance of the passbook:

It will tell you in good English where he stays. My passbook talks good English too…. big words that Sizwe can't read and doesn't understand. Sizwe wants to stay here, in New Brighton and find a job; passbook says, ‘No! Report! back.’ Sizwe wants to feed his wife and children; passbook says, 'No. Endorsed out.' Sizwe wants to (…….) They never told us it would be like that when they introduced it. They said: Book of life! Your friend! You’ll never get lost! They told us lies.67

This is the reality for many black South Africans when they arrived in Port Elizabeth. They would be subjected to various dehumanising and sometimes farcical situations, while also being careful not to be arrested in mass raids by the authorities whose aim is to deport them back to where they came from. The comic inversion of the implication and importance of the passbook is apparent as it is often considered as the “Book of Life”. Therefore, the chance “discovery” of this dead man with a genuine “book of life” as fortuitous as it is, gives Sizwe the opportunity to start a new life, but unfortunately as another person.

Initially, when Buntu suggests the idea of name change to Sizwe, the latter categorically rejected the idea and the reason for this is not far-fetched. Sizwe is psychologically attached to the name ‘Sizwe’ because his name is his identity. His name defines him. The question is, should Sizwe stick to his name and identity and deprive himself and his family a good life? This is a moment of existential crisis for him. As a human being, it is a moment when Sizwe queries whether his life has meaning, purpose, or value. The question is: what is the

66 Many of the inequalities created and maintained by apartheid still remain in South Africa. The country has one of the most unequal income distribution patterns in the world: approximately 60% of the population earns less than R42,000 (South African rand) per annum (about US$7,000), whereas 2.2% of the population has an income exceeding R360,000 per annum (about US$50,000). Poverty in South Africa is still largely defined by skin colour, with black people constituting the poorest layer.
purpose of existence if an individual is deprived of their identity or their humanity? The apartheid policy entraps the black citizens of South Africa, as they are born into a world of limits and suffering, doomed to scrounge for scrapes and sometimes stripped of their identity. In the play, Sizwe’s frustration is apparent as he bemoans his fate:

What’s happening in this world, good people? Who cares for who in this world? Who wants who? Who wants me, friend? What’s wrong with me? I’m a man. I’ve got eyes to see. I’ve got ears to listen when people talk. I’ve got a head to think good things. What’s wrong with me?  

The character’s frustration is apparent especially considering the implication of the biological, the essential and the universal definition of man, is remodelled in the oppressive forms of control directed at people that look like him in the society. Although fully aware of the apartheid policy and having experienced it all his life, the anxiety and disappointment he feels suddenly makes him start panicking. This is because the precarious situation that his black skin has put him in is once again being spelt out by his inability to secure a passbook in order to get a work in New Brighton. However, in this instance, for once, there is a “way out” for Sizwe, but this is frightening to think of, because it implies losing himself and becoming somebody else.

The biopolitical significance of the discovery of the dead man’s body on the street illustrates a systemic violence in the play. Notably, there are two forms of violence encountered in this scene. Firstly, there is the dead body lying on an empty street, probably killed by Tsotsis.  

Secondly, there is the symbolic death that Sizwe is about to experience in order to live freely, or have freedom of existence. These two deaths can be read together and placed within a larger death system, as suggested by Dennis Walder, that death is spread all over the play, assuming different figures.

The death imagery is exemplified in many ways in different parts of the play: the proximity of Styles’ studio to a funeral parlour, the extermination of the

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69 Tsotsis: A Black street thug or gang member; wide boy. https://www.dictionary.com/browse/tsotsi
cockroaches, the death of the old man just two days after posing for his photograph, and the funeral of Outa Jacob. Thus, this massive presence of death in the play is symbolic as representing the death of the self. However, in Sizwe’s case, his “death” is based on a piece of paper. These deaths reflect the emblematic death imposed by apartheid, and it will be in these terms that life and survival will be articulated. The affirmation of the existence of a man is made in the terms dictated by the “Book of Life”, which as it is described contains everything but life. Sizwe’s symbolic “death” seems difficult for him to comprehend as he laments:

Man: I’m afraid. How do I get used to Robert? How do I live as another man’s ghost?

_Buntu answers pragmatically:_

_Buntu:_ Wasn’t Sizwe Bansi a ghost? . . . When the white man looked at you at the Labour bureau what did he see? A man with dignity or a bloody passbook with an N.I. number? Isn’t that a ghost? When the white man sees you walk down the street and calls out “Hey, John! Come here” . . . to you, Sizwe Bansi . . . isn’t that a ghost? Or when his child calls you, “Boy” . . . you a man, circumsized with a wife and four children . . . isn’t that a ghost? Stop fooling yourself. All I’m saying is be a real ghost, if that’s what they want, what they’ve turned us into. Spook them into hell, man.70

The signifying redefinition of a person’s identity, and by extension, the ‘dehumanized’ black body, is further exemplified as Sizwe begins to memorize the identification number on the passbook.71 The identification number therefore assumes the ultimate redefinition of a human being. Incidentally, it is also important to point out that in the above scene, life, though clearly undermined by the concept of the passbook, and therefore regarded as debasement of the humanity of a person, yet it can also be considered as an important element in the comic impulse. This is reinforced by the fact that before Buntu and Sizwe found the dead body on the street, Buntu was rather pessimistic about Sizwe’s

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70 Athol Fugard, _Sizwe Bansi_, 185.
71 Fugard, 187.
chances of success: “There’s no way out, Sizwe. You’re not the first one who has tried to find it. Take my advice and catch the train back to King William’s Town.”

André Brink suggests that the narrative in the play may indeed present images of closed circles in which Buntu's words reverberate ad infinitum: “There’s no way out.” and this reality necessitates the characters' utilization of humour to deal with their situation. Therefore, Sizwe’s situation is revealed here in terms of the affirmative force of life, as the survivalist mentality of both characters serves as an indication of the comic impulse for life’s possibilities. This idea concurs with Brinks’ idea that, despite the fact that in the play life is made precarious, uncertain, and largely left to the randomness of facts, but nonetheless possible.

Also, it is important to note that the scene above also describes a world in which survival comes not from above or from below, but rather from those who managed to penetrate the system and can now offer some assistance to those in worst conditions. It is perhaps interesting to note that “Sizwe Bansí” means “people are strong” in Xhosa, which indicates very well how the possibility of life is dependent on the people coming together as an informal force or network of empowerment and survival.

Postcolonial Memories of Pain, Loss and Laughter

The violence against colonial subjects is often in the form of experiences that some critics have described as ‘political killing’ and is represented symbolically in the ‘death’ imagery. A typical example is the case of Sizwe Bansí examined above. The death implied is not of a physical murder, but death that is reflected in the biopolitical implications on the colonized, and in some cases in the form of encumbrances with far-reaching consequences up to the postcolonial era. Therefore, exploring the psychological considerations of some of the characters

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72 Fugard, Sizwe, 173.
74 Brink, "'No Way Out,'" 439.
75 Dennis Walder, Athol Fugard (London: Macmillan Modern Dramatists, 1984), 77.
of the modern plays is essential because of the persistently recurring images and representations of colonial violence in them.

The political killings include instances of the deployment of state instrumentalization in order to effectively carry out the material destruction of human bodies and populations through overt and covert machinations. This element of biopolitical “death” is, according to Achille Mbembe, the “maximum destruction of persons and the creation of death-worlds” in which many populations have to suffer life-long processes of death, not just once-only death. Mbembe termed this as “necropolitics” where “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations” is the central phenomenon of power. The necropolitics concept as a paradigm for analysis in this chapter is in terms of the colonial powers’ peremptory ability to impose social or civil death, the right to enslave others, and other forms of political violence.

It can be argued that despite variations in aesthetic forms and obvious differences in themes and plotlines, the idea of political death recurs in most of the plays focussed on in this thesis. It can be suggested that the concept of political death offers perspectives on biopolitical frameworks that foreground non-normative killings. It can also be suggested that the concomitant effect of “political death” imagery is, as earlier referenced above, a result of the trauma of colonial and postcolonial experiences of once colonized countries, albeit the recurring effect is different from country to country.

The suggestion is that most of the characters from the case study, particularly the main characters, exhibit particular traits that indicate a process of ‘grappling with’ past experiences of subjection, either on individual bases or from the group contexts, especially as politically ‘killed’ people. The trauma experiences of the people, and by extension, the characters, mitigated through the “grappling with” process, is further consolidated through humour to “gain life”.

This is evident in the activities of some of the main characters from the plays, as they are actively engaged, though sometimes unconsciously, in actions that can be characterised as the tenacity to stand firm.

The characters have continually been rendered invisible in the society in ways and manners that constitute political death. In Sizwe Bansi Is Dead, from the beginning of the play, we become aware of Styles’ imminent “death” which seems to have been avoided temporarily when the working conditions in the factory were improved. The spot where he works in the factory is described in the Stage Direction as “A dangerous hot test” section. As he and his co-workers work without an asbestos apron and fire-proof gloves and other safety and protective equipment, their exposure to dangerous chemicals means they are dying gradually, as they are constantly being poisoned by the hazardous materials. The authorities’ ignorance and lack of concern towards Styles’ and his colleagues’ wellbeing illustrates the deadly environments that the black workers have to operate in, recalling Foucault’s definition of political murder. If Styles and his colleagues do not die from impoverished conditions, soon enough they will die of serious complications from diseases and health problems.

In Death and the King’s Horseman, there are numerous instances of psychological negotiation of identity in the tug of war spectacle between the natives and the Pilkings as both sides argue for the essence of cultural “death” in the play. The psychological dimensions of the riveting spectacle of the duel with death is encapsulated in the cultural landscape battlefield, and the war is between the Western colonialists and the indigenous traditionalists. The literal deaths of Soyinka’s dual protagonists, Elesin and his son, Olunde, portends the symbolic death of a community caught in the abyss of disintegration in its struggle to ascertain and hold on to its veracity.

It can be suggested that Soyinka could be using the deeper connections between the cultural landscape and the psychological disposition of the locals to the Yoruba cosmology and cosmogony worldview to contest colonialism and its attendant structures, especially if the play’s insistence on the upholding of the Yoruba custom and tradition is to be put into consideration. Mpalive Msiska points
out this “deeper connection” between Soyinka and Freud, and their “shared concern with the topography of reason”\textsuperscript{78}, further suggesting that if considered from Freud's basic psychoanalytic perspective, Soyinka is attempting to salvage and restore constraints that underpin postcolonial modernity. This is tenable, because by implication, if these repressed memories are restored in their purest form and allowed clear expression, it will effectively communicate the existing hierarchical structure, which in turn enables practical consideration to deal with some fundamentally unassuaged tensions within the self.\textsuperscript{79}

The idea is that repressed memory of colonized citizens is reflected in the actions of some of the characters of the plays; therefore, this chapter considers the idea of healing at the individual and collective levels through the prisms provided by the concepts of working on trauma through humour. This important factor is germane to the logic of coping mechanism as part of the strategies by which the colonized and by connection the characters in the plays use humour as liberation/survival strategies. As earlier suggested, humour can be used to channel anger, celebrate survival, or even create hierarchy and dichotomies within communities.

While the case studies of this dissertation focus on different periods of postcolonial history of the countries that they emanated from, the common attribute between them all is the attempt to use humour as a tool to explain and highlight the serious issues of identity, racism and other socio-cultural experiences within the community. A typical example of this in \textit{The Playboy of the Western World} is the scene where Christy uses his story-telling proclivity and dynamic nature to navigate an important aspect of his experience. Through memory recall, role play, and exaggeration, Christy re-enacts the altercation with his father, first in order to convince the townsfolk of the veracity of his claim, and then secondly, in order to convince himself that he can embrace his newfound but preferred identity. Christy exemplifies an important element of the


\textsuperscript{79} Msiska, \textit{Postcolonial Identity}, 20.
postcolonial mindset, encapsulating the force of change and the persistence of will. In describing his father, the character laments:

I’m telling you, and he a man never gave peace to any, saving when he’d get two months or three, or be locked in the asylums for battering peelers or assaulting men (with depression), the way it was a bitter life he led me till I did up a Tuesday and halve his skull.80

Although the above lines demonstrate great violence, they also portray Christy in ascension, as a character with an attribute to revolt against what, or whom, was holding him back and suppressing his growth. Christy’s vibrancy and ultimate “liberation” could be identified with the vital impulse as life affirming and a force of transformation. It can be suggested that the “murder” of his father may be considered as a strong transformational act, having the impact of a quasi-ritual, and the concentrated force that it seems to explode from could be equated with the act of wanting to liberate as colonized people’s attempts and subsequent independence for their ancestral land.

Having been subjugated for hundreds of years, colonized countries were relentless in demanding their human rights. Although this demand might seem ineffective initially, ultimately, freedom is attained. This is epitomized in the statement by Christy that: “Up to the day I killed my father, there wasn’t a person in Ireland knew the kind I was, and I there drinking, waking, eating, sleeping, a quiet, simple poor fellow with no man giving me heed.”81 Therefore, one can suggest that comic characters such as Christy, Elesin, and Sizwe relies on the simple but also complex binaries of thought, first docile, then active; first malleable, but now demanding their voices be heard. These are comic tools of ambivalence and rejuvenation utilised by the characters in order to transform. These humour strategies becomes the means by which the characters embrace liberation/survival strategies.

The humour elements in the human psyche warrant an inquiry into the comic elements in the plays especially in terms of the relationship between pain, loss, humour, and laughter. For example, if we consider the psychological basis

80 John M. Synge, The Playboy of the Western World (Dublin; Maunsel and Company Ltd, 1907), 34.
of the humour within the plays, the ways in which humour is created in some of these works combine concepts from cognitive stylistics and psychology to address the question of how the construction of worlds of the characters in relation to their actions or inactions contribute to the creation of humour in the plays. This aspect of the metaphysical Implications of comedy leads into an investigation of the role of humour in the production of place, action, and space.

The humour in a situation may elicit a great laugh; however, the laughter generated and the comic irony that elicited the laughter can be considered a form of intellectual resistance usually feared by those in power for its irreverence. This is because, as seen in the above example of Christy, humour has the potential of being able to free people to encounter new thoughts. Similarly, the possibility of being able to perceive the world with a different lens is also fundamental to the process. The connection between trauma and humour can be argued as a means by which the tragic elements of modern life could be re-appropriated in creative and productive new ways. Humour is a means to bring the non-representable in the unconscious and repressed memories, and in some instances offers us the opportunities to deal with these memories in a sustainable manner.

This chapter has explored the connection between the plays and the consequences of the colonial past in the respective societies from which they emanated, and the way in which some of the characters seems to be wanting to escape the clutches of their past. The chapter makes the claim that in order to cope, the colonized used humour in order to alleviate their experiences. The chapter also examined instances of trauma by its focus on the actions of the characters as a site for the dialectic cultural interventions of multiple voices or modes of discourse. The trauma of subjugation that has been etched in the consciousness of colonized is like an albatross that collectively weighs down whole communities. The collective trauma works its way slowly and even insidiously into the awareness of people who suffer from it. This is what Kai Erikson refers to as a “wound” that substantiates the trauma concept to a communal level, as according to Erikson, what affects the body ultimately affects
the community, and vice versa “A wound inflicted on the body is a wound inflicted on the community.”

For example, the characters in *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* employ inherent elements of their sense of identification to engender laughter that is both unifying and dichotomous, in order to create an in-group and out-group awareness geared towards making ineffectual the dehumanizing ramifications of the apartheid policy on their lives. In fact, the contemporary plays treated in this thesis serve as examples of narratives attempting to cope with the trauma of colonialism while at the same time picking up the shattered pieces of their identities. In attempting to explore the trauma and the manner of its occurrence, both in the plays and by extension their respective societies, the analysis explores how individuals may internalise the processes of traumatic memory and experiences with the attendant concomitant symptoms of displaced identity as an embodiment of the symptoms of trauma that effectively testify to its historical context.

Because Identity is a fundamental aspect of a society and its people, it is vehemently protected at all costs, and by all means, as was the case in many colonized societies. Nonetheless, the exploration of trauma in this chapter has demonstrated the emergence of a crisis of identities and concomitant exigencies in postcolonial societies. Therefore, the postcolonial analysis of the work has helped in critically examining the intricate crisis of trauma in varying dimensions in some of the case studies. This argument highlights how the vital impulse encourages the uplifting of the creative force, both in individual characters and in the community. The result is a celebration of the indomitability of the human spirit, as a primordial energy that keeps the characters “alive” within the context of their situations.

The next chapter will attempt a comprehensive analysis of the modern case studies, with particular focus on their comic strategies, especially in terms of the multimodal markers of humour. The analysis will highlight the historical, cultural, social, and economic factors that impacted the themes of the modern scenarios.

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plays. The motivations of some of the characters will be explored, especially pertaining to the survival element of the vital impulse and the creative force of the underlying humour, which in itself is considered “carnivalesque” in terms of the transformative or restorative power of laughter.
Chapter Four

Vitalism and the Carnivalesque in Soyinka, Synge, and Fugard

The last chapter explored ideas and concepts of reading violence between colonizer and colonized, by problematizing discourses on political violence and conceptions of national history, memory, and representation, as well as the death imagery and the postcolonial aspects of the plays. However, there are in fact some overlooked comedic aspects and humour within these plays that problematize their simplistic reading as just anti-colonial or fundamentally about the necropolitics of empire. These case studies explore the cognitive and perceptual boundaries of cultural interaction in different contexts and the intercultural synergies and dichotomies between the different groups of people in a society, especially in situations where “subjectivity” of one sort or another raises fundamental questions about interculturalism. This chapter will integrate the ideas and terms coined in the first three chapters, to bring them to bear on the case studies around the key ideas of “vitalism” and the “carnivalesque”.

Although their works are over two decades apart, with Bergson’s ideas culminating at the turn of the century, and Bakhtin’s theories becoming prominent in the 1920s, Bergson can be regarded as part of the formative source of Bakhtin’s ideas, as there are crucial intersections as well as fundamental divergences in their thought patterns. Nonetheless, their theories of the self in time and space, and the symbiotic integration of the self within particular temporal and spatial models, as divergent as they can be, find common relevance in the following analysis, where their priority on language and action illuminates both vitalistic and comic elements in the plays.

These elements are particularly visible in terms of the revival, renewal and rejuvenation elements, vitalism, and the conflict between two opposing camps, exaggeration as carnivalesque aspect of the fundamental trust in life, and the restorative combination of these comic features. The illumination of these traces in Soyinka, Synge, and Fugard will lead to Section Two, where the focus is on contemporary examples beyond the theatre.
The Carnivalesque in *Death and the King’s Horseman*

Like in Aristophanes’ *The Acharnians*, the market women played the part of the Chorus in *Death and the King’s Horseman* and are very actively involved in the comic action of the play. The Iyaloja and the praise singer can also be considered as part of the Chorus moving the play along. The conversations between Elesin and the women epitomise a combination of some of the vitalistic and carnivalesque comic elements in the play, exemplified in their capacity to generate a vitalistic convivial spirit for both Elesin and others within the community. Beseeched by the market women/Chorus, Elesin’s spirit is high as the women stroke his ego, ensuring that the communal gathering is affected positively through their pleasant interactions with him. In the process, we witness how Elesin becomes energised as a result of their support. In one of their many interactive sessions, the women cynically ask Elesin if there is nothing that will hold him back. Elesin affirms that he will approach death confidently because he goes to keep his friend and master, the king, company. He then reminds the women how he and the king shared everything, including food and thoughts. “The world was mine. Our joint hands raised houseposts of trust that withstood the siege of envy and the termites of time.”¹

Proudly, Elesin informs the women that life is honour, and life ends when honour ends. The women assure him that they know he is a man of honour. This appears to offend Elesin, who insists that they stop. The women are puzzled and nervous, wondering what they have said that is wrong. Iyaloja intervenes on behalf of the women, informing Elesin that they are unworthy and that they ask his forgiveness. The women all kneel down. At first, Elesin behaves as if he is too insulted to explain what the women have done wrong, but after some coaxing from the Praise Singer, he tells them that words are cheap. He asks the women: how should a man of honour seem? Elesin laughs at his own joke, informs them that was only playing and that they have not committed any offence, which brings relief to the women: “For a while we truly feared our hands had wrenched the

world adrift in emptiness.” Happily, Iyaloja directs the women to robe the King’s horseman richly, in the cloths of honour, friendship, and esteem.

As Chorus, the market women provide the necessary comic interludes that contribute to the comic spirit in the play. When faced with the culturally errant Amusa, they become like a defender of the culture. Their ring of protection around Elesin is symbolic because it is like a collective ring of protection around the horseman, in the iconic venue of the marketplace, a symbolic site for cultural demonstration. Their power and influence in the market sphere is demonstrated when they warn Amusa: “Your betters dare not enter the market when the women say no.”

An important aspect of the carnivalesque and the vitalistic impulse in Death and the King’s Horseman is the idea of the comic as a dynamic force for rejuvenation, renewal and transformation and various examples of these can be found in different aspects of the play. After the consummation of his marriage with his new bride, Elesin brandishes the cloth with the bloodstain of virginity and declares:

It is no mere virgin stain, but the union of life and the seeds of passage. My vital flow, the last from this flesh is intermingled with the promise of future life / When earth and passage wed, the consummation is complete only when there are grains of earth on the eyelids of passage.

Drawing on Bakhtin’s carnival theory, the carnal impulse of Elesin’s statement is evidenced on the implications for such imagery. The grotesque imagery of the contact of bodies, the promise of offspring, marriage, and death are all festive affirmations that Bakhtin described: “The material bodily stratum is productive. It gives birth, thus assuring mankind’s immortality. All obsolete and vain illusions die in it, and the real future comes to life.”

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2 Wole Soyinka, Death and the King’s Horseman, (London: Bloomsbury Methuen, 1975/2014), 16.
3 Soyinka, Death, 39.
4 Soyinka, 43.
It is assumed that the bride will eventually become pregnant. The child from their union will therefore become a mediator between the chaotic forces in the universe of humanity’s experiences. This can be considered as an example of the “raw life force” notion offered by Bakhtin, and is therefore, to be considered as a sign of carnivalesque renewal. This aspect of comedy is, according to Langer, an embodiment of the renewal of life rhythms. It is episodic, creating a rhythm of perpetual rebirth, of repeated restoration of balance, and of the continued reassertion of a new future.

It is in the same line of reasoning that one can consider Harold Watts’ postulation of comedy as restoring balance and creating a sense of regain: “comedy is a dramatic representation addressed to us.” For its relatability to our individual aspirations, it must engender “two immediate pleasures, that of recognition; and that of applying a limited scale of human truth.” Watts goes on to describe the power of comedy in terms of its ability to “stir[s] in us a sense of return (.....) a restored ‘sense of balance’,” which Paul Grawe, building on Langer and Watts’ ideas, later developed further in his suggestion of comedy as celebrating a patterned demonstration of survival of the human race. It reinforces the idea of comedy as being consistent with continuity. The unborn child is a life force that propels the carnivalesque. It ostensibly connects to the circle of life and therefore serves as a sign of hope.

The renewal element is also exemplified in another way in the play in the interaction between the market women and Elesin Oba, and the dialogue between Elesin Oba and the Not I bird, as the latter constantly reminds Elesin of past promises and his duty to his community. The exchange between the two reflects Bakhtin’s carnivalesque notion, in terms of the simultaneous affirmation and denial of life itself. Elesin must die for his community to continue to flourish, and his inability to fulfil this task makes his son to take his place to fulfil the

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8 Watts, 23.
demands of tradition. The life/death renewal scenario is also signified in the interaction between the forces of cultural preservation and force of cultural appropriation. The conflict between the two opposing camps of the indigenous and the alien signifies the struggles for the preservation of and affirmation and the conflicting interests. This conflict, according to Bakhtin, is the essence of carnival: the idea that that two such ostensibly conflicting ideas can be part of life.

Another carnivalesque scenario is the humorous interaction between the market women/girls and Amusa and his cohort of messengers/police sent to arrest Elesin by the Pilkings in Scene Three. This interaction from the play is reminiscent of the ẹfọ slugging humour that is similar to Irish slugging earlier discussed in Chapter Two. Commenting on the interaction between Amusa and the market women, Kacke Gotrick argues that the ẹfọ genre is “comic”, “humanistic” and can be regarded as “comments on the state of society”, which in this instance is used to “satirise”, and “tend/s/ to create the illusion of reality.”

The carnivalesque humour in the ẹfọ taunts is exemplified when the girls and market women ridicule the constables’ batons, the symbols of colonial power and sexual potency. The reference to the notion of manhood is grotesquely symbolic as a means to deter Amusa, and most importantly to get back at the Pilkings, the colonial authority. The physical attribute of bodily function is of carnivalesque significance due to its comic exaggeration. The women’s inference of the policemen’s baton as a “weapon” as an example of Bakhtin’s “lower body stratum” connotes their effective unmanning of Amusa, and by implication, the colonial authority and the Pilkings, the local administrators, being ridiculed in absentia. Although the ẹfọ scenario was discussed in Chapter Three, the role-play “taunts” by the “young girls” as they continuously mimic the English accent also comically reinforces the creativity and vitality of the scene; most particularly in this context, it is being discussed here in terms of the carnivalesque element in the mockery:

Amusa: I am tell you women for the last time to commot my road. I am here on official business.

Woman: Official business you white man’s eunuch? Official business is taking place where you want to go and it’s a business you wouldn’t understand.

Woman: Makes a quick tug at the constable’s baton. That doesn’t fool anyone you know. It’s the one you carry under your government knickers that counts. She bends low as if to peep under the baggy shorts. The embarrassed constable quickly puts his knees together. The women roar.

Woman: You mean there is nothing there at all?

Woman: Oh there was something. You know that handbell which the white man uses to summon his servants….?

Amusa: He manages to preserve some dignity throughout. I hope you women know that interfering with officer in execution of his duty is criminal offence.

Woman: Interfere? He says we’re interfering with him. You foolish man we’re telling you there’s nothing to interfere with.

Amusa: I am order you to clear the road.

Woman: What road? The one that your father built? You are a policeman not so? Then you know what they call trespassing in court. Or – Pointing to the cloth lined steps. – do you think that kind of road is built for every kind of feet.

Woman: Go back and tell the whiteman who sent you to come himself.

Amusa: If I go I will come back with reinforcement. And we will all return carrying weapons.

Woman: Oh, now I understand. Before they can put on those knickers the white man first cuts off their weapons.

Woman: What a cheek! You mean you come here to show power to women and you don’t even have a weapon.”

The dialogue above is illustrative of Bakhtin’s argument about speech patterns in a carnivalesque setting as example of: “[…..] the language which mocks and insults the deity and which was part of the ancient comic cults.” From a Bakhtinian carnivalesque logic of degradation, the funny remarks by the women against Amusa in the above scene present situations in which the characters’

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11 Wole Soyinka, Death and the King’s Horseman (London, Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2014), 36.
play on words and the implied meanings allow for negotiation of social values and the opportunity to bring these values down to the material level.

Similar to the Western Nigerian ẹfé humour, another humour negotiating instrument in another African society is the Mchongoano from Kenya, a type of verbal contest in which two or more opponents exchange insults in front of an audience. As the opponents taunt each other, the audience incites them on, taking turns to either praise the remarks deemed as clever or mock remarks that are considered boring. A typical Mchongoano exchange requires the presence of at least two antagonists and an optional audience, who regulates the exchange by either encouraging the witty remarks or deride the dull ones. Although Mchongoano is normally associated with pre-adolescents, there is evidence that the practice extends beyond adolescence. John Dollard suggests that an equivalent humour practice is also performed in United States of America, especially within the African-American communities. The practice known as “The Dozen” involves two contestants who try to outwit each other by saying things that is meant to ridicule the other person or members of their family. This is illustrative of the interaction between the girls and the policemen.

In his 1976 article in the Journal of Black Studies, Amuzie Chimezie draws a similarity between “The Dozen” to a game called Ikocha Nkocha, practiced in another part of Nigeria different from where the ẹfé game is found. Ikocha Nkocha, which translates to “making disparaging remarks”, is played amongst the Ibo tribe from the eastern part of Nigeria. Chimezie suggests that although the game is performed mainly by young people, funny remarks targeting family members of opponents are usually restrained, mainly because remarks that are considered rude towards family members are frowned upon in the Ibo culture.

All the above forms of expressions, irrespective of how they are referred to, whether as “practices”, “games” or “performances”, can be considered as

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13 Both examples are equivalent to the African American ritual insults or the Turkish boy’s verbal duels (see Abrahams 1964, Labov 1972, Dundes, Leach & Örzök 1972).
carnivalesque representations, especially if considered along Ana Cara’s suggestion that in being part of the process, the people have the opportunity to say what is “conventionally ‘unsayable’ by twisting language around (e.g., through humour, understatement, double entendres) or using words in such a manner that a truth (normally not part of the dominant ethos) is confirmed or revealed.”

Carnivalesque images like the ones that have been discussed in Death and the King’s Horseman makes use of the “grotesque” in order to transgress the boundaries between bodily life and the field of art, bringing bodily functions into the public scene. These images can also be found to be operating in Synge’s The Playboy of the Western World, though in a different context. Bakhtin suggests that the grotesque may be identified by its susceptibility to degradation and also its capability for regeneration. The comic action in the play is exemplified in the element of the “fundamental trust in life” and the element of “confidence in the restorative and palliative powers of human communication” in the main character Christy. This aspect of the human body as a comic figure is perhaps better understood in terms of its positive consideration being linked to birth and renewal and its negative implication linked to death and decay. Therefore, according to Bakhtin: “it is characteristic for the familiar speech of the marketplace to use abusive language, insulting words or expressions, some of them quite lengthy and complex.”

The Playboy of the Western World and the Restorative Powers of Human Communication and Social Organization

The Playboy of the Western World, written by playwright John Millington Synge, was first performed at the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, on 26 January 1907. The play is set in Michael James Flaherty’s shebeen, a public house in County Mayo, on the west coast of Ireland, in the early 1900s. It tells the story of Christy Mahon, a young man running away from his farm, claiming he killed his father with a loyal on

17 Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World. Translated by H. Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 16.
his head. The manner in which he tells the story makes the locals become enamoured to him. As Christy Mahon repeats his concocted story, he adds more dynamic details.

Although Christy’s initial story when he first arrived at the shebeen is plain, when alone with Pegeen Mike, he begins to exaggerate the story. By the second act, he decides to add more vivid details to the story as he narrates the incident to the widow Quin and the village girls who arrives at the public house in order to take a look at the man who “killed his father”. He adds bewildering addendums that portray him as a physically tough and romantic personality. He claims that he rebelled when his father wanted to marry him off to a widow whom he dislikes, and that in the course of their argument, his father raised a scythe to strike him and he dodged the scythe, then struck his father on the head with a spade which resulted in his death.

Christy: *flattered and confident, waving bone.* He gave a drive with the scythe, and I gave a lep to the east. Then I turned around with my back to the north, and I hit a blow on the ridge of his skull, laid him stretched out, and he split to the knob of his gullet.¹⁸

Through the story, he becomes a hero in the town. The locals revere him. Women come to visit him at Flaherty’s shebeen bearing gifts. Though Pegeen is engaged to Shawn Keogh, she falls in love with Christy Mahon, having been enchanted by his supposed heroism. She advised her father to employ Christy as a pot boy in the pub because, with him by her side, she would no longer be afraid as he would: “stand along with me and give me courage in the doing of my work.”¹⁹ Widow Quin, a supposed murderer of her husband, who is said to be searching for a new husband, has also shown interest in Christy. She registers him in a local athletic competition featuring racing, leaping, and pitching.

Eventually Christy’s father, Mahon, who was only wounded, tracks him to the shebeen looking for his son. A loud cheering from outside the shebeen made him to look out of the window. He sees his son being praised for winning the athletic competition. Mahon is befuddled. The Widow Quin convinces him that he

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is seeing things. She urges him to go away. As Mahon exits, Christy, Pegeen and the crowd celebrating his victory enters. Later, Mahon re-enters the shebeen. He pounces on his son, beating him. Christy’s father’s presence in the village affected the respect the villagers have for Christy. When the locals realize that Christy has been telling them ‘a gallous story’, they turn on him:

Pegeen: And to think of the coaxing glory we had given him, and he after doing nothing but hitting a soft blow and chasing northward in a sweat of fear. Quit off from this.

Christy: Piteously. You've seen my doings this day, and let you save me from the old man; for why would you be in such a scorch of haste to spur me to destruction now?

Pegeen: It's there your treachery is spurring me, till I'm hard set to think you're the one I'm after lacing in my heart-strings half an hour gone by. To Mahon. Take him on from this, for I think bad the world should see me raging for a Munster liar, and the fool of men.

Mahon: Rise up now to retribution and come on with me.

Crowd: Jeeringly. There's the playboy! There's the lad thought he'd rule the roost in Mayo! Slate him now, mister.²⁰

To regain the respect of the people and also win back Pegeen’s love, he decides to kill his father, this time for real. As Christy and his father start to fight, he chases his father outside the shebeen. He catches up with him and hits him with a loy. He then comes back in hoping to be received warmly by the people. However, to his chagrin, the people turn on him instead of celebrating him as he expected. No one wants to have anything to do with him. Widow Quin urges him to run for his life, but too late. Michael, Philly and Pegeen throw a loop of rope around him trapping his arms and torso. Christy believes that Pegeen should take him back now that he has actually killed his father:

Pegeen: I'll say, a strange man is a marvel, with his mighty talk; but what's a squabble in your back-yard, and the blow of a loy, have taught me that there's a great gap between a gallous story and a dirty deed. To men. Take him from this, or the lot of us will be likely put on trial for his deed to-day.

²⁰ John M. Synge, The Playboy of the Western World (Dublin: Maunsel and Company Ltd, 1907), 117.
Christy: *With horror in his voice.* And it's yourself will send me off, to have a horny-fingered hangman hitching his bloody slip-knots at the butt of my ear.

*Men, pulling rope. Come on, will you?*

*He is pulled down on the floor.*

Christy: *Twisting his legs round the table.* Cut the rope, Pegeen, and I'll quit the lot of you, and live from this out, like the madmen of Keel, eating muck and green weeds on the faces of the cliffs.

Pegeen: And leave us to hang, is it, for a saucy liar, the like of you? *To men.* Take him on, out from this.

Shawn: Pull a twist on his neck and squeeze him so.\(^21\)

They tie Christy and decide to hang him. Then Mahon crawls back into the pub, demanding to know why they are restraining his son. He unties Christy, who then asks whether his father wishes to be killed a third time. The father urges the son to come back with him to their own town. However, Christy will not leave with his father, because according to him, his father will henceforth act like a "gallant captain with his heathen slave."\(^22\) Old Mahon is amazed and delighted by this change in his son. They decide to leave together, but not before Mahon tells the group that he and Christy will talk about the people’s villainy for years to come. Shawn then approaches Pegeen to remind her of their wedding engagement, but she rebuffs him. She starts to cry and lament that she has "lost the only Playboy of the Western World."\(^23\)

Although Pegeen has been confronted with Christy’s fraudulent heroism, it can be argued that she is most likely astounded by her own reactions to his supposed heroic nature. Though it is clear she rejects his “dirty deed” and “gallous story”, nonetheless she probably understands that she has lost “something”, and this is poignantly expressed through her groan in the end. Pegeen’s lamentation could be attributed to the feeling of loss that logically


\(^{22}\) Synge, 131.

\(^{23}\) Synge, 132.
locates Pegeen and by extension the Irish nationalists in that era in the difficult position of loss and self-reflection to which this play requests of them.

In the book *Tragedy and Irish Literature*, Ronan McDonald explores the subject of the tragic through the analysis of some plays, including Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World*. McDonald discusses in-depth the relationship between comedy and tragedy and concludes that: “While comedy espouses a fundamental trust in life, a confidence in the restorative and palliative powers of human communication and social organization, in tragedy the destructive forces are not contained or controlled.”

Incidentally, that element of the “fundamental trust in life” and the element of “confidence in the restorative and palliative powers of human communication and social organization” is what makes the play essentially comic, especially in terms of its affirmation of life’s creative force and the vital impulse. McDonald, however, seems to build on a rather simplistic view of both the tragic and comic, opposing them as one would oppose sadness and happiness; whereas, as it was already sufficiently discussed in the previous pages in this thesis, the comic occurs sometimes in dual ways, sometimes direct and linear, sometimes in contrast. The comic occurs in a dynamic manifestation of release and contention, in which both aspects reaffirm each other and give the whole its full meaning.

From the early years of the Abbey Theatre, Irish drama has always remained conscious of its relation to the life of the nation. To most of the early Irish literary icons that inaugurated the Abbey Theatre in 1904, it was not only an act of cultural nationalism but also one of political responsiveness. In the same vein, many of the earlier audience that trooped to the Abbey Theatre since that inauguration by W.B Yeats and Lady Augusta Gregory acted on the political and cultural inspiration they received from nights at the Abbey. Declan Kiberd in *Inventing Ireland: The literature of the Modern Nation* suggests that: “It was the grand destiny of Yeats’ generation to make Ireland once again interesting to the

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Irish, after centuries of enforced provincialism following the collapse of the Gaelic order in 1601.”

This is in the background of the crude representation of the Irish character in nineteen century theatrical works, when the tendency was to resort to stage Irish effects to rollicking notes and in the words of Kiberd, “Paddy Whackery.” The Irish national theatre movement was without doubt an integral part of that broader cultural nationalism of the turn of the century which sought to create for a long-colonized Ireland its own national identity.

The plays and players in many theatres in Ireland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were almost always English in origin or influence. Although some of these playwrights were Irish-born, they concentrated their artistic interest mainly on issues pertaining to London, albeit not without the inclusion of one or two romantic characters. However, the representation of these characters and even the themes of their dramas were not always a favourable representation of the Irish persona. For example, in the nineteenth century Dion Boucicault wrote plays on Irish subjects, but the mainstay of most of his plays was a lovable, patriotic ‘stage Irishman’ whose charming but sentimental buffoonery rather compromised the ambitions of the nationalistic Irish who were, at the same time, working assiduously to free themselves of such stereotyping.

The concomitant effect of this is clear when considered alongside the fact that, at the heart of the relationship between England and Ireland then were images circulated through history, travel writings, cartoons, and plays which suggested the inferiority of the Irish or their infantile dependency. To this end, late nineteenth century and early twentieth century Irish nationalist intellectuals who were alert to the implications of such negative representations worked assiduously to reverse the trend.

In *The Politics of Irish Drama: Plays in Context from Boucicault to Friel* (1999), Nicholas Grene begins his insightful and well annotated exploration of Irish drama and the political contexts by quoting from different instances in Irish

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theatrical history, one of which was an extract from the 1897 manifesto for the Irish Literary Theatre: “We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism. We are confident of the support of all Irish people, who are weary of misrepresentation.” The phrase “weary of misrepresentation” as implied refers to the early Irish theatre as being directed towards addressing the issue of the stereotypical representation of the Irish in English arts as apes, drunkards, mystics, or some combination of all three.

However, when The Playboy of the Western World premiered at The Abbey Theatre in 1907, the play caused a riot. On January 26, 1907, the first performance of the play at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin was disrupted by noises, foot stamping and shouting from angry audience members. During the week of performances that followed, the disturbances escalated as tin trumpets were blown, fights broke out, police were summoned, and protesters were ejected or arrested. Some of the protesters were reacting to the nature of the play’s language.

The argument can be made that Synge’s play met with hostility because of its seeming slight to Irish country people. The inaugural performance of The Playboy of the Western World that caused much furore came about probably because the audience thought it was slanderous to Irish women or most importantly, perhaps because they thought that what Synge’s play implied was that it is a heroic thing to kill one’s father. Either way, even before the opening night, there were indications of some level of concern with Synge’s affairs from the nationalists. The French undertone of the themes of his earlier plays especially In the Shadow of the Glen is emotive. They took umbrage at a plotline that sees a frustrated young Irish wife walk away from her marriage and home in the Wicklow mountains into the arms of a tramp whose name she doesn’t even know.

It was an era when Irish nationalists identified the part of the country that Synge decides to set his play, as largely uncorrupted by alien ways of the departing colonialists, and thus this part of Ireland is regarded as the repository of Irish ancient language, culture, and spiritual values. Apparently, this was the reason that Synge decided to travel to the Island and live there for a while, near a village on the coast of Mayo, closer to a soon-to-become-mythical Ireland. According to Shaun Richards, by doing so the author seems to “[...] conform to the Literary Revival’s preference for an idealized west of Ireland location, whose distance from the anglicized east had preserved Irish authenticity, and so enabled the embryonic nation-state to draw its vitality from that hidden spring.”

Synge first took a trip to Inis Meáin, one of the Aran Islands in 1898 and returned there many times observing and listening to the people. He admired the resilience and deep-rooted nature of the Inis Meáin people. He loved the land so much and acknowledged that some of his experiences there gave him the inspiration for his contribution to the Irish Revival. In *The Aran Islands* (1907), Synge highlights the “primitive” as he experienced it on the three islands. He refers to the people as “natural” people and insists in the “Introduction” that he is “inventing nothing changing nothing essential” in his descriptions of them. It is instructive that in *The Aran Islands*, Synge’s image is not that of a weak people, as he depicts the island people as very powerful, in particular, through his descriptions of the island women.

Incidentally, the idea of the subjective might be invoked especially in terms of some of the language used by Synge in his description of the Islanders, as some of these could be considered as tantamount to exotic portrayal of the islanders. Words like the “primitive” and the “natural” people connotes the subjective, debatable, and often problematic in a post/colonial context. Moreover, the inference can be made that by extension, Christy’s delusions of grandeur and self-mastery and his carefree embrace of a desolate future in *The Playboy of the

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Western World are indicative of Synge’s romanticizing of the social and political exclusion and alienation of the people of the Aran Islands. This premise no doubt provides the rationale for the charged relationship of Irish theatre and national politics. Synge’s regard for the people of the Island is never in doubt, in my own opinion, but the community’s deep-rooted interest in its ancestral ways may have been intriguing to Synge. It is clear that Synge’s play is a vivid and fascinating reflection of a national life at that time and an excellent example of the kind of dramatic artistry that will always hold the interest of readers or audiences.

The Carnivalesque in The Playboy of the Western World

There are many elements of Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque in The Playboy of the Western World. Similar to Death and the King’s Horseman, the combination of communal humour ethos and transformative laughter are also evidenced in Synge’s play. These instances of the carnivalesque elements are in the form of the social, political, cultural protest and resistance to the serious, dogmatic, and authoritarian world. At the start of the play, the action mostly takes place in a public house referred to as shebeen (Irish: sibín), a social meeting venue for the community. The climax of the play coincides with the day on which the fair is celebrated in the town. Both the shebeen and the fair ground are considered as carnival platforms where the Mayo village community converge.

At the heart of the transformative laughter of the carnivalesque in The Playboy of the Western World is the quasi-celebration of the individual body and the collective. Therefore, Christy’s wandering into the Mayo village avails him the ideal platform for his pseudo-transformation. Considering that Bakhtin conceives of carnival as a form of resistance, therefore, in accepting a strange character with “a gallows story” into their midst, the townsfolk’s transformation connotes a reappraisal of their erstwhile reliance on the hegemonic influences in their lives, both in the individual frame and also from a postcolonial perspective. Michael Gardiner suggests that: “Mocking laughter and a kind of ‘gallows humour’ were also felt to be effective and appropriate methods of attacking the status quo.”

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In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin suggests the carnival as an unofficial world, a world parallel to and often in opposition to the traditional order. The grotesque imagery of the carnivalesque is imbued with images of exaggeration, hyperbole, and excess. The productive and energising element of the grotesque body exemplified a direct opposition to the formal order. Hence, the body is according to Bakhtin: “a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body.”

In its zeal to engage in the task or the ensuing action, the grotesque descriptions enable a vivid and sensational communication between the body and the world, and this contributes to the upturning of the old and the emergence of the new.

The carnivalesque in *The Playboy of the Western World* engenders the subversion of hierarchies through the implicit awareness and deployment of the grotesque and the illicit. This life-affirming and death-embracing aspects of the carnivalesque is negotiated in the play through spectacle, celebration, role reversal, grotesque imagery, mirrors, and ambivalent laughter in both the actions and the language of the characters. The language and action and the strained interactions between Pegeen and Widow Quin, being the two main female characters in the play provides a representational space for facilitating an important aspect of carnivalesque attributes of the play. The antagonism between them has all the elements of the carnivalesque as Bakhtin proposed, especially in terms of how the hierarchal precedence the two seems to have been suspended. The Rabelaisian is also exemplified in their language and behaviour, and this manifests as a form of caustic humour. When the Widow Quin calls on Christy to come with her, Pegeen replies firmly:

Pegeen: *To Christy*. Don't heed her. Tell her to go into her pigsty and not plague us here.
Widow Quin: I'm going; but he'll come with me.
Pegeen: *Shaking him*. Are you dumb, young fellow?
Christy: *Timidly, to Widow Quin*. God increase you; but I'm pot-boy in this place, and it's here I'd liefer stay.33

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Synge suggests that the wildness in language and action of the Irish peasantry can be attributed to “their extraordinary good points of all kinds, to the richness of their nature.” The point Synge is making here is in terms of the important value of the natural link between the people and their natural environment, which in turn serves to preserve the originality of their language. This natural link is, according to Bakhtin’s theory, encapsulated in the wild language due to the carnival’s all-embracing force. In the long run, whether willingly or unwillingly, everyone succumbs to its power. The reason for everyone’s submission is, according to Bakhtin, because: “Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it.”

The volatile nature of the Mayo villagers is consistent with their role as carnival organisers and with the sometimes-chaotic atmosphere that prevails at carnival time. Hence, the sudden and unanimous termination of Christy’s kingdom is followed by the extreme suggestion to turn him over to the “peelers”. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, i.e. the laws of its own freedom. The carnival, equally, undermines political control, usurping official roles for the duration of the carnival: “Civil and social ceremonies and rituals took on a comic aspect as clowns and fools, constant participants in these festivals, mimicked serious rituals.”

One of the core elements of the carnivalesque according to Bakhtin is to be discerned in the “fool” persona of a character. The trickster character is a carnival King who wears the mask of the fool in order to encourage the temporary “crossing of boundaries.” The primary carnivalistic act is, according to Bakhtin: “the mock crowning and subsequent de-crowning of a carnival king.” The phase is marked by familiarity and freedom, because an inversion of the ordinary social

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hierarchy has taken place and the “norms and prohibitions of usual life” are suspended so that an “atmosphere of freedom, frankness and familiarity”\textsuperscript{38} reigns. Bakhtin further suggests that “a signal is given to each and every one to play the fool and madman as he pleases.”\textsuperscript{39}

The fool characteristics are discernible in Christy, especially in terms of his ‘crowning’ and ‘uncrowning’ by the people. In Synge: The Medieval and the Grotesque, Toni O’Brien Johnson argues that Synge’s use of the literary fool can be recognized in three ways. The fool is closer to nature than the ‘insiders’, and is instinctive, vital and impulsive. The fool is irrational, which on the one hand leads others to admire his/her visionary ability to see into the heart of things, but on the other, to fear this madness and thus reject him/her, and lastly, Johnson notes that the fool remains an outsider.”\textsuperscript{40}

Christy as the “fool” or the “madman” according to Bakhtin’s carnival concept, and which Johnson described above, is exemplified in his action and utterances by the end of Act 1: “It’s great luck and company I’ve won me in the end of time-two fine women fighting for the likes of me-till I’m thinking this night wasn’t I a foolish fellow not to kill my father in the years gone by”\textsuperscript{41} and also in Act 2: “Didn’t I know I was rightly handsome.”\textsuperscript{42} Carried away by his supposed success, Christy exaggerates his achievements. The comic exaggeration in Christy’s recounting of his tale grows in gory detail each time he retells his story, escalating from a “blow of the loy that cracks the skull”, to “a blow that split him to the gullet”\textsuperscript{43} and finally to a blow that “divided him to the trouser belt”.\textsuperscript{44} The humour in this scene is in carnivalesque fashion made apparent when his father appears to punch holes in his tale.

\textsuperscript{38} Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1984), 153.
\textsuperscript{39} Bakhtin, 246.
\textsuperscript{41} John M. Synge, The Playboy of the Western World (Dublin: Maunsel and Company Ltd, 1907), 43.
\textsuperscript{42} Synge, 45.
\textsuperscript{43} Synge, 54.
\textsuperscript{44} Synge, 72.
The arrival into the town of Old Mahon, Christy’s father, with his grotesquely bloody bandaged head, not only unmarks Christy as no hero that the people had thought him to be, but also forces the son to face the consequences of the difference between: “a gallous story and a dirty deed.” Christy’s only course of action to save his face in the community is to “kill” his father a second time. This verges on Bakhtin’s idea of the conflation of fantasy and reality, also an important carnivalesque comic element. The grotesque narrative of Christy’s carnivalesque fantasy and his reality is evident especially when the character, in frustration blurted out to his father: “[a]re you coming to be killed a third time or what ails you now?”

The carnivalesque in *The Playboy of the Western World* is apprehensible in the Mayo villagers’ attitude to the issue of parricide, especially taking into consideration that they seem comfortable to accept into their fold somebody who had recently committed a heinous crime. The issue of the attitude of the villagers in this regard may be summed up in the statement by Patricia Meyer Spacks that: “one aspect of *The Playboy* that seems disturbing is the curious tone with which it treats the theme of patricide.” The parricide theme in question, with the attendant element of the subversion of authority, effectively situates the carnivalesque as an important element to the understanding of the play. Carnivalesque images like the ones that have been discussed above that make use of the “grotesque” idea in order to transgress the boundaries of social groups can also be found to be operating in another of the case studies. The carnivalesque power for conflicting dichotomy in group dynamics of in-group and out-group interests is the focus of the next section on a carnivalesque reading of *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*.

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46 Synge, 130.
**Styles’ Carnivalesque Nature and the Concept of Freedom**

Styles considers life at the Ford factory as not being a life that is worth living. He believes he is not a man if he can be ordered around by his bosses all day in the factory. His situation is akin to double jeopardy, being shoddily treated as a citizen in the society, yet still be badly treated at work. Styles believes that he must find a means to assert his humanity in order to become “human” within a system that considers him subhuman. However, as hard as he works, as soon as he is about to attain a position of respect or even promotion, the colour of his skin would take him back to a position of nobody, that of a ghost. For Styles, removing himself from the factory will allow him to achieve his humanity.

Styles concludes that starting his own job is a condition for the realization of what defines a man, and he proceeds to inform his father: “Daddy, if I could stand on my own two feet and not be somebody else’s tool, I’d some respect for myself. I’d be a man.”48 This preliminary important definition of a man is the means by which the play explores difficult issues with the possibilities of the comic motif. The story works to convey the movement of survival and the vital dynamic that reinforces the centrality of life. However, the seemingly simple act of starting a photography studio is not as simple as he thought, especially for a ‘black’ person in the apartheid-era South Africa, as Styles role-plays a caricature of the process that he had to endure in order to start his photography business:

> Your application has been received and is being considered.” A month later, “The matter is receiving the serious consideration of the Board.”, another month, “Your application is now on the director’s table.” I nearly gave up, friends. But one day, a knock at the door, the postman! had to sign for a registered letter. “We are pleased to inform you……49

The above passage is infused with a comic element, one that is posited rather in terms of the character’s resolve to rise above his impediments. The passage details the steps that Styles has to go through to assert his humanity, in terms being able to “own a place that he can call his own”, his: “strong room of dreams.”

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The dreamers? My people. The simple people, who you never find mentioned in the history books, who never gets statues erected to them, or monuments commemorating their great deeds.50

Styles seems bent on achieving at least the essential bare form of human dignity. If through oppression, the basic human dignity that is essential to life has been denied a people because of their skin colour, like Styles, the people affected may strive to assert their humanity in a dignified manner:

We own nothing except this world and its laws, allows us nothing, except ourselves. There is nothing we can leave behind when we die, except the memory of ourselves.51

The ability to leave a memory of oneself on earth may be regarded as a justifiable definition of a person. That is why the work of a photographer is in this sense particularly important, especially in the context of the photograph being considered as immortalizing the faces and identities of those who otherwise would have been forgotten. Therefore, when Sizwe appears in the studio, Styles recognizes the tenacity in the man, that this is a person who is determined to beat the odds in life. Styles describes the process by which he distinguishes this attitude:

I get two types of knock here. When I hear.... *knocks solemnly on the table .......* I don’t even look up, man. Funeral parlour is next door. But when I hear.... *energetic rap on the table.... he laughs ....* that’s my sound, and I shout, ‘Come in!’

In walked a chap, full of smiles, little parcel under his arm. I can still see him, man!

*Styles acts both roles.*

Mr. Styles?
I said: ‘Come in!’

‘Mr. Styles, I have come to take a snap, Mr. Styles.’

I said: ‘Sit down! Sit down, my friend!’

‘No, Mr. Styles. I want to take the snap standing. *Barely containing his suppressed excitement and happiness.* Mr. Styles, take the card, please!’

50 Fugard, *Sizwe*, 159.
51 Fugard, 163.
I said: Certainly, friend.\(^{52}\)

The assertive aspiration of the passage suggests an optimism that is pervasive, in the dynamic impulse of the possibilities of the actions of both characters. In his “Strong room of dreams”, Styles talks to Sizwe in the language of hope. By intuition, Styles understands that Sizwe has come to fulfil his “dream” and proceeds to welcome him cordially. However, the conversation between Styles and Sizwe (Man) reveals Sizwe’s inner frame of mind. Although he is determined, he hesitates momentarily:

Man: Mr. Styles?
Styles: That’s me. Come in! You have come to take a card?
Man: Snap.
Styles: Yes, a card. Have you got a deposit?
Man: Yes.
Styles: Good. Let me take your name down. You see, you pay deposit now, and when you come for the card, you pay the rest.
Man: Yes.
Styles: To his desk and a black book for names and address. What is your name? The man hesitates, as if not sure of himself.
Your name please?
Pause.
Come on, my friend. You must surely have a name?
Man: Pulling himself together, but still very nervous. Robert Zwelinzima.
Styles: Writing. Robert zwelinzima. Address?
Man: Swallowing. Fifty, Mapija Street.
Styles: Writes, then pauses. Fifty, Mapija?
Man: Yes.\(^{53}\)

As Styles takes the photographs, he encouraged Sizwe to lift up his slumped shoulders and smile. He is encouraged not to drop the role play of seeming happiness, because this image is vital to the characters embodiment of hope.

Come on Robert! You want your wife to get a card with her husband looking like he has got all the worries in the world on his back? What

\(^{52}\) Athol Fugard, *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* in *Township Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 160.

\(^{53}\) Fugard, 164.
will she think? My poor husband is in trouble! You must smile! Robert shamefacedly relaxes a little and starts to smile.54

The element of survival and the vitality of the positive action of name-switching puts the idea of Bergson and Langer’s concept of élan vital at the nucleus of the play. This is premised on the idea of the vital instinct inevitably kicking in the face of the possibility of the jeopardy to one’s humanity. There is less room for the inert speculations of the intellect, as life must be secured. Survival as the pulse of life is the main reason that Buntu persuades Sizwe to renounce his identity, as a fair price to pay in order to stay alive.

According to Brink, Fugard is emphatic about what survival entails, shedding important light on Sizwe’s ending: “Survival can involve betrayal of everything – belief, values, ideals – except Life itself.”55 However, in order to be preserved, life has to be reduced to its bare forms, especially when faced with an uncompromising choice of losing one’s livelihood which may lead to one’s death, or “dying” to live by losing one’s identity to be alive. Given the circumstances, to live and to survive are now confounded, and their meanings overlap. In the world of the play, survival is the possible option to guarantee life. The name-switching scene as an identity challenging moment can be illustrated in psychoanalytic terms as a compulsive reaction by the victim of a repressed traumatic memory. The desire to circumvent a repressed memory, according to Freud, can be actualised through dream. Sizwe Bansi desires a new name and dreams of a better life. His “dream” of a better future than the one he has presently is the motivating factor and which makes him to agree to the name change. On entering Styles’ studio for the first time, the dream is written all over his being, making Styles who has never met him before to exclaim “A Dream”.56

Sizwe’s dream is further given traction in the following scene, when he becomes convinced through a movie that he is: “Mr. Robert Zwelinzima, man about town, future head of Feltex, walking through the city of the future.”57 This

54 Athol Fugard, Sizwe Bansi is Dead in Township Plays (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 164. 
Fugard, Sizwe, 166. 
55 Brink, No Way Out, 446. 
56 Fugard, Sizwe, 164. 
57 Fugard, 168.
mythic ‘dream’ and the certainty of a place in an envisioned idealistic world are guaranteed by the instrumentality of Styles’ camera. The characters’ optimism, although somehow PANGLOSSIAN, nonetheless propels their imagination from the impossible to the attainable. As Sizwe finishes narrating to his wife how he came about his new name in the letter, the flashback scene ends with a switch back to Styles’ studio, with the stage directions indicating that: As he finishes the letter, Sizwe returns to the pose of the photo. Styles’ Photographic Studio. Styles is behind the camera.58

Styles finally takes the photograph of Sizwe as Robert Zwelinzima. The “new-born” man gives a smile to the photographer. The smile is fixed in “time and space” as according to the stage directions, the “Camera flash and blackout”, thus ending the play. The smile at the end of the scene is not without importance. On the one hand, it hints at the force and importance of affirming life even amidst the most precarious conditions. On the other hand, it echoes another smile, an affirmative smile that Buntu said was given by the dead Robert as a sign of approval of the change of identities: “Look, brother, Robert Zwelinzima, that poor bastard out there in the alleyway, if there are ghosts, he is smiling tonight. He is here, with us, and he’s saying: ‘Good luck, Sizwe! I hope it works.’ He’s a brother, man.”59

“Gentlemen, old Bradley says this Ford is a big bastard”: Laughing at the Oppressor in Sizwe Bansi Is Dead

Up to this point, this chapter has focused on specific instances of the carnivalesque and vitalism in the three case studies. This section looks at an example of where this comedy reclaims it political potency, enabling a ‘writing back’ to empire or helping the individual to navigate the situation of oppression. It introduces critical race theory as a tool to connect the postcolonial discourses of Chapter Three with this chapter’s focus on comedy in the public sphere, where these layered negotiations point toward Section Two of the dissertation.

58 Fugard, Sizwe, 192.
59 Fugard, 191.
Styles spends a considerable amount of time at the beginning of the drama telling the story of his life, starting with his decision to become a photographer to the chagrin of his father. He recounts his days of working in a car factory owned by the Ford family. In a long but amusing monologue, he recreates scenes from the car factory, embellishing his story with anecdotes about his current business. Styles’ action in this scene, and those of Buntu and Sizwe Bansi later on in the play, is a typical example of how the play utilizes the in-group versus the out-group signifiers for effective communication. Nevertheless, the statements are laden with humour-coded connotations that allow the characters to communicate their frustration while “laughing” at the “oppressors”.

As it has been suggested in many instances in this dissertation, while humour is able to bring people together, create solidarity, and build an identity within groups, it also has the propensity to instigate social distance. Also, as already discussed in Chapter Two, Rose Laub Coser’s theories on humour strategies and the social function of laughter is applicable here. Rose Laub Coser argues that: “to laugh, or to occasion laughter through humour and wit, is to invite those present to come closer. Laughter and humour are indeed like an invitation, be it an invitation for dinner, or an invitation to start a conversation, it aims at decreasing social distance.”

Coser’s position here is a follow up to her first paper on humour that is based on the microsociological studies of humour in a hospital ward in which she looked at the patterns of laughter during staff meetings. The study showed how jokes and the direction of joking has the proclivity to reflect social hierarchy. Coser’s study concludes that the manner of joking, instances of ‘joking down’ or ‘joking about’ helps to maintain the social order, enforce certain patterns of relating and behaving and keeps people “in their place”.

Giselinde Kuipers noted the significance of Coser’s study, but also added that, indeed, “The hierarchy building function of humour, with the associated correlation between status and successful humour production, has been noted in

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various other studies (Pizzini 1991; Robinson and Smith-Lovin 2001; Sayre 2001).” Therefore, it can be argued that between Coser’s two papers on the subject and various studies by other commentators, what is apparent is the utility of humour in terms of combining the seemingly contradictory functions of hierarchy building, tension management, exclusionary possibilities and solidarity affirming potentials. However, because this sense of solidarity often rests on the assumed presence of at least the rudiments of an already existing sense of identification, the kind of laughter employed by the characters in Sizwe Bansi Is Dead is effective once the reader is aware or understands the basic principles of such joking mechanism. From a race perspective, apart from serving as a means of excluding the white group favoured by the apartheid policy, it also helps to strengthen a sense of cohesion for the black factory workers and other black characters in the play.

Therefore, because of the issues of racial segregation and apartheid that are the predominant themes in the play, critical race theory can be considered as an appropriate framework through which the issues in Sizwe Bansi Is Dead can be analyzed, helping to bridge the history of comedy, the carnivalesque, and the postcolonial. This is in line with the argument by Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, especially their emphasis on the importance of context within critical race theory and the considerations of the lived experiences of marginalized peoples. They posit that: “Unlike traditional civil rights, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law.”

Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. suggests that for many critical race scholars, resisting racial oppression is a defining characteristic of the approach. Crenshaw et al. argue that: “Although Critical race scholarship differs in object, argument, accent, and emphasis, it is nevertheless unified by two common interests,

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namely, to “understand how a regime of white supremacy and its subordination of people of colour have been created and maintained” and to not only recognize “the vexed bond between law and racial power but to change it.” The concept of Critical race theory originated in the United States, and it is primarily concerned with studying racism, how it was created, wielded and is being currently maintained. It seeks to proffer avenues for reshaping power relations with the ultimate goal of understanding the imbalances within the society.

Critical race theory argues that race, instead of being biologically grounded and natural, is a socially constructed concept that only functions to maintain the interests of the white population that constructed it. Daniel G. Solórzano and Tara J. Yosso suggests that: “A critical race theory challenges ahistoricism and the unidisciplinary focus of most analyses and insists on analyzing race and racism by placing them in both historical and contemporary contexts.” Robin Barnes argues for the acknowledgment of critical race theory, especially from the perspective of viewpoints. Barnes opines that: “Critical race theorists are attempting to integrate their experiential knowledge, drawn from a shared history as ‘other’, with their ongoing struggles to transform a world deteriorating under the albatross of racial hegemony.” Referring particularly to the context of race relations in the United States, Coello, et all, suggest that: “CRT investigates the assumptions behind the call for equal rights and seeks to re-evaluate and transform stagnant notions of equality, which serve to hide important differences of power between groups. It goes beyond traditional civil rights and ethnic discourses to place these relationships in economical, historical, social, and group contexts.”

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Therefore, in the consideration of pertinent factors of economy, history and race as exemplified by Coello et al., in the United States’ context, and drawing on Barnes’ suggestion of the need to inculcate the concept of viewpoints in approaching perspectives, there is a need, according to both theorists, for fundamental change in the ways we think and construct knowledge about race relations. This is because, according to Barnes, both minority cultural viewpoints differ from white cultural viewpoints, and therefore require a delineation of the complex set of social interactions through which minority consciousness has developed. Barnes argues further that this is imperative because: “Distinguishing the consciousness of racial minorities requires acknowledgment of the feelings and intangible modes of perception unique to those who have historically been socially, structurally, and intellectually marginalized in the United States.”

In the South African context, the implication and application of this theory implies that the concept of subordinate race as a major factor foregrounds the apartheid policy as a socially constructed phenomenon. Based on the suggestions above, applying critical race theory as a basis to understanding the implications of the systemic oppression of black people in South Africa implies understanding the important differences of power between racial groups in the former apartheid enclave. It is also crucial to fully understand the primacy of racism as an inevitable or particularly important aspect of inequity of the apartheid policy in South Africa. It is therefore imperative to acknowledge this in any empirical, personal, and political aspect of critical race scholarship.

Consequently, the critical race theory vista helps to question the morality of the unjustifiable economic disparities that still exist today in South Africa, even after over thirty years of dismantling the apartheid policy. It also enables a detailed comprehension of the despicable situation, the pain, and the endurance of the characters in the play, and by extension, the plight of the larger black South African population. Therefore, understanding the critical race theory implication

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68 The writers pointed out that the paper was a literature review of articles published from 1992 to 2002 in the American Journal of Health Education using critical race theory as a lens for the analysis of culture differences in healthcare.

in the play's analysis enables the reader/audience to appreciate the stoicism behind the character's humour, while the in-group versus the out-group signifier suggestion by Coser allows the humour-coded connotations by the characters to be effectively communicated to the reader/audience, as both the characters and reader/audience 'laugh' at the oppressors, with the oppressors none the wiser.

*Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* is suffused with humour despite the difficulties encountered by its characters. This is exemplified in the scene where Sizwe balks at losing his name, with the humour in the imagined scenario accentuated when Buntu momentarily calls the now newly named Robert by his old name Sizwe. Affirming his new identity, Robert corrects Buntu to get his name and new identity right, to which Buntu replies angrily: “All right! Robert, John, Athol, Winston .... Shit on names, man! To hell with them if in exchange you can get a piece of bread for your stomach and a blanket in winter.” This piece of information is important for two reasons. One, life is once again defined in terms of the most basic form of survival that the apartheid system has cast over black South Africans. Their existence is assured by “a piece of bread” and “a blanket in winter.” Secondly, Buntu’s usage real names like Athol, John and Winston, is probably to give the play a kind of authorial stamp that sets it in the vicinity or community where those names hails from. The names as “fictitious” as they might be assumed to be, are also “real” in that some people in the world have them.

Fugard also used the names to universalise the experiences of the characters in the play, in order for the reader/audience to be able to relate with the characters’ situation. People with similar names like the ones above have had to endure years of humiliation under the apartheid system, with many having to swallow their pride and be subservient to their fellow white citizens due to their desperation. This is exemplified as Buntu momentarily, and probably out of frustration laments: “Understand me, brother, I’m not saying that pride isn’t a way, for us. What I’m saying is shit on our pride if we only bluff ourselves that we are men.”

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Coser’s humour-coded connotations of insider in-group versus outsider out-group hierarchical structure discussed in chapter two is found to be operating as the characters “invites” the reader/audience to join in ‘laughing’ at the oppressor. This is exemplified sarcastically in the scene of the preparation for the Ford factory owner’s visit. After years of not providing the black workers the safety equipment required for the job, suddenly, because of the impending visit, the safety equipment is hurriedly provided by the managers. Safety lines that had faded a long time ago are being drawn along safe zones in the factory, and safety precautions are written conspicuously just to give a veneer of normalcy. So, when Styles’ manager, Baas Bradley calls Styles to translate the instructions, it becomes an opportunity for him to communicate his ridicule of his bosses to his fellow workers.

Styles: General Foreman Mr ‘Baas’ Bradley called me.

“Styles!”

“Yes, sir.”

“Come translate.”

“Yes, sir!”

Styles pulls out a chair. Mr ‘Baas’ Bradley speaks on one side; Styles translates on the other.

“Tell the boys in your language, that this is a very big day in their lives.”

“Gentlemen, this old fool says this is a hell of a big day in our lives.”

Styles jokingly communicates a “message” to his fellow black workers as he translates the words of Bradley. He uses materials of dissent contextualized within a cognitive frame that only he and the workers understands, conveniently excluding Bradley. This type of joking is, according to Emmanuel De Vienne, remarkable by its inescapable application, both moral and functional. This characteristic is intricately linked to the frame of interaction that joking is built upon. Though the joke follows conventional patterns on which jokes are defined, it is also able to produce profound destabilization of the hierarchy order.

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First, Styles sets the parameters of the joke by starting the translation with a signifying code of respect. He used the word “Gentlemen”, instead of using the word “boys”. The word boys in this context is a form of insult used by Bradley and other white South Africans to denigrate and infantilize black men. Obviously, Styles and his fellow black workers understands Bradley’s obnoxious intention, therefore, by referring to them as Gentlemen, Styles drops the first hint of the joke that is on Bradley. Also, for Styles, this opportunity to translate his boss’s words presents itself as a means of vengeance through which he can express his contempt for the racist policy that makes his language an anathema.74

The interaction between Baas Bradley, the impudent factory boss, and Styles, the rebellious employee, continues onward in the scene, with Styles now using the opportunity of the translation to also destabilize the hierarchical position that the apartheid policy puts Bradley. This is encapsulated in the momentary reversal of white and black roles, as Styles continues to make Bradley the butt of his jokes using codified inferences in his native language Xhosa. By simply standing erect while Bradley is “kneeling there on the floor”, or by “wearing a mask of smiles”, these connotative actions and their perception is crucial to the racial power play at work in the scene.

When Styles announced that: “We were watching them. Nobody was watching us,”75 the role reversal is complete as the erstwhile subjects have now switched roles to become master exemplifying how social control and social power are organized in part through surveillance strategies. This is exemplified in the concept of panopticon and how it can be used for internalized coercion achieved through constant observation. This idea appears in theories propagated by Foucault and the architectural theories of surveillance often involving physical and spatial centralised mechanisms of watching over subjects.76 According to

75 Athol Fugard, Sizwe Bansi is Dead in Township plays (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 154.
76 Foucault’s theory examines the relationship between power and knowledge, and how these can be used as a form of social control, using institutions within any society. Jeremy Bentham’s nineteenth-century prison reforms impacted on Foucault’s theoretical postulations regarding forms of control. In the “Panopticon”, Bentham contends that an ideal prison should be structured in such a way that cells
Foucault, “the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.”

The effect of not being watched probably makes the black workers relax and engage in laughter. For example, after Styles jokingly communicated to them his message of dissent: “Gentlemen, this old fool says this is a hell of a big day in our lives.”

The stage directions indicated that “The men laughed” and Styles continued:

They are happy to hear that, sir.
“Tell the boys that Mr Henry Ford the Second, the owner of this place, is going to visit us. Tell them Mr Ford is the big Baas. He owns the plant and everything in it.”

Gentlemen, old Bradley says this Ford is a big bastard. He owns everything in this building, which means you as well.

A voice came out of the crowd: “Is he a bigger fool than Bradley?”

They’re asking, sir, is he bigger than you? “Certainly … blustering … certainly. He is a very big baas. He’s a … groping for words … he’s a Makulu Baas.”

I loved that one!
Mr “Baas” Bradley says most certainly Mr Ford is bigger than him. In fact, Mr Ford is the grandmother baas of them all … that’s what he said to me.

“Styles, tell the boys that when Mr Henry Ford comes into the plant I want them all to look happy. We will slow down the speed of the line so that they can sing and smile while they are working.”

Gentlemen, he says that when the door opens, and his grandmother walks in you must see to it that you are wearing a mask of smiles. Hide your true feelings, brothers. You must sing the joyous songs of the days of old before we had fools like this one next to me to worry about. To Bradley. Yes, sir!

“Say to them, Styles, that they must try to impress Mr Henry Ford that they are better than those monkeys in his own country, those niggers in Harlem who know nothing but strike, strike.”

would be open to a central tower. Prisoners in the cells are constantly confronted by the panoptic tower, which has been engineered to see all of them without them having the opportunity to see the watcher. The idea is for the prisoner to believe that the personnel in the tower can watch them any time.

Yo! I liked that one too.

Gentlemen, he says we must remember, when Mr Ford walks in, that we are South African monkeys, not American monkeys. South African monkeys are much better trained … Before I could even finish, a voice was shouting out of the crowd.

“He’s talking shit!” I had to be careful!

*Servile and full of smiles as he turns back to Bradley.*

No, sir! The men say they are much too happy to behave like those American monkeys.78

Bradley’s lack of respect for the Black factory workers is evident, even as he luxuriates in the knowledge of the apartheid policy’s disempowerment of the black workers. The lack of respect is further demonstrated as he gives instructions to Style that he and his fellow black workers should be well behaved in order to prove to Mr. Henry Ford that they are better than: “those monkeys in his country, those niggers in Harlem who know nothing but strike, strike.” His lack of respect for them is further exemplified in his ironical behest that Styles and his co-workers should display their supposed contentment by singing and dancing whilst working, but which Styles translated as “mask of smile”.

This kind of insolence by the colonial authorities’ attitude of disparaging the ‘Other’ is similar to the attitude of the Pilkings in *Death and the King’s Horseman*. Mr Bradley gets away with referring to the black workers in Harlem as monkeys and he covertly extends the same degrading characterization to Styles; after all, the people in Harlem that he is referring to are black people like Styles and his colleagues. Bradley assumes that he can use the ‘N’ word flippantly because of his privileged position. Bradley does not seem to have any qualms about referring to the shoddy treatment of black people, albeit his language is ensconced in derogatory conjectures. There is also the racist impression that black people cannot demand their rights, and the fact that the black workers in Harlem can get involved in strikes irritates Bradley. What Styles is able to communicate to his audience is that it is time that Black South Africans organized strikes of their own, because apparently black people’s involvement in

strikes in Harlem is a pointer to the fact of their relatively more empowered status compared to their counterparts in South Africa.

The humour in the scene is built up amidst the violence and horror of discrimination and the creative intervention of the carnivalesque called upon to negotiate the biopolitical scenarios in the play. In the lines above, it is clear that Styles redirects the monkey slur back at Bradley and by extension the visiting Mr. Ford. To Styles, and by extension, the audience, the unsaid seems to be: “This man Bass Bradley giving the instructions obviously thinks that I am a monkey, but I know I’m not, and by extension, you reading this play, or watching this performance know I’m not, but now that we have both (me and you) established the fact that he is in fact the real monkey, ha, ha ha, how funny is that, the joke is on Bradley.”

This “means of dissent” is used to effect here and can be employed by the intended target of a joke to reverse the joke back on the person that made the joke. If well executed, it makes the person who initiated the joke become the butt of the reversed joke and would therefore be the one that is laughed at. This is also evidently depicted when Styles humorously urges the workers to sing: “The joyous songs of the days of old before we had fools like this one next to me to worry about.” The fool being referred to here is of course Baas Bradley who does not have a clue that he is being made a subject of derision, but this generates laughter in the other workers (who understands Styles’ intent) and the reader/audience who are privy to his machinations.

In another instance, Styles re-enacts the behaviour of all his immediate bosses at the factory, gloating at the fact that on that day, they are forced to tolerate hardship and smile as he always did. Through role-play, Styles demonstrates how they all scurried into the room one by one, according to their hierarchy in the company. They stumble in one by one, cowering and fidgeting as they are about to welcome Mr. Ford, the owner of the factory: “The General Superintendent, Line Supervisor, General Foreman, Manager, Senior Manager,

Managing Director... the bloody lot were there .... like a pack of puppies!" 80 Styles’ funny and metatheatrical performance in this scene facilitates in-group and out-group dichotomy. Turning the reader or audience into co-sufferers emphasizes the biopolitical implication of the state’s racial policy of apartheid and its subduing tendencies. By association, the reader as in-group member/s are reduced to inferior beings diminished of worth as a human being in the same manner that the state has deprived the characters their dignity because of the colour of their skin.

Denis Walder detects the influence of Grotowski and his ‘theatre of the poor’ on Fugard’s play, and suggests that: “Never was the potential of artistic hybridity, of Grotowskian ‘poor theatre’ in an African context, more convincingly embodied.” 81 He suggests further that this might not be unconnected with the fact that: “Grotowski’s views on theatre chime closely with Fugard’s: always aiming towards a ‘pure’ theatre experience.” 82 There is the propensity for a liminal experience that transcends the actions in the play into the reader’s experience as a way to understand how the effect of discrimination affected lives and created concomitant inequalities. Walder suggests that the play can be considered in the context of the sense of a communal experience, of a strong moment of communion, partially anchored in the experienced reality that is shared, on different levels, between the characters and the reader/audience.

**Conclusion**

The analysis in this chapter has revealed the comic as a dynamic force for rejuvenation, exemplified in the main characters as the archetypical embodiment of the comic hero who deploy the vital spirit and carnivalesque interventions in authority, in order to survive. The survival factor, demonstrated in the vitalism of the affirmative and subversive action of name-switching in *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, the creative endeavours of Elesin in *Death and the King’s Horseman*, and self-

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82 Walder, *Athol*, 53
discovery of Christy in *The Playboy of the Western World* makes Bergson and Langer's “vital impulse” integral to their comic strategies.

This chapter also examined the natural proclivity of the comic character in terms of the celebration of the human will and the potential to overcome the crippling circumstances of deprivation, humiliation, and subjugation. The has been explored in the influence of the Bakhtin’s carnivalistic concept of the combination in the communal ethos of humour and transformative laughter, and the restorative powers of human communication and social organization in the case studies. Bakhtin conceives of carnival as a form of resistance, the quasi-celebration of the individual, and the collective action in the plays can be considered as carnivalesque especially in terms of Bakhtin’s description of the “fool” characteristics. The main characters have been identified as trickster characters, as carnival Kings who wear the mask of the fool in order to encourage the temporary crossing of boundaries.

The next section of the thesis comprising chapters five to seven will examine the intercultural dynamics of representations and humour in contemporary societies. The section will focus on the modern plays as case studies, particularly in terms of their contemporary interpretations and collaborative possibilities.
Section Two

Rethinking Interculturalism: The Dynamics of Representation and Humour in Contemporary Societies
Chapter Five

The Problematic Interculturalism of *Death and the King’s Horseman* at the Royal National Theatre

Interculturalism in artistic productions typically involves theatre practitioners from one part of the world, working with people, cultures, and mythologies of people with a distinct cultural inclination from another part of the world, using innovative and creative ideas to produce new works and also engender cross-cultural contact and collaborations. The well-known practitioners of these types of works includes Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine, Jerzy Grotowski, Ong Keng Sen, Eugenio Barba, and Tadashi Suzuki, among others. With its non-traditional approach, intercultural theatre offers the potentials for ground-breaking, aesthetically exciting productions and new frontiers of creative endeavours. This notwithstanding, there have been reservations concerning some intercultural projects in the past, in terms of either the rights of representation or the modalities of content and ethics. For example, there is the suggestion of the propensity to appropriate other people’s cultural heritages in order to suit Western agendas. Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert recognize this possibility and suggest that: “Even when intercultural exchanges take place within the ‘non-West’, they are often mediated through Western culture and/or economics.”

Interculturalism should always be about authentic human capacity and societal integral development. The intercultural, according to Patrice Pavis, can be considered as the creation of: “a hybrid form, by consciously and voluntarily mixing performance traditions traceable to distinct cultural areas.” Similarly, Julie Holledge and Joanne Tompkins define the intercultural or interculturalism as: “the meeting in the moment of performance of two or more cultural traditions, a

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temporary fusing of styles and/or techniques and/or cultures.” From these definitions, the implication is that such meeting, encounter, and mixing of cultural traditions must always be considered from the perspective of an intent to construct a new theatrical paradigm in order to build a conscious cultural diversity, in which conflict and pluralism is reflected, especially in the collective experiences of a specific time and place.

Wole Soyinka’s *Death and The King’s Horseman* is based on an actual event in 1946, at a Yoruba village from the Western part of Nigeria. In the last two chapters, extensive discussion on the plot and requirement of culture and responsibility before Elesin, and the intervention by the British resident administrative officer, being elements that drive the intercultural conflict in the play have been explored. With the intrinsic cultural significations in *Death and the King’s Horseman*, the dynamic appeal to critics to focus on the implied tragic circumstances of the story in order to memorialize the gravity of the ritual’s importance to the Yoruba worldview is acknowledged. However, it is important that the play’s preoccupation with history, ritual and myth, should, according to Sam Ukala, not just be considered as mere “remembering” of early rural life and the people's tales, as a means of highlighting the ‘tragic’ of which past criticisms of the work are fond, but instead should, according to Isidore Okpewho, be regarded as a (re)definition of purpose in terms of identity contextualization geared towards what he describes as: “a translation of culture.”

Basically, Soyinka’s play is an epitome of the explosive tension arising from the imperial British representative’s intervention in a traditional African cultural practice. This description seems apparent, however, in the expository ‘Author’s Note’ prologue of the play, Soyinka cautions against the “perverse mentality” of ascribing the play with “the facile tag of ‘clash of cultures’.”

author’s attempt to dissuade the reader/director from analyzing the play from a
culture clash perspective notwithstanding, it is nonetheless the case that a clash
between cultures drives much of the conflict within the play. Michael Billington
believes that: “Soyinka is concerned with something far more complex than
colonial incomprehension of indigenous practices. He is really writing about the
tension between the overwhelming life-force and the ritualised custom, about the
power of the spirit world and about the perils of isolation and exile.”
Pragmatically, both the culture clash and life force frames of reference offer a
fascinating ambivalence, contingent on the cultural perspectives of the critic.

The colonial representative’s interdiction of the Elesin and the implied
interference in the natives’ culture notwithstanding, Soyinka’s charge that the
play should not be considered as being solely about the clash of cultures is
compelling and relevant. Past interpretations of some of his works by some
directors in the West have revealed their production’s struggle with the pace,
ambience, and cultural metaphors of the text, probably due to the cultural barriers
or the incompetence of the directors or actors, or probably due to the weakness
of the particular production in its entirety. James Gibbs suggests that: “In many
of the productions of Soyinka’s work, directors have found themselves faced with
difficult and perhaps foreign material, they have often had to overcome their own
ignorance and the incompetence or limitations of their casts and stage crews.
Rarely have the directors had the luxury of interpreting to any substantial extent
or with any degree of clarity.”

This chapter will examine the intercultural elements in Death and the
King’s Horseman, first from a textual analysis perspective, followed with a
detailed performance analysis of the production of the play directed by Rufus
Norris at the Royal National Theatre, London on the 16th of June 2009, which
was the day that I saw the production. This intercultural analysis of Soyinka’s

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8 Michael Billington, The 101 Greatest Plays: From Antiquity to the Present, (London: Faber & Faber,
2015).
10 It is imperative to clarify that this particular analysis in this section is from an intercultural
perspective, because other forms of analysis e.g. from a comic genre, post-colonialist and carnivalesque
etc. perspectives of the play has been explored in the other chapter in this thesis.
text and the Norris production examines the encounter between two different cultures with distinctive ideologies, and the misunderstanding that ensued from the encounter. The insistence by the natives to uphold the sacrosanctity of Elesin’s ritual because of its importance as one of the primary frameworks of Yoruba ideology is at variance with the Pilkings’ assertion of their responsibility being the colonial administrator. This contention by both sides complicates the intercultural ambit of the play.

These dichotomous orientations attests to the play’s roots on issues of occupation, subjugation, colonialism, cultural intervention, and the Eurocentric imperial imagination. For example, the attempted sabotage of the autochthonous Yoruba religion and cultural norms by British colonial authority demands an intercultural appraisal, particularly because of the attempt by the English characters to question the validity of the Yoruba folk/cultural philosophy by considering it solely from a Eurocentric cultural standard. The analysis explores how these have been articulated in the Norris production with specific focus on how the logic of creativity, choice and experimentation generates a unique sort of tension, especially in different aspects of the production.

The production is problematic not only due to the aesthetics of casting, but also the failure to appraise some of the germane socio-cultural issues of contemporary British society pertaining to specific identities and inclusivity. Particularly remarkable is how this production misses the opportunity to explore the identity-linked tensions from the intercultural interactions between the national majority and the ethnic minorities within the environment of its creation. The National Theatre’s production can be considered from the perspectives of an exhibition of the ‘Other’ particularly in relation to the lack of an in-depth historical articulation or depiction of colonialism and the effects of the political, social, and cultural intervention in the affairs of African people. This lack of detail in the production through which the present-day British society may have been evidently informed is a missed opportunity.
Intercultural Elements in *Death and the King’s Horseman*
between Text and Performance

The intercultural interaction paradigm of two different cultures coming into contact connotes that the central conflict in *Death and the King’s Horseman* be considered from the point of binaries of allegiance and responsibilities. While Elesin’s responsibility is to his community, the responsibility of Simon Pilkings and his wife Jane is to the Queen of England, and by extension the English culture. A semiotic analysis that considers the actions and language of the characters would reveal that Soyinka’s suggestion that a ‘clash of cultures’ reading be avoided is slightly misleading. A deconstructive contrapuntal analysis is therefore productive for a reading that goes beyond the author’s suggestions, perhaps revealing some of his own latent perspectives.

Deconstruction, in the way I employ it, is the application of semiotics in order to demonstrate the existence of deeper levels of meaning beyond the superficial in the text. Deconstructive reading of a text reveals the text’s internal oppositions and contradictions between its intention and its (potential) meanings. With deconstructive analysis, the social, cultural, and political implications of the character’s actions are used to question the fundamental conceptual distinctions of cultural oppositions in the play by paying particular attention to the language and logic of the cross-cultural interactions of the characters. There are various intercultural elements in *Death and the King’s Horseman*, including contesting cultural Identities with variegated sources of power. Soyinka’s play explores intercultural interactions between two distinct cultures, albeit with the attendant friction that ignites the combustible powerplay in the dissimilarities between the opposing cultural codifications.

Contrapuntal analysis is a form of deconstructive inquiry that is based on dialogic exploration of multiple cultural perspectives within a text. A contrapuntal scrutiny of the play focuses on the intertwined histories and perspectives of interactions between the natives and the colonialists, which in turn reveals significations of impulses within the text. This exposes the innumerable potentials for meanings in the purview of clash of cultures as incidental to the unfolding of
events in the play. Contrapuntal analysis was developed by Edward W. Said for interpreting literature texts in order to reveal the latent and manifest connotations in a work. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said suggests that “contrapuntal reading” of a text must always emphasize not only the processes of imperialism, but also the resistance to it. This, according to Said, is only possible by broadening our reading of the texts to include what was once forcibly excluded.\(^{11}\) Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin suggest that, by analyzing a text through a contrapuntal exploration, “the critic can uncover cultural and political implications that may seem only, fleetingly addressed in the text itself”.\(^{12}\)

Bearing the above in mind, a contrapuntal reading of *Death and the King’s Horseman* not only helps to determine its relevance as redolent of history and colonialism, but also helps to comprehend the perspectives of both the colonizer and the colonized. By donning the Egungun sacred attire and masks, the Pilkings show their lack of respect for the culture of the natives. To the locals, the costumes symbolize the spiritual power, and the reverence with which they treat it indicates the veneration of their ancestors, but to the Pilkings, it is just ‘fancy dress’. The natives’ respect for the religious cum cultural symbol is conveyed through the actions of Amusa when he arrives to inform the Pilkings about Elesin’s ritual. On sighting the Pilkings dressed in the Egungun costume, Amusa vehemently expresses disbelief and refuses to come near the Pilkings because of the “forbidden” attire. He declined to talk to the couple because of their insistence on wearing the costume. The Egungun masquerade costume is to Amusa, a “uniform of death”.\(^{13}\) Another example is the scene where the market women attack Amusa as a metaphor for the natives’ disregard for Pilkings and the colonial administration. The attack on Amusa, as discussed in chapters 3 and 4 is by extension, designed as a ‘message' for their abhorrence of the English culture.

The Rufus Norris production, according to the director’s statement in one of the flyers for the production, attempts to produce a “harmonious experience of theatre making” that explores the opportunities for the fullness of cultural exchange in all its contradictions and convergences. Statements like this about an intercultural enterprise of such magnitude is commendable; however, the question is whether the production achieved its set objectives. Any creative work that connects two cultures may be evaluated through the application of intercultural performance theories such as those developed by Ric Knowles, suggesting intercultural theatre as: “a site for the continuing renegotiation of cultural values and the reconstitution of individual and community identities and subject positions.”

Without doubt, some elements of Knowles’s model of intercultural theatre can be identified in Soyinka’s text that are also recognizable in the Norris production of the text; however, there are other symbolic, cultural, and economic elements that can be used to query the intercultural intent of both. These include concepts like “community” and the “Other”. The two notions of what defines the “community” and how we relate with the “Other” are important markers to ascertaining any genuine intercultural endeavour especially from the cultural contrariety perspective. The first concept is authenticated on the fundamental principle of ascribing community the primacy in the cultural ordering of social life. Life is organized around the essence of communities. Culture is defined from community context and people’s way of life. From an intercultural perspective, Soyinka’s text and Norris’s production engenders an opportunity for two different cultures to interact.

The second element is indicated in the manner in which a person or group of people from one community relates with people from another community. The core egalitarian ideal is to treat people as equals and with respect. Inordinate focus on difference implicates the notion of “Othering” or the “Other”, both postcolonial terms for the depiction of assumed superiority over the other person or group. The “Other” concept may also be considered from Mikhail Bakhtin’s

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concept of alterity. When differences are portrayed in order to limit the humanity of the other person or group, the problem of alterity occurs. Alterity, in Bakhtin’s argument, is not only in terms of exclusion, but according to Bill Ashcroft et al, also from the perspective of an apartness that stands as a precondition of dialogue, where dialogue implies a transference across and between differences of culture, gender, class and other social categories.15

The strain between both the Oyo community and the colonial administrator whose fealty oath and liege homage is to the Queen can be deemed rigid posts of opposing interests. It is through this rigid post that the “Other” is perceived suspiciously, and this accounts for the cultural conflict in Death and the King’s Horseman. From the perspectives of the characters, both the villagers and the British foreigners, the actions of each opposing end of the rigid post are intricately connected to yield benefits for their respective communities. By implication, this pits one community against another. It can be argued that by insisting on the sacrosanctity of Elesin’s ritual, the villagers are defending the integrity of their cultural practice, and as the representative of the queen of England, the Pilkings are also defending the Queen’s and her people’s interest too. The rigid post also serves as the cultural frontier from which each representative attempts to engage without jettisoning their respective ideals. Therefore, with all the intensity of tensions generated by the clash of cultures, the conflict is derived from their respective position ‘of unwillingness to yield ground’ between two cultural frontiers.

One of the most vocal critics of interculturalism is Rustom Bharucha, with his assertion that practitioners of any kind of intercultural theatre should always keep in mind the social, economic, and political contexts from which the source material is taken, even as he warns against the tendency to flatten the “specificities of particular cultures”.16 Bharucha also emphasized the concept of reciprocity and respect for other people’s culture as key element of

Interculturalism. It is pertinent to bear this in mind so as to fully understand the hierarchical relationship between the Pilkings and the villagers in *Death and the King’s Horseman*. The Pilkings’ assumptions of their “civilized” culture’s superiority and therefore their presumption of an active role in the lives of the natives is contrary to the dictates of interculturalism, which according to Bharucha should be about respect for each other’s culture. The decision by the couple to wear the religious ancestral mask to a mundane party shows an apparent lack of respect for the Yoruba culture.

The flippancy with which the Pilkings treated issues that are important to the wellbeing of the natives is analogous to the hegemonic ramification discourse of orientalism posited by Edward Said in his book *Orientalism*. Said postulates hegemony as an essentialist assumption of Western superiority over the distant cultures, the Other and his/her way of life. He suggests that this assumed superiority is manifested throughout all forms of discourse including literature, research and in conversations both due to, and in order to perpetuate Western influences and economic control. A contrapuntal reading of this assumption is demonstrated in Olunde’s statement to Jane Pilkings that: “No, I am not shocked, Mrs. Pilkings. You forget that I have now spent four years among your people. I discovered that you have no respect for what you do not understand.”

The imagined superiority over the colonized has also been examined by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*. In his response to Octave Mannoni’s “dependency” and “inferiority” notion which the latter offered as a form of contrived explanation of connection between European civilization and colonial racism, which he ascribes as the reason for the Madagascar natives’ embrace of the colonizer, Fanon disagrees with Mannoni’s suggestion that Europeans in Madagascar exhibit the need to feel highly regarded by others because of the dependency complex of colonized peoples. The dependency mindset, according to Mannoni’s submission, arises because what the Malagasy fears most is abandonment. Using the characters Caliban, Ariel and Prospero and the

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dynamics and the psychology of the relationship between these three in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* to support his argument, especially pertaining to the submissive nature of both Caliban and Ariel, Mannoni suggests that the European’s sense of superiority is because: “What the colonial in common with Prospero lacks, is awareness of the world of others, a world in which Others have to be respected.”

Mannoni’s logic is that because the dependence/inferiority relationship had already been established in the consciousness of the Malagasy even prior to each individual European’s entrance and interventions in the colonies, the Malagasy had been conditioned to the traditional sorts of dependencies, he/she is unable to handle his/her own autonomy with its attendant and troubling sense of personal inferiority. Mannoni’s reasoning goes as far as suggesting that the French incursion into Africa at the beginning of the colonial era was as a result of the colonial Frenchman fleeing his own society because he could not accept men as they are. Therefore, his “rejection of that world is combined with an urge to dominate, an urge which is infantile in origin and which social adaptation has failed to discipline.”

Mannoni’s analysis of colonialism may be considered as exculpatory reasoning to absolve the colonialists from culpability. The overarching message seems to be that the colonialist should be excused of wrongdoing, especially if his instinct to dominate is considered from the perspective of the tractability of the colonial subjects. This argument is not only wrong but also very condescending. Fanon disagrees with Mannoni, insisting on the Europeans’ liability for the intrusion in the lives of the people of Madagascar, proclaiming the dehumanization of the Malagasy as racism and insisting that: “it is the racist who creates his inferior” through colonization that “[left] the Malagasy no choice safe between inferiority and dependence.”

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Mannoni’s argument, coded and imagined in white colonizing imagery is somehow reflected in some of the choice of ideas by the Norris’s production of *Death and the King’s Horseman*, especially in terms of how the production has attempted to navigate the complexities of intercultural spaces and relationships of dominance. This is similar to what Ann B. Dobie refers to as: “transactional analysis” which is allowed a vital place within the intercultural imaginary. The imagined imagery reference of the production can be explored through Dobbie’s deconstructive contrapuntal analysis logic, especially in terms of “how the codes, signs, signals, and rules work together to produce meaning.”

By applying this logic, one can begin to understand the different cultural perspectives that connect to this particular production. A play imbued with the fundamental exigencies of the conflict between two cultures is being directed from the perspectives of a person from one of these cultures. Incidentally, because of the cultural conflict inherent in the text, there is always going to be a possibility for its stage production being skewed towards a subjective presentation, depending on the individual’s propensity for subjective evaluation. In Norris’s production, these are clearly evident in the choices of movement, stage blockings, topography, and gestures in the use of the body in space in the production.

To further articulate the intercultural potential of the text and its interpretation regarding the arrangement of bodies and items on stage, proxemics and kinesics are two important analytical criteria that must be given consideration for a semiotics reading of the performance. Proxemics is mainly about the deployment and signification of space. Edward Halls defines it as “the interrelated observations and theories of man’s use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture.”

Kinesics, on the other hand, deals with the aspect of movement within that space. Studies of the human body as a means of communication through kinesics have been used by theatre semioticians to analyse and codify gestures in performance. Kinesics and proxemics when

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combined together facilitate an interpretation of space and action which are themselves the source of the audience’s perception and interaction in the theatre.

The choice and use of body in space is particularly important in the meaning-making process of a production. Elaine Aston and George Savona suggest that: “Variations in the proxemic relation between the actor and the spectator can radically alter the spectator’s perceptions and reception of a production.” As the imaginary frame with the potential for knowledge creation, the semiotics analysis of Norris’s production reveals significations and symbolisms of cultural negotiations, especially through the use of space, and the choice of the particular body in space. This will be further examined later on, but first, it is imperative to explore some of the genuine intercultural ideas in the detailed analysis of the production.

This discussion of the Norris production of *Death and the King’s Horseman* and the intercultural impact of the production will avail of ideas from Ric Knowles’s model of interculturalism to interrogate the ethical elements of the production’s aesthetics. Knowles’s concept of interculturalism as a site for the continuing renegotiation of cultural values is exemplified in the production’s multiracial cast and crew. While the cast is composed of actors from within the Black community, the crew were mostly composed of White Westerners. Also, the text, written in English, is in the production intermingled with the African drumbeats and dance choreography, without any of these subduing the other.

Interestingly, Norris and some crew members travelled to Nigeria (the source culture) to buy materials and props for the production, and ostensibly as an opportunity to undertake more research on the source culture. This afforded them the opportunity to interact with the people in the towns near the particular

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25 This is based on the idea that the way we use the space around us is generally shaped by our culture. For example, the concept that people from different cultures have different concepts of what constitutes another person’s personal space, especially if the person’s culture is different from theirs. Elesin’s space and by extension the villagers’ personal space have been breached by the Pilkings because they did realize the people’s entitlement to their personal space for their beliefs. This is only possible in situation when the humanistic agency for self-determination has been eroded as was the case with colonialism.
village in the story. Norris and his entourage’s experiences of the familiar with the foreign forges an interesting aesthetics for the London production. Perhaps this visit to Nigeria informs the director’s decision to effectuate the visibly humour-oriented ambience of the production. Norris must have concluded that the writer may not have intended the text to arouse the cathartic feelings of pity and fear in its audience.

Evidently, the production exudes the kinetic energy of African theatre viscerally in all its physical and cultural particularities of spoken words, music, songs, trance-like gyrations, incantations, dance, and mime. The fact that the choreography for the production was packaged by a Venezuelan-born dancer/choreographer, Javier De Frutos, a non-Yoruba choreographer, speaks volume for the production’s ambition as an intercultural exemplification in the model of Daphne Lei’s “Hegemonic Intercultural Theatre” primarily because, amongst other factors, according to Roaa Ali, it can “cross the boundaries of one culture”26 and as stipulated by Lei, compounds “First World capital and brainpower with Third World raw materials” with the peculiarity of an African text being interpreted through “European performance traditions.”27

In terms of the kinesics of the stage placement of the bodies and the stage props, the aesthetics of the stage gives the impression of the setting of an average African village market centre of rural Oya in 1943. The movement of the actors on stage, the placement of objects like statues and wood carvings etc., and the actors’ navigation of these objects on stage evokes an aura of colonial-era traditional African village viridity and verdancy. Aston and Savona suggest that: “Whilst configurations of actors within a space constitute a codified method of generating meaning, so too do the movements of actors within the space.”28

The inventiveness of the actors as they hawk their wares with woven baskets full of red chilli peppers, fruits, and vegetables, precariously balanced on their heads,

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is a sight to behold. The stage paraphernalia of assorted swaying and dancing haystack bushes and tree figures adds to the vivid appeal of the atmosphere.

In some scenes, cages of poultry placed conspicuously, are clustered together beside long ropes along the stage on which are hung different fabrics of quintessential African print, some similar to the costume materials worn by the actors. The costumes designed by Katrina Lindsay, some of which are handmade from Nigeria, adds to the fullness of the artistic, visual world of the production. The kinesics of the actors’ bodies as they gyrate around the stage in the flowing African print costume epitomizes the production’s elaboration of the African cultural vibrancy on stage. Evidently discernible are the crew’s and cast’s rigorous efforts at significations and their representational roles in theatrical semiosis as embodiment of the collaborative intercultural theatre practice. Aston and Savona attest that: “Not only do spatial codes set out to define, shape and construct the meaning of the spectating and playing spaces, they also govern relations between performers on the stage, and performer-spectator interactions.”29

Lo and Gilbert posit the collaborative intercultural exchange as a form of theatre-making that places great importance on cultural negotiations at all levels, from the highly personal and individualistic to the "superstructural" and institutional. The cultural negotiating element of the production is acknowledged, but the question is, does the production go far enough for the kind of intercultural exchange envisioned by Lo and Gilbert to occur? In terms of the narration and performance aesthetics, the production succeeds in many aspects; however, it is in terms of the continual processing and facilitation of the collaborative forms of intercultural exchange that it is found wanting. The National Theatre production could not be said to be community generated in line with the prescription by Lo and Gilbert that an intercultural exercise of such magnitude ought to “emphasize the process and politics of exchange rather than theatrical product per se.”30

29 Aston and Savona, Theatre., 114.
30 Lo and Gilbert, Towards., 39.
Phenomenological Concerns in the National Theatre Production

If the intention of Norris was to do a collaborative work to facilitate cultural exchange with emphasis on the process of facilitation, there are more than fifteen thousand people from the Yoruba community in Britain that could have been targeted, and some of these people could have been invited to take part in the production. In the process, a more robust collaborative intercultural dialogue involving people from the source culture interacting with other participants would have been ideal. Rather, the rehearsal process for the production was a normal twelve weeks structured-rehearsal with no follow-up that would have explored the multi-layered interactions that could have taken place between the participants. This puts a huge question mark on the cultural exchange potential of this production. Most of the actors struggled to cope with the right pronunciations of important words, and even simple comprehension of the Yoruba culture in form and content, which ultimately affected the production. The cast-list in the programme pamphlet reveals that no Yoruba person was cast to play any of the principal characters in the play. From a Yoruba person’s perspective, the non-inclusion of any Yoruba language speaker amongst the cast robs the production of the richness of the language in the dialogues.

Nonetheless, the main source of controversy for the intercultural credentials of the production is on the issue of casting. The director’s decision to have the faces of some of the all-black cast painted white in order to play the White characters in the play is both bewildering and tendentious at the same time. The casting may have been envisioned from a postmodern or poststructuralist interpretation of conceiving the world beyond social constructs that are considered predetermined, in the same manner that the traditional lamps and other furniture on stage are embodied in human forms. The casting of black actors as white characters is deemed in bad taste, because for some people, it evokes a form of theatre in history that was both demeaning and dehumanizing to black people. In her critique of the production, Lizzie Loveridge suggests that: “what is unusual is the white makeup the black actors wear, a negative image of
the reviled black makeup worn by white male singers in the manner of Al Jolson
or in the 1960s for BBC television’s The Black and White Minstrel Show.”31

Loveridge’s criticism of the actors’ makeup suggests that Norris’s anomalous racial casting is reminiscent of the American origins of the Blackface minstrelsy in the mid- to late nineteenth century, when white actors would routinely use black grease paint on their faces in order to depict plantation slaves and freed blacks on the stage. It is from this perspective that the implications of the black actors having their faces painted white has been considered. Although the clarification must be made that while Blackface has historically been a way to insult, demean, and hurt black people, the intent behind this casting does not appear to be so, and in any case, the context is entirely different. Nonetheless, against the backdrop of a history of abject mistreatment and dehumanization of black people and current racial social and political disparities in Britain, to put this image in contest, the question is would the reception of such an interpretation at the national theatre be positive if a white actor had blackened their face in a production? The answer is probably no, I’ll say!32

From a phenomenological point-of-view, the Black Pilkings with white painted faces did not evoke the same reaction that using a White Pilkings may have achieved. Even with their painted faces, the race of the actors is very much apparent, as other areas of their body are still obviously discernible. Inversely, the production could almost be imagined as a laboratory where black people embodied the role of the oppressor. Black actors with their faces painted white and dressed up as European characters in order to demonstrate how a black society was subjugated and African people’s beliefs denigrated somehow sends

32 The analysis of the Rufus Norris production of Death and the King’s Horseman has been attempted with full cognition of a counter-argument that can be made in terms of some of the choices by the director, especially concerning the faces of the actors painted white. For example, Brandi Wilkins-Catanese explores the inherent tension between racial identification and identity in terms of cross-racial casting and how “transgressive” performances confront problematic racial representation in theatre, film, and television. Pitching casting on two sides as either transcendent or transgressive, Wilkins suggests that “Rather than transcendent ignorance or reiteration without contestation, transgressive black performance has a historical efficacy that transforms our relationship to black presence and the black present.” See Brandi Wilkins-Catanese, The Politics of the Color[bind]: Racial Transgression and the Politics of Black Performance (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 113.
a confusing signal. It feels surreal, and indeed very strange, watching the actors playing the oppressors, launching derogatory comments against their fellow black people.

It must be emphasized that there is nothing wrong with using an all-black cast, however, the main problem here is the use of the all-black cast with painted faces.\(^{33}\) This sets off an ambivalent energy that has the tendency to influence one’s interpretation. The ‘willing suspension of disbelief’, a major cornerstone of drama, has been stretched in this production because of the political implications that the casting has thrown up. In some scenes, Soyinka’s dialogue from the text does not seem to agree with the reality of the characters presented to us on stage. Examples of this includes the scenes where the “Black” Pilkings give commands to their subordinates, using ridiculous gestures to make fun of the villager’s cultures.

If Norris’s intention was to bring the effect of colonial intervention in Africa to bear on the British audience, as he claimed, this did not seem to have worked, as the discussions and critical reviews in the aftermath of the production did not evoke any single mention of British atrocities towards the African people or the attack on the cultural identities of the British colonies in Africa. It can be suggested that the National Theatre production by Norris instead effuses the impression of a production that attempts, even if inadvertently, to subvert traditional notions of white patriarchy. While the Pilkings in Soyinka’s text represents political and racial hierarchies, Norris’s Black Pilkings reimagines their exploits in the oppressed’s own skin and in the process conforms with not only the racial and political aspects of such hierarchies, but also now imbued with psychological and social peculiarities.

\(^{33}\) The question might be posed that, would these concerns have been there if the play were to be staged on an African stage? The probable answer would be no. Using black actors to play the European characters would not have been a problem because of two factors. One, the actor’s face would not have been painted white and two, the furore is because this production that was supposedly based on a drama about the advent of colonialism and clash of cultures was on a British stage. This is in the background of the British antecedent as colonialists on whose history of subjugation of African people’s rights happens to be one of the key elements of the topic of the play in production.
As the actors grapple with their portrayal of the Pilkings characters dexterously enacting their roles with airs, aura, and impressions of nobility, there is a multi-layered satire of privileges and entitlements that is communicated; however, the undeniable knowledge of the actual race of the actors is inescapable from a phenomenological perspective, and this is problematic. Because some of the dialogue and lines of the English characters are blistering condemnations of the townsfolk and their culture, as the indigenous characters talk to them, with the actors’ obeisance, kowtowing to the racially disparaging demands of the English characters in the play, watching the action as it unfolds almost feels like watching black people oppressing other black people in the world of the play.

Incidentally, the interactions between the characters — both the Pilkings and the Africans — especially in the last scene of the performance can also be regarded as being structurally oriented to engender more than a superficial interpretation from the audience. In terms of the social relations of identity formulations within the British society, the casting affords one a form of postmodern ontological gaze that demands a conscious appraisal far greater than the mere aesthetics of its staging. For example, in the last scene of the production, the director made the protagonists, Elesin played by Nonso Anozie, and the colonial administrator and wife, Simon and Jane Pilkings, played by Lucian Msamati from Zimbabwe and Jenny Jules, donning a dark blonde wig, to lock gazes.

This scenario was also repeated in another scene with Olunde, Elesin’s eldest son played by Kobna Holbrook-Smith, and Jane Pilkings locking gazes staring at each other with tensed utter friction that probably was meant to imply a tension-filled energy situation of “who blinks first”. The symbolic stance may have been intended to be read as a visual imagining of the deliberate inclination of these characters and the complications in their intertwined histories. However, the image and its disposition evinces a mirroring effect of Africans looking at themselves, probably like a strange “out-of-body” experience, beholding a reflection of each other’s image, and in that moment appreciating all that is
admirable in each other’s ancestry and history from slavery to racism, from colonialism to the colonialist’s machinations.

In an intercultural context, the conflict and the implicit contextual creative structure is the *sine qua non* on which the comedy in *Death and the King’s Horseman* should be theoretically imagined, instead of the tragedy interpretation that past analyses has ascribed to the play. The Norris production did not invoke in me a sense of an arousal of cathartic feelings of pity and fear that is expected to accompany the purgation of such emotions. What the production embodies in many aspects is an ambience of the humorous exemplified in the role-plays, the characters’ mannerisms as presented by the actors, the inflections in the dialogue and the motivations of the characters’ actions. The chanting, swaying and drum-beating induce life and spontaneity into the production, and the incongruities of an ordinary situation being acted with such exaggeration generate great humour. All these present a heightened sense of awareness that stimulates the *élan vital*. The intercultural ethos of the production would have been adequately served, at least, to an extent if the audience is required to participate in the performance.

There are many other examples of humorous occurrences in many parts of the performance. The scene where the praise singer, played by Giles Terera, urges Elesin on to complete the ritual is as serious as a scene of such magnitude could be, but executed with such great humour that makes the scene poignant but also comical. Watching the black actors playing the Pilkings couple go through the actions of crossing and uncrossing their legs and their attempt at walking with a funny gait simulating different postures in order to appear as the colonial administrator and his wife is clearly funny. The scene where the market women parody and lampoon the colonial authority with vulgar, explicit sexual bullying of the policemen is very amusing. Sarah Amankwah’s acting as one of the market women is profoundly hilarious, especially with her choric partners, as they all mimic the English mannerisms even as Sarah rolls her eyes and bends her limbs in the most risible manner, and the audience seem to enjoy it judging by the raucous laughter in the auditorium.
Other humorous examples are manifested in the mispronunciations and the obvious confusion of the cultural specificities of some words, specific names, and the misrepresentations of particular Yoruba cultural nuances. These mispronunciations, both in the diction and inflections, engenders the entrenched humour in the production. As a Yoruba myself, the mispronunciations of the words and the misunderstanding of the contexts by the actors is a bit odd, especially since some of these words lose their meanings, and in some cases the effect intended. The dearth of Yoruba actors that could have managed the intricacies of word delivery and pronunciations in the production culminated in the mispronunciations of certain words leading to miscommunications, thereby compromising the veracity of culturally important markers like language.

As this chapter has shown, intercultural theatre can be a vehicle for intercultural dialogue within communities, but with the caveat that in applying creativity as a tool, interculturalism must be able to mobilize factions within the community to recognize historical and cultural contexts for the benefit of all. This includes understanding the motivations of the characters in the text, and then exploring and exploiting the connections to and between the actors, the audience, the participants, and the different cultures in order to address shared problems. The importance of encouraging diversity through these types of exchange allows the different cultures to acknowledge the validity of diverse cultural expressions and contributions. Above all, it is particularly important that artistic works from different cultural realities are engaged with honesty and integrity. As Ric Knowles insists, there should be “new ways of thinking about theatrical flow across cultures and the ways in which human subjectivity and identity are constituted – brought into being – through performance.” But how can this consideration for theatrical flow across cultures commence, without adequate and honest representation of history? This must include looking closely at the hegemonic structures and sovereignty-depriving occurrences like colonialism and its cultural identity-degrading aspects, as is the case in Death and the King’s Horseman.

In his essay “Intercultural Theatre Today,” Patrice Pavis suggests the intercultural theatre space as a “metaphor of the exchange between cultures, between past and present.”[35] The metaphorical space for symbolic meaning is in jeopardy if encumbered by the impropriety of the model of exchange, the medium of communication and the method of translation. The Pavis metaphor has not worked particularly well in this instance, because the potential for the intercultural space as a site for symbolic meaning is exiguous in the Norris production, especially because of the indifference or the unwillingness to discuss the true ramifications of imperial British incursions in Africa.

It is true that a stage production of a text is bound to throw up a plethora of meanings and interpretations from a personal to group perspective. An intercultural interpretation of the text would have been adequately served if the production had presented perspectives pertaining to the clash of cultures, the concern by the playwright warning against this narrative notwithstanding. What is unambiguously clear is the indisputable fact of Soyinka’s intention that the corpus of African literature be considered from the perspectives of his amplification of the specific cultural sensibilities. Femi Osofisan seems to agree with the suggestion that “Soyinka succeeds most in recreating the complete, credible world of African ritual [because] here the ritual form is not merely recast, but the playwright invests it with a dialectic, and his personal vision intervenes for a crucial interrogation of history.”[36]

The semiotics and phenomenological approaches that have been relied on to study Soyinka’s text and also analyse the Norris production in this chapter is anchored on the idea of meaning not being limited to pretext and/or context, but also incorporating the experiences and awareness of the readers/audiences’ world, thereby giving them the liberty to create their own meaning. Intercultural theatrical ethos does not subscribe to running away from portraying the situational realities in a bid to avoid serious conversations. Interculturalism is about having a firm and deep discussion and reappraising the contexts, talking

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about the past, with a view to meeting each other on a level playing field, and bridging a new relationship built on respect and regard into the future. The postcolonial focus of Soyinka’s text and its dedication to the struggles of a community under subjugation is not particularly pronounced in the Norris production. Contemporarily, the experiences of marginalized communities in the London metropolis of 2009, and the skewed power structure dynamics of the complicit systemic oppression of minorities, was not fully engaged with in the production.

This contemporary imagining of Soyinka’s text by the Norris production has shown that there is a gap in the processes, expectations, and differing perspectives in some intercultural theatre projects. This is not to say that there is no genuine desire by intercultural theatre promoters to facilitate creativity, but these usually fall short of expectations because of the inability to address the gap, which can be analogized through Soyinka’s lamentation in an *African Today* interview as: “a tragic gap of understanding between all the cultures of the world” exemplified in the reality of the tension, conflict, and mistrust of such undertakings through which the prospect of intercultural understanding has become a cultural signifier. The gap, according to Soyinka, is not the main problem per se, primarily because acknowledging it “is the beginning of wisdom” but as he cautions: “It is when it takes on the attitude of what I call violent superiority that is when the world runs aground.”

Tejumola Olaniyan also discusses the impact of the gap in the intercultural theatre process, starting with the significance and relevance of performance as a human capacity to initiate cross-cultural awareness. He suggests that the performative tendency in humans is indicative of the need to reach out to fellow humans in order to find similarities and coherence, irrespective of cultural affiliations. Basically, because humans are susceptible to performance, they are predisposed to negotiating cultural interaction through performance. However, Olaniyan contends that: “Between needs and their reconciliation is a space, a

gulf, or in more popular parlance, a gap. Without the gap, there is no performance, and without performance the gap cannot be reconciled.”

Olaniyan also suggests that if considered from the perspective of the primal contingent of time-space of performance, the gap determines the genres and languages of performance, “encompassing both art and life in all aspects — social, political, economic, cultural, religious, bureaucratic, technological.” Therefore, in theory and in practice, all our exertions in performance, all our performances, are ways of bridging the gap, whether we are conscious of this general fact or of particular gaps or not.

The reason why the gap factor is not often discussed in general academic performance discourse or even in the academic discourse on performance, according to Olaniyan, is because of the assumption that interculturalism in the theatre is bound to encounter impediments in the process of navigating sometimes conflicting cultural inclinations. Intercultural theatre derives its natural impetus from human proclivity to find ways and means of bridging the gap. The theatre space as a site of cultural production and knowledge must continue to be used to explore history and spaces of past conflicts, especially from other cultural perspectives. Joanne Tompkins suggests that: “Theatre provides an experimental zone in which different ‘worlds’ can be constructed and tested.”

Revisiting past contested histories through experiential resource is one of “the often-subliminal spatial ways in which theatre can make us think.” This is in line with what Kevin Hetherington calls “Spaces of alternate ordering”, an imaginative setting created that allows the audience to take their intellectual responses to the issue discussed at the behest of their experiences of the production back into their world.

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40 Olaniyan, “Contingencies” 23.
42 Tompkins, Theatre’s Heterotopias, 3.
Finally, what has been ascertained in this chapter is that intercultural theatre is concerned with bridging the interstices of the foreign and familiar in the society. The question is whether the Norris production of *Death and the King’s Horseman* understands the gap’s encumbrance and its attendant difficulties. Nonetheless, the production should still be considered from the perspective of a unique intercultural enterprise that challenged the British audience to acknowledge the idea that death without the need for grief, as the pivotal motif in the play, can be an honour, especially if the outcome of such death is to the benefit and wellbeing of the whole society. The next chapter examines the contemporary intercultural adaptations of *The Playboy of the Western World*, with particular focus on the Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle’s version, and Camino Productions’ *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* as grassroots integration strategies in Ireland. The chapter discusses in detail the dramatic characteristics of the texts and the dramaturgical processes of their stage productions through which the individuals and theatre companies engaged with current social issues pertaining to identity and belonging.
Chapter Six

Grassroots Integration and Intercultural Adaptation in *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*

Theatre can be a vehicle for intercultural dialogue within communities because of its ability to mobilize factions within the community to recognize historical and cultural contexts for the benefit of all. Because the focus of intercultural theatre is to bridge the interstices of the foreign and familiar in the society, it inevitably entails a process of encounter and negotiation between different cultural sensibilities. This engenders new ways of thinking about or problematizing questions around race, class, identity, and inclusion through the concept of ‘interculturalism-from-below’¹, as seen in the case studies that are focussed on in this chapter.

The first section of this chapter explores some of the thematic preoccupations in Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World* by drawing attention to the differences and similarities with Synge’s version and the various versions that will be focussed on here, either in print or stage production. An account of the manner in which the writers, directors and production companies construct their plot of the play initiates an investigation into how fact becomes fiction in the creation of new narrative accounts, narrative being considered as a participatory event that is psychologically imperative.

The second section of the chapter will examine the details of the dramaturgical processes used for the production of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* by Camino Productions, and the attempt made by the production company to contribute to social discourse in Ireland through the staging of the contemporary

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¹ As already explained, the concept of ‘Interculturalism-from-below’ as employed conceptualises the work of community-based arts organizations’ engagement with their communities by immigrant-led theatre and arts organizations. This is especially in terms of how individuals and organisations have used their talents, productions, and policies not only to probe, contest and subvert the notions of belonging, but also to collaborate and synergise with people of different cultural affiliations, in order to increase cross-cultural awareness in society.
reimagining of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* at the Project Arts Centre Dublin in 2008. Amongst many other reasons, Camino Productions was set up in 2007 with the intention of changing negative narratives about immigrants and contextualizing the problems being faced by new Irish citizens and the indigenous community.

The chapter engages the creative means by which the company reworked the play using innovative ideas of Bertolt Brecht’s Epic theatre and expressionistic stage designs of the theatre space in order to engage with issues in the contemporary moment and issues pertaining to identity, opening up new ways of thinking about or problematizing questions around race, class, identity, and inclusion in a format theorized as “interculturalism-from-below”.

**The Playboy of the Western World**

John Millington Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) has been a hugely influential text, and it has inspired a series of adaptations and versions all over the world. Its wide appeal is found in part in its reflections on the power of the imagination, its fascination with violence, and the tensions of insider/outsider. These tensions are heightened due to the highly charged and paradoxical nature of the intercultural essence of such interpretations or adaptations. While time and space constraints might not allow this chapter to fully explore all the various versions of *The Playboy of the Western World* ever conceived, nonetheless, the different versions of the play that are focused on in this chapter were selected essentially because they reveal the ongoing allure of intercultural transmission of Synge’s play. The play’s afterlife seems to demand contemporary comparison alongside the historical dimension, which – as Section One of this dissertation has shown – operates through a comic aspect and resonates with the concerns of postcolonialism.

As Synge’s play presents us with a particular view of the Irish peasantry at the turn of the century, demonstrating the problems confronting a rural community whose most vigorous progeny has emigrated, to escape such social ills as deprivations, arranged marriages, famine etc., all the other versions of the play that are treated in this chapter presented versions of the play that attempt to authenticate the nuances and cadences of their era. For example, in 1984, a
different version of Synge’s play surfaced in the Caribbean. This version entitled *The Playboy of the West Indies* was written by Trinidadian playwright Mustapha Matura. His version is a clever variant of Synge’s classic, and like the original version, it explores the experiences of a young man who shows up at an isolated bar after apparently believing that he murdered his own father. The shebeen has been transformed into a rum shop and the Widow Quin is now a superstitious folk priestess known as Mama Benin, a lecherous voodoo priestess.

Though Matura’s plot and characters were very much similar to Synge’s, every line in his version had been rendered into the expressive Trinidadian English grammar of the 1950s. Matura’s *The Playboy of the West Indies* tells the story of the young Ken, who briefly earns the adoration of an impoverished town by confessing to having killed his own father in the sugar plantation. By the end of the play, Ken’s father, who was wounded by a cutlass instead of a loy in Synge’s piece, returns from the dead, and father and son literally bury the cutlass, and their differences. Matura’s poor Trinidadians, like their Irish counterparts, welcome the father-slayer because he taps their own subconscious yearnings for rebellion or, more specifically, the decapitation of oppressive patriarchal authority, whether that be a church, family, or government.

Desperate Optimists’ version of Synge’s play, titled *Play-Boy* was presented at the Projects Arts Theatre on the 22nd of February 1999. The company’s production is a postmodern interpretation of Synge’s iconic play, comprising a mixture of live action, video-taped interviews, recorded movies, and dance choreography, with violence as the key element that united the company’s interpretation. There was loud music and a lot of violence and gory details. There was a scene used to reimagine the murder of Leon Trotsky, the key Bolshevik figure in the Russia Revolution.2

Another scene in the Desperate Optimists’ production shows the witnesses’ discussions of the murder complemented with the frequent ear-rattling

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2 Trotsky helped to overthrow the Tsarist regime in Russia and became an influential figure in the early days of the Soviet Union. He was forced into exile in the 1920s after losing a power struggle with eventual Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. In 1940, a Spanish-born Soviet agent, Ramon Mercader, murdered Trotsky at his home in Mexico City.
reports of blanks fired on stage. It appears from this production that a link is being established between violence, colonialism, and isolation. But somehow the production seems to beckon on one’s freewill to immerse one’s consciousness in the action, join the dots, for the ideas to manifest. Desperate Optimists’ approach in Play-boy can be described as a multimedia colloquium in cultural studies. The presentation bears the hallmarks of whimsical humour, dry wit, and bizarre narrative meanderings. The production established a narrative tension between the opening account of a significant moment in Irish theatre history and an anecdote of the activities of an Irish man born of an Irish father and a Spanish mother in eighteenth-century Chile.

This live performance with recorded materials has none of Synge’s original text in The Playboy of the Western World; however, by adding their own ideas, and their use of the “narrative process” the production reveals how packaged information can become a “fictional reality.” Initially drawn in by the story, one is violently brought back to the “reality” of the moment in terms of the dialectic of performance, “real life” and the historical linkage. In the opening paragraph of his essay Irish Rioters, Latin American Dictators, and Desperate Optimists’ Play-boy, Neal Swettenham, commenting on the human’s innate attraction for story-telling, observes that “We note the details that seem important to us (or that show us in the best light, perhaps). We structure the elements of the story in hierarchies of information that appear, to our way of thinking, obvious and logical. As we select and organize, so too do we — consciously or unconsciously — re-imagine and reinvent these stories.”

A Chinese version of The Playboy of the Western World directed by Gavin Quinn was created by Ireland’s Pan Pan Theatre Company. The production was innovative and unique, as it drew on the counterpoints of an Irish story and contemporary urban Chinese culture. The first production took place in the Beijing Oriental Pioneer Theatre in March 2006, after which it was produced at the Projects Arts Centre, Dublin that same year. Both productions were

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performed in Mandarin with English subtitles, with the language interspersed with contemporary idiom and slang. The company transplants Synge’s story of patricide from the West of Ireland to a modern-day Chinese municipality. The action takes place in a hairdresser’s shop on the outskirts of the capital. Christy, the notorious fibber in Synge’s masterpiece, metamorphosed into a Chinese man who loafs around with some girls at a Chinese hairdresser’s studio.

Pan Pan Theatre’s willingness to use ‘any language of the theatre’ to express an intended meaning is innovative. At the time of their production, they discovered that the only existing Chinese Mandarin translation of the text of *The Playboy of the Western World* was from the 1930s, and this itself was in classical Chinese that even the younger Chinese actors could hardly read. The company then made the conscious decision to create a new Chinese version of the play, which according to Quinn had to be infused with the street language of contemporary Beijing. However, the translation of Synge’s play to another language and its performance under different cultural conditions seems to throw up its own peculiar challenges, especially in terms of the contextual background of Synge’s era and the contemporary setting of the Chinese version. This difficult alignment beset the China production probably because Synge’s play is so inseparable from a particularly Irish experience. However, when the production transferred to Dublin, this perceived challenge was not apparent. Although audience’s reaction is usually hard to measure, it seems the Dublin audiences were able to relate their understanding of Synge’s classic with the Pan Pan’s productions of Chinese inferences.

Nonetheless, of lingering significance is the interesting question of whom the play was intending to engage. Pan Pan’s *The Playboy of the Western World* is a typical example of an intercultural performance that incorporates international elements of performing traditions from disparate cultures as an approach to artistic creation.\(^4\) Pan Pan’s version can be regarded as a metaphor of the

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\(^4\) The aspect of intercultural theatre examined in this dissertation is that which adopts an approach that can be termed intercultural in that the primary objects of study allow consideration of texts from both western and non-western traditions. The study has not concerned itself with the strand of intercultural theatre that attempts to engage different cultures with the aim of bringing a particular culture’s
exchange between cultures, between past and present, but most importantly, it can be regarded as a form of creativity and representation, and an opportunity for cultural and artistic interculturalism between a Western and a non-Western culture.

The intercultural ethics of Pan Pan’s China project can be examined closely, especially in terms of the debates that once surrounded past intercultural projects. This concerns how production companies from western countries used their influence and wherewithal to propel interculturalism using the culture and traditions of the locals. The debates particularly raised ethical questions surrounding the ability of the western practitioners to undertake such expeditions, as it quickly became apparent that it was only first-world theatre practitioners that had the privilege to cross national borders, and that the “collaborations” often seem like seeking out people of “exotic” locations and their cultures. However, a few years down the line, most of these controversies seems to have abated, as interculturalism shifted from a globalist focus to engendering communication and interactions between people and cultures. Promoting interaction, understanding, and respect between people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds involves creating alliances and solidarities across communities for genuine effort towards reciprocal forms of intercultural collaborations.

In 2007, a new version of *The Playboy of the Western World* was produced by the Abbey Theatre to great acclaim. The new version, a product of a supposedly intercultural enterprise, was co-written by Bisi Adigun and Roddy materials to a wider audience. The criticism of intercultural theatre has always centred around the point that the organizer, creator, or artistic director of such internationally renowned works are usually from a dominant worldview and therefore, sometimes prone to be accused of the issue of cultural appropriation. The English director Peter Brook, for example, has been accused of this in relation to his production of the Indian Sanskrit text, *The Mahabharata*, as an example of intercultural production that attempts to experiment with various levels of mixing and matching of traditional or contemporary aspects of theatre in productions. Often, the result of such “collaborations” are productions laden with cultural disregard or indifference, and different levels of textualities of power and representation embedded in a supposedly “intercultural alliances.” The problematic nature of this seemingly two-way intercultural exchange is what Daphne P. Lei refers to as “hegemonic intercultural theatre,” because the dominant form of intercultural theatre in the contemporary world is still influenced by the existing power structures. The biggest problem in this phenomenon is that HiT limits and interrupts cultural flow from the east to the west, while on the contrary encouraging cultural flow from the west to the east and thus allowing a consolidation of western discourse and ideas.
Doyle. The two playwrights included in their version race, migration and intercultural related elements that are evidently discernible in contemporary Irish society. Their version successfully expounds on the idiosyncrasies related to some of the people who have now migrated to the shores of Ireland, albeit without losing the essence of the plotline of the original play. In fact, all the crucial narrative elements of the original are retained but deliberately updated. Adigun and Doyle’s effort may be considered as a unique attempt to demonstrate an awareness of contemporary Ireland in terms of its complexities and multifariousness, although the question remains whether the issues addressed in their version were wide-ranging enough. Nonetheless, the success of the 2007 production probably informs the decision for the revival of the play at the Abbey, beginning from November 2008 till the end of January 2009.

However, like its original counterpart, Adigun/Doyle’s version of Synge’s text meant different things to different people. Emer O’Toole suggests that: “Many Irish theatre scholars recognise the production as socio-politically significant, even while they disagree on its politics and aesthetic efficacy.”\(^5\) Mick Heaney, a *Sunday Times* critic, described the play as: “a spectacular misjudgement” by the Abbey, adding that the Abbey Theatre was giving “two fingers” to the play that made its reputation. Charlotte McIvor noted the symbolic gesture of both playwrights’ remake of Synge’s iconic play, arguing that: “Synge’s canonical play reworks Irish theatre literally from the inside: inside its canon and inside the walls of the national theatre.” However, she laments the lack of confidence on the part of both playwrights to reimagine an alternate ending for the play, as according to her, it “falls victim to the dramaturgy of Synge’s play, not gathering enough courage to push convincingly against the text or break past its proscribed ending.”\(^6\)

Nonetheless, one of the opportunities presented by this version of the play is the prospect for an in-depth interrogation of the concept of identity and

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belonging that underlies many intercultural dialogic experiences. For example, in reference to what this implies from an intercultural perspective, Brian Singleton posits that Adigun and Doyle’s *The Playboy of the Western World* may be considered as a good example of “how the Irish canon can be contested in a spirit of social change and where Ireland’s own colonial missionary legacy in Africa might begin to take responsibility for the geopolitical changes in the world out of which Ireland emerged as ‘refuge’.”

The fact that this new version was even programmed by the Abbey has once again exemplified the Abbey Theatre as one of the establishments at the forefront of intercultural dialogue in Ireland. From the early Abbey years, Irish drama has always remained consciously aware of its relation to the life of the nation. Therefore, what the Abbey Theatre as an institution epitomises, and by extension the Irish theatre as a movement stand for to this day, is the focus of an ongoing conversation, as controversial now as it ever was, about what it means to be Irish. This sort of conversation is metaphorically imperative for the question of what it means to be fully human in a dichotomous world. Melissa Sihra perceives a significant moment of creative intervention in Adigun and Doyle’s project as an: “interrogation of the outsider through their deeply politicised figure of Christy” and also declares the Nigerian/Irish co-authorship of the play as: “a kind of indigenous intercultural reading of an Irish text within an Irish setting.”

In a global context in terms of resonance and familiar frames, the different versions of *The Playboy of the Western World* represent the diversity of contemporary intercultural performances that have become popular since the play’s composition. These re-imagined versions have been employed by theatre directors and playwrights all over the world as intercultural tools to challenge identity, belonging and spatial interactions for constructive life possibilities as concrete spaces of racial engagement. Specifically, the Adigun/Doyle version offers the opportunity to explore the concept of *élan vital* concept discussed in

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Section One, exemplified in the interactions in different scenes in terms of the differences in race, class, and cultural backgrounds perspectives. These interactions may be considered from humorous perspectives as well as intercultural ones, encompassing the capacity for the impulse for life.

These scenes will be identified in the text and analyzed with the aim of contextualising the semiotics of what these scenes really connote in contemporary Ireland. By locating the contextual element of the Adigun/Doyle *The Playboy of the Western World* in contemporary Ireland, the following analysis will explore the concept of whether intercultural dialogue through arts collaboration can be attained (or nearly achieved) through the deployment of humour as a creative impulse. The shebeen in the isolated corner of County Mayo in which Synge sets his play is reimagined as a modern west-Dublin pub in Adigun/Doyle’s version, and as a rum shop in Matura’s version. The people who patronise these places are probably in the throes of social ennui that feels for them like they have far too much time on their hands and far too little with which to fill it. Then one day, Christy Mahon, Christopher or Ken, a character who incidentally gifts them a new lease of life that is incongruous to their erstwhile existential realities, wanders in. The incongruities of their situation, both before and after this larger-than-life character walks into their life, is an actuating factor for humour.

Charlotte McIvor examines issues such as the ethics of interculturalism in her 2011 article in the international journal *Modern Drama*. From the perspectives of both the political and artistic interest of the interculturalism of the work of Adigun/Doyle and Pan Pan Productions, McIvor argues that “contemporary Irish discourses of interculturalism and use of the arts as cultural diplomacy in international and domestic contexts frequently marginalize the very minority-ethnic communities that the works claim to represent or speak for.” This raises questions about the meaning of interculturalism, especially in terms of race and

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belonging as they are understood academically, culturally, legally, and in actual practice in a community.

It is ironic that the play that enraged so many people on the opening night in 1907 has, in its various contemporary versions, failed to elicit such emotional responses. The reason for this is not far-fetched: there is a big difference in context and connotations between Synge’s play and all the other versions of the play. The next section will explore specific aspects of the play comparatively, with reference to all of the new productions mentioned so far, addressing how particular similarities and differences with the original illuminate a new intercultural theory of comedy.

**Comparative Analysis: Contemporary and Intercultural Versions of The Playboy of the Western World**

The first notable difference between Synge’s play and the other versions pertains to the location. Synge’s version changes location from Mayo to Dublin in the Adigun/Doyle version, from Ireland to Trinidad in the Matura’s version, and a Chinese locale by Pan Pan, and those changes have significant contextual implications. In the Adigun/Doyle version, Christy Mahon, the main character is now Christopher Malomo, a Nigerian immigrant. The location for the play has been switched from the rural west of Ireland to the modern suburbs of west Dublin. While the stage directions in the beginning of Synge’s version describe a country public house or shebeen, very rough and untidy counter on the right corner, empty barrels near the counter etc., the stage direction in the beginning of this version describes a modern suburban pub on the west side of Dublin.

The Adigun and Doyle version attempted to present a ‘wild wild west’ of Dublin that is non-existent. The “Blanchardstown, Dublin 15” setting of their version is reputed to have the greatest mix of people from different backgrounds and races, and therefore does not actually have the same homogeneity that the people of Mayo had in Synge’s era, when almost everybody in the town would have been peasants, white and Catholic. On the other hand, the north inner-city Dublin gangland murders alluded to in the play, which were supposed to serve as metaphorical denunciation of the negligence of these areas by the authorities,
indeed provoked a reaction phenomenologically - however, the play seem to care less about the social and economic neglect of the people of these areas.

The cultural differences of the setting of the original and the newer versions is a major reason for the differences in the reception and reaction to each of these versions and their production. In its original context, *The Playboy of the Western World* uncovers the violence that lies just beneath the surface of Irish rural life. It challenges the audience to reflect on the consequences of cultural loss in addition to psychological repression. Though all the other versions must also have inspired some fantastic imaginations in their audiences and elicited broad reactions within their own social milieu, the fact that there is no clear-cut parallel within their particular environment that matches the social, political, and economic conditions of the Mayo people in Synge’s era illuminates the difference in context to Synge’s era.

Most importantly, the fact that Synge’s play resulted not in unity or transcendence but in social dissension only emphasizes the contingency of the terms and the historical moment in which the play was set. The contextual reference in 1907 for *The Playboy of the Western World* has been attributed to the fact that Synge’s project was not geared to the creation of ‘a nation once again’ but of another Irish nation, taking into cognizance that the Irish nation at that instant was a state fashioned out of social and cultural components that had been shaped for hundreds of years under a political control that was ultimately remote and alien to most of the population. Therefore, the difference in political context cannot be over-emphasized, and this in itself is one of the major reasons for the lack of riots and agitations for or against all these newer versions of the play, especially, in this context, Adigun and Doyle’s version of the play.

In most discussions of Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World*, one of the discerning attributes of the play is that it generated a riot at its inception in 1907. This was because some of the play’s critics took offence at the manner in which the play referred to women in an immodest way. Some Irish nationalists of Synge’s era considered the play’s performance on the Abbey stage as an offense to public morals and an insult against Ireland. The significance of the word “shift”
The contentious word in this regard – can be found in Act 3 of the play. When Widow Quin tries to persuade Christy to escape because the people are planning to hang him, he refuses to leave because of Pegeen. In desperation, the Widow Quin’s attempt to convince him that there are girls in other parishes that are more beautiful than Pegeen, elicits the following response from him: “It’s Pegeen I’m seeking only, and what’d I care if you brought me a drift of chosen females, standing in their shifts itself maybe, from this place to the Eastern World.”

It is pertinent to note that the word ‘shift’, as understood by the protesters in 1907, refers to an essential part of the clothing worn by ladies during this time, for which reason, using the word ‘shift’ either within a play text or in a performance during this era was considered vulgar. Some Irish nationalists resented the idea that Synge could present the image of women of their beloved Ireland in such an unpalatable manner. Of course, Synge shared their dream of an Ireland of true ideals; however, they were not ready to entertain his version of Irish truth. They particularly rejected the idea of Irish women being portrayed as ‘liberated’ women who could be in charge of their own body, their own sexual desires. Susan Canon Harris seem to support this conclusion with her suggestion that: “Theories purporting to explain why Irish nationalists responded so violently to the premier of Synge’s play The Playboy of the Western World in 1907 are as numerous as the stars in the sky, but Synge’s contemporaries made it clear that they were protesting among other things, his representation of Irish women. In particular they were appalled by the spectacle of Irish women expressing and acting on their own sexual desires.”

Furthermore, Harris queries why some nationalists such as Arthur Griffith could only imagine a future of unique identity for Ireland, in terms of their insistence on folk memories of Irish women as chaste and home-loving. To them, Irish women were supposed to stay at home and have children, and not be projecting out their fantasies like Pegeen, whose “sexual purity was conflated

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10 John M. Synge, The Playboy of the Western World (Dublin: Maunsel and Company Ltd, 1907), 123.
with the cultural purity of the domestic space from which it was her job to exclude foreign products and foreign culture.”

It is apparent that Synge’s play is imbued with colourful imagery and lively dialogue laced with exaggeration. Take for instance the term “Playboy” that Synge used to connote the characters ebullience, which according to James Kilroy is “inspired to eloquence by the adulation of his audience and particularly by the love of a woman” and with the result of his greater confidence, makes him to become “a true poet, and, concurrently, achieves physical mastery of his own life.” However, it must also be emphasized that the term “Playboy” as used by Synge and the contextual reference of the word in 1907 has a totally different meaning in contemporary terms. Thanks to the magazine of that name by Hugh Hefner, the term today connotes today a man, young or old, rich enough to dedicate his essence to pleasure, especially in the company of beautiful young women.

Nonetheless, Kilroy notes the appeal of Synge’s play “due to the play's dialogue; lyrical, rich in natural imagery, almost a folk dialect.” This is evident in the way he imbues the English language of his characters with the rich dialect of rural Irish countryside, a dialect influenced by the syntax and vocabulary of the ancient Celtic tongue of Ireland and Scotland. The uniqueness of the dialect contributed greatly to the humour in Synge’s play. However, though Matura loosely followed Synge’s plot and characters, he was able to translate elegantly the rich essence of the Irish language of the original text into a rhythmical flow of the Jamaican patois. The Adigun and Doyle version, however, relied on a

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12 Harris, Synge and Gender., 104.
14 Kilroy, The Playboy, 441.
15 Kilroy, 439.
16 Jamaican Patois, known locally as Patois and called Jamaican Creole by linguists, is an English-based creole language with West African influences spoken primarily in Jamaica and among the Jamaican diaspora; it is spoken by the majority of Jamaicans as a native language. Jamaican creole was formed by contact of the British and West African and other Slaves. The contact took place in Jamaica so that the emergence of the pidgin there created its own culture. The contact between a growing number of new slaves gave rise to a new generation for whom the pidgin became a native tongue and thus Jamaican Creole evolved.
Christopher Innes suggests that in Synge’s original version: “Christy’s language when he is not being self-consciously poetic is based on the simple archetypal tropes which are characteristics of folk poetry, e.g. sun and stars, night and day, dews of dawn.” 17 Synge makes use of a lot of vivid metaphors and hyperbole that add to the humour in the play. For example, when Michael Flaherty asks Christy Mahon whether he has committed larceny, Christy replies that he has no need to stoop to thievery, for according to him, his father: “could have bought up the whole of your old house a while since, from the butt of his tail pocket, and not have missed the weight of it gone.” 18 Indeed, most of the humour grows out of the dialogue. For example, as Christy Mahon recounts the tale of his patricide on various successive occasions during the play, he elaborates and develops his narrative with ever-increasing levels of enthusiasm and colourful detail. In the context of contemporary Irish society, an aspect of the language of the Adigun and Doyle version conceptualises an affirmation of self and social inclusiveness from an immigrant perspective.

There are also some revealing similarities between the original and these new versions, pointing toward how commonalities of comedy/humour cultures can emerge from such intercultural exchanges. In both Synge’s and the Adigun/Doyle version, Christy or Christopher’s main attraction is based on the fact that he is a murderer, but also an innocent instrument in the hands of the people’s gullibility and fallibility. This attribute in both versions is similar thematically to Mustapha Matura’s version of the play. In Matura’s The Playboy of the West Indies, the description of the parricide committed by Christy — which Ken calls ‘Dead like a ripe mango’ and considers worthy of celebration — is an important similarity of both versions of the play. Pegeen in Synge’s original is still referred to as Pegeen in the Adigun/Doyle version, but as Peggy in Matura’s

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18 John M. Synge, The Playboy of the Western World (Dublin: Maunsel and Company Ltd, 1907), 16.
version. Peggy has also fallen in love with Ken, and like Pegeen, being protective of Ken, she has to fend off a couple of giggling schoolgirls.

The antagonism between Pegeen, the Widow Quin, and the schoolgirls is underscored by the carnivalistic element in their interactions, similar to the interaction between the market women and Amusa in *Death and the King’s Horseman* in terms of Bakhtin’s Rabelaisian exemplification of the shocking style of language and behaviour, as the two women and the girls engaged in a feisty verbal contest for Christy. Their excessive hyperbolic and caustic language is illustrative of Bakhtin’s argument about speech patterns in a carnivalesque setting. From a Bakhtinian carnivalesque logic, each woman attempts to wrest Christy from the other by slinging insults to sabotage the other presents situations in which their language allows for negotiation of social values and the opportunity to bring these values down to the material level. The carnivalesque ethos and transformative laughter of Synge’s language can be considered as form of resistance to the serious, dogmatic, and authoritarian world.

In all the versions of the play the character Ken, Christy, or Christopher is condemned to be on the run, so as to maintain the outsider’s foray into another community. To change the trajectory will only cut the umbilical cord to the original version and disrupt the possibility of ingroup/out-group comedic structure. Incidentally, in all of the versions treated in this thesis, the cycle of violence that derives from a social or political pathology and other abnormalities in their milieu are focussed on but not followed through to a logical conclusion.
In terms of the Religion and the idea of ‘casting off’ in Synge’s original version of the play, there is an unmistakeable hint of the satire of Catholicism epitomised in the ridiculing of Shawn Keogh as a way to manifest the invisible but very potent presence of Father Reilly as a reference to ‘Holy Ireland’. The Catholic faith is derided as an alien faith, and the characters appears to be wanting to cast off the religious hold on the nation, and indicators of this abounds from the beginning of the text. From the opening scene, Shawn Keogh is constantly ridiculed for his submission to and fear of Father Reilly and Rome.

The ‘casting off’ image is also underscored in the Adigun/Doyle, version especially regarding the overbearing influence of alien faiths and religion in the lives of the two interacting cultures in the play and the attendant effect on the characters. The synchronicity of intent of both Synge’s original and the Adigun and Doyle version on the religious influences is very discernible. In their version, there is a constant reference to the faith and belief of the Nigerian characters, a texture of images that enable one to define a moral and psychological perspective on these characters. For example, from their continuous references to “The lord God”, “The almighty”, “Satan”, “Jesus”, “The son of God”, It is clear that a considerable number of the lines of father and son in the play are based on their credo. This arguably emanates from the effects of colonization, when religions inimical to the African cosmology and cosmogony were foisted on the people.

Nonetheless, the poetic, religious-laden language adopted by Chief Malomo in the play contradicts his attitude, intent, appearance, and demeanour. Malomo’s insolence to people around him is apparent, especially when he appears at the pub. His attitude as he speaks to the Widow Quin is brash and belligerent. It is obvious that his authority as “the father” in his society dare not be questioned. It is obvious that he is a ‘boss’ in the meanest kind of way, in his
male hegemonic stratification prone phallogocentric society from which he hails from.\textsuperscript{19}

**The 2007/2008 Production of *The Playboy of the Western World* at the Abbey: The Insider/Outsider Dichotomy of Laughter**

The 2007/2008 production of *The Playboy* at the Abbey reveals the extent to which stage performance is influenced by context and audience, especially in matters concerning laughter. In the auditorium, a performance may elicit various kinds of response from the audience, from roars of laughter or unconscious responses like silence, and in some instances, the audience might clap. The interaction between the actors and the audience can extend beyond the walls of the theatre in the form of codes and messages, which might later influence the reaction of individual members of the audience to events outside the walls of the theatre. A drama can drop or entrench information, old or new, overtly, or covertly, into our consciousness, in the order of action, interaction and relation.

In the Abbey Theatre production, the stage setting that confronts the audience on entering the auditorium is a modern suburban pub. There is evidence of an invented form of Irishness. Guinness Signs; photos of Michael Flatley, Roy Keane, and Mary Robinson. There is a CCTV screen, above and behind the bar counter upstage centre. On the wall behind the counter…… etc.\textsuperscript{20} There appears to be a sense of contemporary Dublin. Christopher Malomo arrives at the pub and he quickly becomes the talk of the local community. He wins the heart of the tough talking Pegeen Mike with his morbid tale of murder, but his good fortune turns unpleasant when his 'dead' father arrives in town looking for vengeance.

\textsuperscript{19} In *Critical Theory and Deconstruction*, Jacques Derrida refers to the privileging of the masculine (phallus) in the construction of meaning as the exclusionary and dictatorial dominance of logocentrism and phallocentrism. Logocentrism is the "privileging" of logos wherein the term "logos" is used metaphorically to refer to an appeal to an objective reality, an objective, stable, unambiguous foundation of our understanding of reality. To Derrida, Logocentrism refers to the philosophy of determinateness, while phallocentrism is the term he uses to describe the way logocentrism itself has been genderized by a "masculinist (phallic)" and "patriarchal" agenda. Hence, Derrida intentionally merges the two terms phallocentrism and logocentrism as "phallogocentrism."

Although the Adigun/Doyle version retains the foundational plot line of Synge’s original, a lot of material has either been extracted or added to give the new version a stronger analogy to the social context and intercultural milieu from which their materials have been sourced. That particular aspect of the pursuit of unflinching truth that is characteristic of Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World* has also been brought further and situated within contemporary nuances. For example, instead of the homogeneity of the races of the main characters in Synge’s original, two of the pivotal characters in the Adigun/Doyle version are black people from West Africa.

This analysis locates the Adigun and Doyle’s version of *The Playboy of the Western World* in relation to one of its most serious and pressing relevant socio-political specificities, that is, the issue of intercultural interactions and relations between the indigenous and the immigrant communities in Ireland, at both institutional and societal levels. Following Jason King, who calls for greater use of the wider debate surrounding intercultural theatre in the Irish setting, this analysis situates the latency of an inter/multi-cultural theatre tradition in Ireland, which although not fully developed or manifest highlights the importance of collaboration that cultivates a sense of community, which is the ultimate goal of intercultural dialogue.

The *Abbey Theatre* production also notable makes use of lots of situation comedy for humorous effect. When characters hide behind a door or desk and other characters barge in ‘unexpectedly’, every moment of that situation has the effect of inducing laughter from the audience. For example, with the use of the CCTV, both the actors and the audience are able to see anybody coming into the pub, and therefore take action to either evade them or be prepared to confront them, with the CCTV making the audience privy to whatever is going on both inside Michael Flaherty’s pub and the entrance to the pub.

Curiously, one may wonder if the humour generated in the production of the play at the Abbey is meant to solely focus on the exploitation of the negative

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inferences of the immigrant characters in the play in order to exemplify or engender a joking mechanism framed by in-group/out-group dichotomy. If this is so, then it calls into serious question the kind of interculturalism that the play seeks to engender. Some of the utterances of the characters in the play may be assumed as an inclination to submerge the indication of common humanity. Unfortunately, this may create a dichotomous gulf in the relationship between the immigrant and the indigenous community.

A typical example of this is the manner by which the production seem to inadvertently, or perhaps intentionally, demean the nationality of the Nigerian characters on the epochal stage of the Abbey Theatre. In many instances in the performance, the representation of the Nigerian nationals in the Abbey Theatre performance is condescending. One example is the stereotypical statement of fraud being a subject or curriculum in primary schools in Nigeria. Each time in the performances that the fraud insinuation is mentioned, the audience composed of mainly indigenous Irish people exploded into raucous laughter.

The semiotics of the ‘intended’ meaning of this statement, and the phenomenological implication of the meaning of the sentence to both the Nigerians who are the butt of the joke and the mainly Irish audience, is illustrative of an in-group and out-group strategy. This is ensconced in the biopolitics of the interactions on stage, exemplified by the reported uncomfortable feeling by most of the Nigerians present in audience. In terms of semantics, denotata, and syntactics and the relation between signs and the things to which they refer, and the relation between signs and the effects they have on the people, the in-group versus out-group dichotomy in the statement in the Abbey Theatre production is evident if one should juxtapose the above scene with the scene towards the end of the play when Chief Malomo stated that the Irish townspeople in the play are fools, and that he would go back to where he came from to speak about their foolishness. This time, the ambience within the auditorium was significantly silent. The audience may have considered this statement as unamusing, suggesting a level of nationalistic reaction towards a ‘statement’ probably considered as an affront, especially spoken on the symbolic Abbey stage.
One of the interesting correlations between the vitalistic impulse of a comic presentation and interculturalism, as suggested in this thesis, is the ability of the theatre or of the stage to serve as a potential venue for discussions of race, ethnicity, and diversity. This is where the Abbey Theatre production of the Adigun/Doyle version of *The Playboy of the Western World* vacillates in presenting a realistic picture of the lives of the characters it seeks to portray, especially in terms of highlighting some of the negative innuendos that still exist in contemporary Ireland. For example, the scant examination of the background of some of the characters, especially the west Dublin characters and the nuances of their lives which may have ultimately influenced their life choices seemed glossed over.

The intriguing story of Sharon Collins from County Ennis who plotted to murder her husband by hiring a hit man, epitomised in the production through the character of Widow Quin, adds a carnivalesque element to her ruthless subversion of decency and morality, as suggested in the statement when Shawn Keogh asks for her help to persuade Christopher to leave town. Responding to his fears that Pegeen might reject him because of his presence, Widow Quin boastfully replies that: “I'll take care of him, Shawn. The oul’ Sharon style.” Her statement that “There’s a fella from one of the Sunday papers wants to write my story” further elucidates the horrendous nature of Collins’ crime and her total lack of remorse. She was reputed to have secured lucrative offers for interviews, publishing and film deals for her story by tabloid newspapers and film producers from Ireland and the United States.

The bright matching colours of the pink tracksuit and Ugg boots outfit of the girls referred to as ‘young wans’ in the scene when they appear at the bar to

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22 Sharon Collins, from Ennis, Co Clare, was sentenced to six years in jail in 2008 for soliciting a hitman Essam Eid from Las Vegas to kill her partner PJ and his two sons. The court was told that Collins used the online name ‘lyingeyes98’ to investigate the hiring of a hitman on the internet. She then used the name ‘Lying Eyes’ to contact Eid by email. 

23 The Ugg boots are unisex style of sheepskin boot that is immensely popular with young people in Ireland. They were semiotically tied to a certain celebrity-mimicry and performance of class in the early 2000s. Ugg boots originated in Australia and are typically made of twin-faced sheepskin with fleece on the inside, a tanned outer surface, and a synthetic sole.
visit “the lad with the gist” aids the production’s comic gesture. However, the teenager’s attitude to Christopher — as comic as the scene is — can also be considered as a case study in dysfunction, and as examples of young people from tortured family situations being reactive and erratic. It can also exemplify young people’s apathy to societal responsibilities, as being privileged, or entitled makes them less engaged:

Sarah: You’re like heroes, the two of yis.
Honor: Like Bonnie and Clyde.
Sarah: Ah, yeah. *Quoting the by-line*. ‘They’re young, they’re in love, and they kill people.’ Come here, a drink for the gangsters. Come here, you sit there and you there.

_Sarah links Christopher and Widow Quin’s hands. They are initially reluctant, then play along._

Sarah: See? Yis are natural together.
Widow Quin: Ah, stop messing, Sarah.
Honor: Made for each other.
Sarah: Come here. A drink for the gangsters.
Sarah: To the two of yis, the walking killers.
Honor: Hear hear.
Sarah: And all the others like you; the hitmen, the heroin dealers, coke dealers, crooked cops and politicians, and publicans and lawyers; celebs and DJs, and the whole fucking lot of them.
Widow Quin: Good girl. You left out no one.24

The young people’s attitude here could also be read as action born from frustration, lack of opportunity, or simple exploration of the world as it could be translated as them building their own lives, their own systems, their own communities, their own alternatives. Connecting the story of the Widow Quin, famed to have killed her husband, and that of Christopher, reputed to have murdered his father, the young ones regard them as heroes, in a carnivalesque sense.

The invigorating stage antics by the actors as they waltz around Christy, hailing him a hero, could be considered as emblematic of an open-arm embrace,

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and a symbolic analogy of contemporary Irish society’s welcoming of new demographics. More so, contrary to the proclivity in the Irish theatre landscape, for once the Nigerian immigrant at the centre of the story is a well-educated, courteous character who arrived in Ireland from Nigeria, having completed two degrees at prestigious universities in his home country. The implicit connotation of ‘this one’ not being a sponger who is only here to ‘scam the system’ might even be suggested as the trigger for the admiration from the local community.

Nonetheless, even if the production seems to leave too many questions unanswered, it still has plenty of strengths, as there are many refreshingly ironic elements to this production, including the intimate moments between Christopher and Pegeen. Although it must also be said that even this at times feels like the production may have been attempting to present an accommodating example of mixed-race romance in a world in which everything and everyone works in perfect harmony, where cross-cultural interactions have attained transcendence and Ireland is an intercultural utopia. Conversely, the production did not examine or even acknowledge in-depth the racial tension in multi-racial relationships within the various communities in Ireland, or even the tension that usually affects such cross-cultural unions and interactions in Ireland. The ambiguity notwithstanding, the powerful direction by Jimmy Fay is commendable as there are many laudable initiatives to this production with the comic scenes adding the element of play and freedom. Play evokes laughter, and the freedom that comes with laughter can be regarded as a manifestation of vitality and the affirmative force of life.

The Spectator as the ‘Spectagonist’: Camino Productions’ Sizwe Bansi Is Dead (2008)

In 2008, the African Irish Theatre company Camino Productions’ contemporary version of the South African play Sizwe Bansi Is Dead ran for two weeks at the Project Arts Centre, Dublin from the 12th to the 23rd of August 2008. The production was a culmination of two months of preparation, rehearsals and dramaturgical processes conceived as an intercultural initiative, especially in terms of the dynamic cultural interactions that it was designed to engender. The
actualization of the production’s interculturalism agenda was envisaged through a creative collaborative effort of the perception of theatre as a medium for addressing social issues, increasing cross-cultural awareness while also encouraging inclusion and stronger cohesion in communities.

The process started six weeks earlier with a three-day colloquium/workshop attended by about twenty-five people from different backgrounds in Ireland, including the cast, community stakeholders, and representatives of different groups from the indigenous, immigrant, and Traveller communities. The basis for the meeting was to enable conversations on issues of socio-cultural significance, especially at the grassroot level, and explore means by which the theatrical space might be used to examine common social problems. This is underscored by the understanding that the theatre also has a vibrant role to play in terms of cultural and social awareness particularly in the rich and living tradition of contemporary Irish theatre, in which minority ethnic theatre companies have contributed uniquely to the diversity of the Irish theatre as a movement.

The production falls into the category of intercultural theatre defined by Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert as “performance practices characterized by the conjunction of specific cultural resources at the level of narrative content, performance aesthetics, production processes, and/or reception by an interpretive community,” especially in terms of its focus on the “cultural encounters between and across specific communities and regions within the nation-state,” albeit with the caveat suggesting a discernment from multiculturalism, based on the focus on diversity and interactivity, rather than assuming cohesion. Collaborative interactions such as this that involve a professional artist working with members of their communities with the focus on social contexts facilitate community development, as such encounters avail people the opportunity to tell their community’s story. The prospects for intercultural dialogue, political expression and social commentary, enabling

26 Lo and Gilbert, “Toward,” 38.
members of the community to get involved in ways that build social capital, are
germande to the ‘Interculturalism-from-below’ concept posited by Charlotte McIvor. The phrase conceptualises the work of community-based arts organizations’ engagement with their communities by immigrant-led theatre and arts organizations, of which Camino Productions has been at the forefront.27

In her work examining creativity, diversity, and intercultural integration as
an innovative source for communal dialogue and societal wellbeing, McIvor highlights the significance of some of these companies in Ireland, especially at the grassroots level, proclaiming that such artistic efforts within communities and social contexts is indeed a vibrant form of interculturalism. Incidentally, it is the ‘from below’ aspect of the idea that McIvor considers more significant.28 McIvor’s unique aspect of the ‘from below’ interculturalism is fashioned after Ric Knowles’s work in Toronto, Canada in which the focus of the cultural interaction is on the different cultures that work assiduously in understanding the divergent intercultural identities of contemporary Canadian society. Such ‘interculturalism’, according to Ric Knowles, can be positioned as a: “site for the continuing renegotiation of cultural values and the reconstitution of individual and community identities and subject positions.”29 What makes intercultural theatre unique, especially in an Irish context, according to McIvor, is not only its specificity in engaging and linking cultures, but also the potential for exchange through the arts which “have been so explicitly referenced as a site for the forging of Irish interculturalisms.”30

It is important in the context of the discussion to clarify the difference between intraculturalism and interculturalism. The intracultural illustrates the interaction that takes place between members of a group or groups with similar social or cultural background. A typical example of an internally differentiated

28 McIvor, “Casting,” 86.
29 Ric Knowles, Theatre & Interculturalism (Houndsmill/Basingstoke/Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 5.
group in a national space is that of the Traveller ethnic group, in the context of their unique ethnicity relative to the Irish nation. The intercultural, on the other hand, is the interaction between parties from different cultural values, beliefs, and expectations, with consequential exchanges occurring between them even as each group evolves and their identity changes, due largely in part to the opportunity for cross-cultural alliances.

A specific evidence of this is the recent demographic shift in Ireland’s population with the influx of new communities from various backgrounds, as a once monocultured oriented nation now has new people from different cultures that call Ireland home. The participation of these ‘New Irish’ in the creative sphere of belonging and the potentialities of their work and contribution to national discourse from the grassroots i.e. from below is potently relevant here. The Camino Productions’ *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* exemplify this ‘from-below’ implication in Irish society, as the production’s focus was mainly about mobilising creativity to entrench diversity as an asset by exploring the intercultural social capital, to examine the socio-cultural and economic issues affecting the lives of the people in the community.

In the original Athol Fugard case study, some of these issues includes the concept of identity, the injustice of the passbook law during the apartheid era in South Africa, the idea of role-playing as a means of survival, and the influence of capitalism and its attendant contribution to the creation of classes and subalterns not only in South Africa but in many societies. The play explores the struggles of Sizwe Bansi who relocates from King Williams Town to New Brighton in order to look for job and provide for his family, hoping that they can later join him. Being an illegal alien in the town, he has to go underground lest he will be deported back to where he came from. In his quagmire of confusion and desperation, he struggles with the thought of giving up on the only true thing that belongs to him, his name, especially because changing his identity for a dead man’s is a choice that he has to make between personal dignity and survival. Like Sizwe Bansi, Asylum seekers go underground because of the fear of being deported. They subsequently take up different types of dehumanising jobs under various alibis
and identities. Most of these people have to undergo a pretence borne out of necessity, a reasonable choice given the parameters of their peculiar situation.

In the Camino production, the original two black characters in Fugard’s play were split up to become three, with one of them played by a white actor. Casting an indigenous white Buntu was one of the many decisions supposedly meant to place the play within the immediate Irish society. Nonetheless, the production is also about finding humour in difficult scenarios. The production had many comedic scenes deliberately interpolated to make the appalling situations of the characters more affecting and hard-hitting. The Irish Buntu raises the need for people to acknowledge what people who have come from distant places to Ireland sometimes go through, but most importantly, this contemporary Buntu also depicts the numerous indigenes who despite being natives of Ireland, can be classified as very poor, neglected, and underprivileged.

The colloquium/workshop organized to kickstart the rehearsal process commenced with discussions of Athol Fugard’s play and how the characters have been denied their fundamental human rights and the impact that the deprivations has on the characters individually, and by extension, how the characters’ experiences mirrors the experiences of black people in South African of the apartheid era and the attendant effect of the segregationist policy within contemporary South Africa society. This reimagined contemporary production of the play intently focussed on socio-economic issues and its attendant effect in communities within Irish society. The participants identified correlations between some of the issues in the play and current socio-political events in Ireland around the time of the production. These include issues such as the negative representation and denigration of asylum seekers by the Irish press, the inordinate deportations of asylum seekers, incessant news about eviction of travellers from halting sites, the issue of the disadvantaged in the society, who despite been indigenous to Ireland are categorized as poor, neglected and forgotten, even during the prosperity of the Celtic Tiger era.

In the year 1999, the then-minister for justice, John O’Donoghue, declared that the Irish government had decided to introduce a new system geared toward
the creation of accommodation for asylum-seekers in Ireland. It was to be referred to as the “Direct Provision” system. By the following year (2000), the system was adopted by the government as a formal policy. By 2020, as many as sixty-five thousand people have had to use the Direct Provision Centres for durations ranging between a few weeks to up to ten years. Presently, approximately 6,000 people, including 1,600 children, are being housed in these centres across the country. Of these 6,000 people, 778 have received refugee status or “leave to remain” but are struggling to find somewhere to live in the midst of a housing crisis. Many Irish citizens are not aware that for more than fifteen years, asylum seekers are only entitled to a weekly allowance of €19.10 per adult and €9.60 per child. Only recently in 2018 was the amount changed to €38.80 per week for adults and €29.80 per week for a child. Nobody is willing to talk about the commercialisation of the asylum process that encourages ‘detaining’ asylum seekers through the facility of the direct provision system. The direct provision system gives Irish businessmen the opportunity to invest in the lucrative business of housing asylum seekers in privately run hostels. This ensures that many asylum seekers whose legitimizing documents are deliberately delayed, are languishing away in holding locations all over Ireland, sometimes in squalid conditions.

The discussions by the workshop participants, of the maltreatment of immigrants in Irish society focussed on a particular case as an example of such incidents. In 2008, it was widely reported that a particular judge, Jim Nicholson of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal, was reputed to have given judgement to thousands of cases without a single positive result. Every asylum application decided by the judge was negative, even when some of these people had glaring evidence of torture on their body and were likely to be persecuted if they were deported back to their country. This revelation came to light when the Supreme Court ruled that the Refugee Appeals Tribunal must produce the statistics on the record of this particular judge to the High Court. Unfortunately by then, most of the applicants whose cases were decided by Judge Nicholson had been
deported back to the places where they were fleeing from. There was another case then that caused furore and it was challenged in court by human rights organizations in Ireland, about the powers of the Garda to randomly arrest and detain any asylum seeker who is unable to produce an I.D. card when demanded by a Gardai.

As the deliberations on the format of the production progressed, the participants were divided into three groups. Each group worked together for a couple of hours each day and then presented different scenarios from the play, with group members trying out role-plays from different scenes. The decision from the workshop was that some of the aforementioned issues that are peculiar to Irish society would be reflected in the production. Consequently, the dramaturgical decision was made to cast the audience as witnesses to these oppressive situations, so that the audience members as spectators must consider themselves as part of the process. As spectators, the audience are also the protagonists in the unfolding drama on stage, hence the idea of the ‘Spectagonist’ which in the interculturalist words of Lo and Gilbert, is to “to transcend culture-specific codification in order to reach a more universal human condition.”

Therefore, as the audience stepped into the foyer of Project Arts Centre on the opening night during the show’s run, they were issued with an immigration card on which was written various questions ranging from age, gender, race, etc. ‘Immigrations officials’ paraded the foyer of the Theatre, some staffing various parts of the building, keeping an eye out for anybody who seemed to be doing anything untoward. They would check the audience to verify their cards, randomly select their targets, look intently at each audience member’s face, check the card again and even scrutinize the person’s face with a penetrating but condescending expression on the ‘officer’s’ face. The idea is to make the

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31 The case of judge Jim Nicholson was significant because it afforded many Irish people the awareness of the despicable treatments that asylum seekers often had to endure in the hands of state officials. https://www.independent.ie/sport/golf/lawyer-accused-of-bias-against-refugees-quits-appeal-tribunal-26427734.html

audience to become self-conscious / or to make them wonder what they might have done wrong to deserve that kind of incriminating treatment. Some officials might randomly pick on audience members and follow them around suspiciously. These interactions were meant to replicate some of the complaints by the workshop participants of security officials’ penchant for following black people in department stores, even though they did not do anything inappropriate.

Conceptually, the set design for *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* was expressionistic. With a rejection of the realist focus that emphasizes greater fidelity to real life, the set design with its stark arrangement of the stage is clearly intended to convey the inimical effect of social policies and their resultant encumbering effects. On stage right a few feet above the ground is a screen. Projected onto this screen intermittently during the course of the performance are pictorial documents, texts etc. On stage left and stage right are two doorframes placed strategically towards the back of the stage, with four oversized puppets placed beside each door. The puppets are painted in wild, strong, and non-realistic colours with thickly textured paints. Lighting placed behind the puppets reflects their images towards the audience, exerting an overbearing ambience on the entire auditorium. By inference, the door frames connote the access to social conveniences in societies and standing guard against their improvement are encumbrances like capitalism, nepotism, and absolutism, symbolic of the human deprivations, the arbitrary use of power and the influence of capitalism and their contributions to the dispossession of the underprivileged in human societies.

The whole auditorium is encircled with wire mesh, implying that the audience (Spectagonists) are momentarily ‘imprisoned’ in the actor’s suffering. The audience is made to perceive the defencelessness of the characters in the play. Through their experience of the actors’ role-play, the audiences’ perception of victims of oppression can potentially engender an understanding of what people in similar helpless situations in our societies go through.
As the play progresses, the actors mix with the audience, and the auditorium purposely becomes an acting area. Through the actors’ open interaction with the audience, the audience is made aware of the mechanics of the theatre. Characters appear intermittently to perform contemporary dance sequences that are used to illustrate experiences and travails of immigrants as they flee their countries of origin, charting their journeys through the dangerous terrain before arriving in Europe. The choreographed dance can also be read as commentary on the everyday struggles in life of the penurious, destitute, and the homeless and what people in the lower echelons of the social ladder in our societies have to contend with every day in life.

To distinguish the scenes of reality from those of dreams, the characters wear masks. The masked ‘forms without faces’ characters move in slow monotonous rhythm contorting their bodies to the drumbeat. The grotesque movement by the characters is symbolic. Emphasized by their costumes and masks, their movement also portrays the conflict of forces between the rich and the poor, the natural and the supernatural. They point the beam of the torchlight in their hands towards the stage and onto the audience’s face, in-sync to the music from the chorus.

The expressionist concepts above are complemented in the production with a robust inclination to the epic theatre, as popularised by Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) for the audience’s inspiration towards a more critical or intellectual acuity. The idea is to heighten the audience’s participation by making them become part of the production process. Two things are immediately apparent. One, it equips them with the ability to ascertain their level of awareness of the issue at hand, and also allows them to be engaged in their participation therefore enabling their criticisms of the issue. The Brechtian anti-illusive theatrical style of the epic theatre in which the audience are constantly reminded that they are in

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33 For the audience, *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* was meant to be a reflective and introspective theatre experience in accordance with Marvin Carlson’s discussion on the semiotics of a performance and the ambience of a performance venue. In *Theatre Semiotics* (1990), Carlson argues the elements of the semiotics of the entire theatre experience which he believes must include the appearance of the auditorium, the information in the programme, and countless other parts as a whole. This implies that the theatre is more than simply a place of entertainment, but a simulation of lived experience, a site for the staging of the social self.
the theatre watching an enactment of reality instead of reality itself occurs in different modes and in different aspects of the performance.

The spontaneous, intentional interruption of the action during the performance with songs helps to accentuate important messages of the production. In some scenes, the actors randomly pick on some members of the audience and engage them in eye contact while delivering specific lines from the play. There are many examples of this during the performance, including the scene where Bansi holds up his immigration card as he utters the words: “What’s happening in this world, good people? Who cares for who in this world? Who wants who? Who wants me friend, What’s wrong with me, I’m a man. I’ve got eyes to see. I’ve got ears to listen when people talk. (starts to tear off his clothes) Look at me, I’m a man I’ve got legs.”

In another scene, when Buntu suggests to Sizwe that things will be okay for them, and that they should just manage to stay out of trouble, Sizwe replies: “Buntu, you know what you are saying? A black man stays out of trouble? Impossible, Buntu. Our skin is trouble.” As he delivers the lines, the actor walks up and stands in front of an audience member, looking into people’s faces, staring forlornly ahead, and taking a long pause before dropping his head onto his chin. At the scene where Sizwe reads out the letter to his wife explaining his change of identity, the character is directed to sit on the same spot looking constantly at the back of the auditorium for about two minutes. During some performances, some audience members turned around in their seats to look at the spot behind them where the character’s gaze was fixated.

The role-playing/metatheatrical elements in the production encourages the audience members to develop their own thoughts and criticisms of the story as it unfolds, even as they unwittingly become part of the narrative. The intention was that this would have encouraged reasoning from the audience, as against just being entertained. For example, in the factory scene, as the characters prepare for the visit of a member of the Ford family, the auditorium becomes the

factory. As Styles plays the role of the managers and Bass Bradley, the audience acts the role of the factory workers, as some of them are randomly selected by Styles as he gives them tools, rags, and a cleaning apparatus to clean and dust the factory wherever they are in the auditorium. The experience of observing other members of the audience cleaning and being ordered around might enable them to reflect on their societal ‘roles’ whether as privileged, dominant, or docile citizens, and hopefully each person might imagine other people’s situation in a different perspective.

By engaging the audience in discourse, the theatre space is able to engage with conceptions of diversity and questions of communal development in contemporary society, opening up new ways of thinking and problematizing questions around identity. This has been the core ethos of Camino Productions as a theatre company in Ireland since its inception in the year 2007. The social justice aspect of the company’s interculturalism can also be considered or described in ‘performative’ terms. The company operates on the mission of a self-representational ethos of immigrant identity, by facilitating the creative materials enabling various strategies to encourage immigrant performativity concept in engaging contestations of belonging. These contestations, often in the form of labels and certain racial schema in which the non-indigene appellation is emphasized inordinately, ascribing to the immigrant the ‘outsider’ connotation, have often led to erroneous identity conceptual understanding, in which words like “asylum seekers”, “refugees”, or “economic migrant” could be construed in terms of ascribing the groups of people a membership or identification with some larger group undeserving of belongingness in the ‘unique’ Irish national project.

The idea that being an immigrant means outsider and being indigenous means insider is a reasoning that has been used to legitimize ‘belonging’. Words and phrases like those above and racist tropes like “Go back to your own country”

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36 Some immigrants, although highly qualified with degrees find solace in the fact that the tip earned as a toilet attendant in Dublin’s nightclubs and pubs and undertaking menial jobs in the black markets is sometimes the only determinants of starvation for their people back home.

37 Mark Pizzato in *Theatres of Human Sacrifice: from Ancient Ritual to Screen* observes that “Brecht abhorred the communal catharsis of Aristotelian tragedy, whereby the audience, in sympathetic fear of the hero’s catastrophe believes in his inevitable fate rather than questioning societal norms.”

38 It is a known fact that some politicians in Ireland exploit the asylum seeker issues for political gain.
sometimes reiterated in discourses have been grounded as material factors in determining and augmenting sites of power. The discrediting element of the ‘non-national’ outsider implies that the immigrant, prone to peculiar life experiences, is bereft of any pertinency in contributing to Irish national discourse. Contextualized restrictive identity like this can be characterized by what the philosopher Judith Butler suggests as “performativity”, used in the perspective of the conceptualizing of gender as interactionally situated. The notion of performativity in gender studies, analyzed by Butler as being socially and historically contingent, suggests that gender identities are constituted through stylized repetitions of bodily acts, and that the doing of gender is conditioned by heterosexual gender norms. Butler argues that identity must be understood as emerging from the lived experience of an individual, and as interpretable within the cultural norms in which that individual was socialized.39

The suggestion is that the creation and maintenance of gender identity, especially one which is predicated on ascribing less to the female, is at the core of inimical performative actions. Butler suggests that it is erroneous to insist on gender identity outside the ways it is constituted as a “social temporality.”40 The ways we talk about each other is important as part of how identities are created and understood as normative or otherwise. The process through which a body becomes gendered implies a constant and ‘stylized repetition of acts through time’;41 however, the temporality factor is about the “re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established.”42

Using Butler’s theory on gender and performativity, one can suggest that the idea of the indigenous versus the immigrant, one being the bona fide ‘insider’ citizen and the latter considered or compelled by circumstance as ‘outsider’ non-national, are regulatory. In racial Imperatives, what the theory of performativity indicates about words and phrases of similar connotations that denotes the

41 Butler, Performative Acts, 520.
42 Butler, 526.
racialization of belonging is that these words are used to delegitimize a group of people. Although the exploratory range of Butler’s theory of performativity has been limited to gender, I have taken liberty to apply it to race and discrimination here because if gender is socially constructed, and this construction makes the body socially visible, it is only through the mediation of series of social practices that the body becomes gendered at all. Also, according to Butler, the element of constant iteration is vital for the gendered body through repetition as a temporal process. In other words, these repetitions are necessary for the continuous reproduction of gender, therefore the peculiar ideas of racism or discrimination can be deduced in this very same process, especially in terms of the efficacy of the repetition of the racialised appellations mentioned earlier.

How one is positioned in relation to others, whether in terms of race or gender, can be analogized in terms of the repetition and enactment of some activities characterized by the “showing” concept. The power of control lies in the hands of the ‘show-er’ who — as the conceptual name suggests — controls the medium of information dissemination, and therefore is able to manipulate and/or ‘show’ these repetitions from which narratives of identity are formed. This repeated ‘information’ in the public domain about the immigrant subject being ‘shown’ effectively communicates to the insider citizens and the outsider immigrant the hierarchical dynamics of power structures in society. The constant reiteration of the foreignness of the immigrants, even when they acquire Irish citizenship, is sometimes couched in the phrase: “Where are you really from?” which effectively articulates their foreignness into a discriminatory impulse. In some social discourses in Ireland, immigrant bodies have been compared, differentiated, classified, and hierarchized according to these racial standards. This not only produces and reinforces the dominant meanings of racial categories but is also used as a vehicle for constituting bodies and identities in accordance with dominant racial norms. In racial terms, how we position ourselves in relation to others is achieved through the repetition and enactment of these activities.

In both issues of race and gender, there are strategies of social action in which temporal processes can be regulated to contribute to intercultural dialogue and inclusion. In racial identity terms, how we position ourselves in relation to
others, in terms of a positive affirmation of our identity is achieved through the repetition and enactment of particular identifying activities engineered through what Roger Silverstone suggests as “appearance in the public sphere.”\(^{43}\) In his argument positing the importance of maintaining appearance in the public sphere, Silverstone argues for the necessity to maintain a presence persona in the community space in order to effectuate attainment of power. Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s concept on power, Silverstone suggests that appearing is a key issue because appearing presupposes agency, especially in terms of the realm in which people are brought together “face to face” to create a public sphere based on visibility, appearance, performance and rhetoric.\(^{44}\) Though Silverstone’s idea is in the context of the media, the same principle applies to the concept of being visible in the society, especially in terms of contributing to the national discourse.

Appearance is crucial for the creation of spaces of self-representation. The power of appearing is lost when one becomes merely a subject who is reported on, or who is merely “shown.” The performative essence of interculturalism-from-below advocacy can be bolstered through self-representation. Self-representation by immigrants both in the arts and media industries is tantamount to counteracting negative narratives. As Darko Suvin argues, besides the opportunity to engage a person in positive self-discovery and self-expression, a performance space, for example, can serve as a “qualitative ensemble whose different dimensions signify various ideological ways of perceiving possible societal relations.”\(^{45}\)

The performative inculcates the power of language to effect change in the world, because language itself functions as a form of social action. Depending on the language or actions involved in order to communicate or create identity, performativity could be used to empower or disempower by changing narratives. The arts and the media play a crucial role in the processes by which individuals


\(^{44}\) Silverstone, *Media*, 29.

are compelled to assume normalized racial positions. This is why narratives of identity culture exhibition by immigrants is necessary in the arts, especially the way the arts as a medium can engage a person in positive discovery and expression of the self.

Some of the other productions by Camino Productions, especially since its inception in 2007 have been about representation and being visible. The *Wedlock of the Gods* by Zulu Sofola, which also ran for two weeks at the Project Arts Centre, Dublin, in 2007, witnessed the emergence of new audience demographics from the immigrant community. Many of the attendees confessed that it was the first time that they were attending a theatre show in Ireland. Many were particularly happy to see themselves being represented on an Irish stage by an immigrant company for the first time. The adaptation of *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe in 2013 at the Draíocht Arts Centre, (in Blanchardstown Dublin 15, Ireland), also fulfils the ‘appearance’ objective of new Irish communities in the public sphere. Achebe’s novel with more than twenty million copies sold worldwide and translated into more than fifty languages, presented the customs and traditions of the Igbo people on an Irish stage for the first time.

Ultimately, although the production of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* examined the injustices in our societies, with the reflection on process of the production and the emphasis on inclusion, the production apportioned no blame on individuals but ascribed faults on the inefficient administrative systems and bureaucracies. The idea of the colloquium/workshop and the production itself was purposely to prove the universality in humanity’s struggles that requires an obligation to reach out to each other. Camino Productions’ offering of McIvor’s form of interculturalism that is ‘from-below’ based on a collaborative philosophy of grassroots collective theatrical structure is performative through its intra- and intercultural work, especially in terms of Ireland’s changing demographics. This method of work ‘from-below’ signals a movement reflecting a generation of Irishness that does not necessarily imply being born in Ireland, but can and should include new Irish

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46 The next chapter dwells more on the influence of the media, theatre and the manner of portraying migrants and migrant identity, especially as the ‘Other’ in contemporary Ireland.
citizens, whose Irishness must be acknowledged based on their positive contribution to the wellbeing of the Irish society.

**Conclusion**

As it has been argued in the course of this chapter, *The Playboy of the Western World* can be considered as a vehicle through which the themes and the genre of comedy, or the quality of the comic can be explored. In both Synge’s original and the other contemporary versions, the element of redefinition is not only analogous but also commendable. However, because Synge’s classic is enshrined in specific Irish theatre history, all the other versions must be considered in their own special terms, as none could have necessarily reached that unique stratum that Synge’s play attained. The humour largely stems from Christy’s self-creation as a hero by means of his aggrandisement. The same applies to all similar characters in the other versions, as the presentation of the characters and the textual imageries are important elements to comprehend the humour entrenched within them. One can conclude that in all the versions, the comic action lies in the reversal of accepted values that constitutes its moral and social milieu, and the eventual rejection of the principal character by the townsfolks is a catalyst for growth and development.

The chapter also examined in detail the Abbey Theatre production of the Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle version of *The Playboy of the Western World*. The analysis establishes the production in relation to the intercultural interactions between the indigenous and the immigrant communities in Ireland, at both institutional and societal levels. The chapter identified how the production served as a potential venue for discussions of race, ethnicity, and diversity. This makes it a veritable means for exploring interculturalism on a practical level in Irish society. This calls into question the Abbey Theatre production of the Adigun/Doyle version of *The Playboy of the Western World*, in terms of the semiotics of some portrayals and the phenomenological implication of Nigerians as butt of the joke on an Irish national stage. The chapter argues that the biopolitics of the interactions on stage has the potential of encouraging an in-group and out-group dichotomy.
The *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* production by Camino Productions has also been discussed in this chapter as an example of interculturalism-from-below within communities in Ireland. The chapter reflects on process of the production, placing emphasis on inclusion in order to engage the populace in discourse on the injustices in our societies. Through this idea, the theatre space is able to engage with questions of diversity and communal development in contemporary society. The production has also been discussed in terms of finding humour in difficult scenarios and making the audience become complicit in the experiences of the characters. This has been explored in the various comic scenes deliberately interpolated, to make the appalling situations of the characters more affecting and hard-hitting.

The next chapter is a detailed assessment of the role of the media, theatre, and politics in the reductive labelling of black African immigrants in Ireland as a subordinate social group, resulting in these groups of people being treated as the ‘Other’. The chapter cites numerous instances that the media, theatre industry and even some sections of the political class in Ireland have represented African immigrants negatively in order to perpetuate the insider versus outsider dichotomy. The chapter concludes with how the self-portrayal of immigrants in the realm of stand-up comedy “writes back” to this type of societal representation, in productive as well as problematic ways.
Chapter Seven

The “Other” in the National Space: Migrant Portrayal and Identity in Contemporary Ireland

Interculturalism in contemporary societies creates an awareness of how language functions in the interactions between in-groups and out-groups. From a communicative intercultural perspective, language can be used to explore important aspects of group interactive processes in which belonging, and distinctiveness exemplify in-group favouritism, bolstering positivity for such group while tendentiously engendering discrimination towards the out-group. Another important element of the in-group versus out-group dichotomy in terms of language is the way each group tends to mark their identities communicatively through the language they create as devices for constructing an “us versus them” narrative. In this sense, the “outsider” connotation in Adigun and Doyle’s The Playboy of the Western World, and the implication of the reference on the Abbey stage is considered from the aspect of the Abbey as an important marker of identity for Irishness, and this is best understood in terms of the pivotal role of both the building and theatre arts in the national identity consciousness.

The continuing debates on identity, nationality and race discussed in previous chapters will now pivot to analyse intercultural relations in Ireland. This is in terms of how schism between in-group and out-group grows in contemporary Ireland, and how comedy can be used to address this schism. This will be explored by examining both media performances of the migrant identity and the self-representation of migrants in stand-up comedy, discussed here as a potentially important sites of cross-cultural and cross-racial engagement and socialization. The drive towards interculturalism as a way into discussing these issues, which can at times seem quite complex, will explore the question of how this new dedicated connectivity of interculturalism – its positives as well as its challenges – is being expressed through stand-up comedy.
For example, because the humour operating on a particular stage in an intercultural milieu is not occurring in a vacuum, the role of structural inequalities in intercultural interactions can be used to serve as a potential venue for discussing the in-group versus out-group dichotomy, especially in terms of the in-group's use of pejorative expressions or ethnophaulisms and their social meanings in attaining hierarchical status in the society. This suggests that there are cross-cultural implications in terms of the ordering of social groups in a particular society. In the Abbey production, the silence in the auditorium when the Nigerian character spoke back to the in-group is striking, therefore, it is important to examine its significance and understand what conditions it.

Unpicking the processes of discrimination and racism is an inherently challenging and complex task. The issue of how cumulative instances of discriminatory incidents that often occur across various aspects of societal interactions, be they interpersonal or institutional, can be hard to discuss, mainly because of the manner in which the words “discrimination” or “racism” are defined or understood. In the past, there has been a fixation by some scholars and researchers on the incidental occurrences of discriminations and racial intolerances between individuals or groups. Even when racism is spotlighted, there is usually no clarity about how state institutions that are supposed to be non-discriminatory in their services often knowingly or inadvertently interact negatively with the people who are largely considered as outsiders.

The “subjective” level of violence, rather than the “systemic” or “symbolic” forms of violence that usually underpin such individual instances of racism, is further compounded in terms of the aggressive content of the information dissemination medium in contemporary Irish society. Slavoj Zizek’s theory of violence conceptualizes “subjective” violence and its media representations as having been shaped by less noticeable forms of “objective” (symbolic and systemic) violence, based on the use of language that excludes or includes depending on the insider versus outsider dichotomy. The violence of language, according to Zizek, basically sanctions the “imposition of a certain universe of
meaning."¹ Zizek’s conceptualization of violence can be used to explore the exclusion and detrimental characterization of the outsider group as violence in the context of immigrants. The examples of “subjective” violence were grounded in the externalization of a clearly identifiable “other”², which symbolically frames the immigrants as the outsider not deserving of protection.

Paul Taylor explores Zizek’s idea on the premise that, through their forms of presentation, the mass media ensure that their audience’s thoughts process is impacted through the violence being transmitted as factual images of violent acts from around the world. This form of violence is innately oppressive, according to Taylor, because of the powerful and harmful constraints it imposes upon language and thought, despite its purported neutrality.³ Occurrences of discrimination and racism in a society have been attributed to the hierarchical structure in that society. Often, this hierarchical structure is constructed using identity, political, mental, physical, social, and sexual control mechanisms that effectively enable the dominant group to maintain its economic and social power.

Three notable realities can be used to define the social landscape of Ireland between the 1800s and the 1950s. These include a familial/rural culture, the prevalent reliance on the Catholic faith by a large percentage of the population, and high levels of emigration. According to John Bradley, the 1950s onward can be regarded as “a period of transition in the Irish economy and economic policy”, and concomitantly, it can therefore be suggested that “the modern economic age dawned for Ireland in the late 1950s.”⁴ However, by the 1990s, a significant change in inward migration to Ireland was becoming apparent, as people from different parts of the world started arriving in the country.

From the nineties to the turn of the millennium and beyond, liberal trade policies and the drive for industrialization stimulated economic expansion.

Ireland’s economy developed extremely fast, and the country evolved from one of the poorest countries in Western Europe to one of the most successful. The period of economic growth and national wealth became known as the Celtic Tiger. By this time, most of the hegemonic rural discourse of the sixties had mostly disappeared, and the fundamentalist Catholic influence on Irish society has greatly weakened. The economic growth and the years associated with it made Ireland an attractive destination for many immigrants from different parts of the world, both economic migrants and refugees fleeing persecution from their home country.

Certainly, the rate at which the Irish society changed from what used to be referred to as a “homogeneous” society to a “heterogeneous” one that seems to be rigorously trying to accommodate different cultures may have been a challenging experience for many indigenous Irish people. This is evident in the cases of indifference or incidences of discrimination that some have shown towards immigrants in Ireland. In his collection of essays that make up the book *The Ex-Isle: Images of a Global Ireland*, Fintan O’Toole suggests that: “the speed and scale of transformation on every level of society has induced a sense of internal exile, a sense that Irish people feel less and less at home in Ireland.”

Incidentally, although it is true that immigration to Ireland increased significantly, relative to other EU countries, the number of immigrants coming to Ireland per year was not (and still not) remarkably high, nor is the total immigrant population high. Nonetheless, the presence of immigrants has resulted in a substantial emphasis on issues related to perceived threat to distinct Irish identity, as well as pleas for diversity and interculturalism discourses in the face of rising levels of public concern about, and negative sentiment towards migrants in Ireland.

A 2007 survey documented worrying levels of racism being experienced especially by African immigrants living in Irish society. These include: “diverse

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pattern of multiple exclusionary practices”\textsuperscript{7} and documented incidents of racism encountered by many African immigrants. While “some of these experiences are overt in nature, there have been reported cases of instances of physical violence, name-calling and discrimination, even “when seeking to access public space.”\textsuperscript{8} There are also evidences of institutional racism encountered especially by African immigrants in Ireland, when accessing public services, employment, or even outright instances of racial profiling. In some cases, some of these types of discriminatory practices involving public officials are usually subtle in the manner of the circumstances in which they occur.

The chapter will outline the representations of immigrant identity through the incidental presentations in the media, arts, and some sections of the political class in the reductive action of labelling of black African immigrants in Ireland. The chapter cites numerous instances that Irish socio-political leaders have represented African immigrants in Ireland negatively and shows how these representations have oftentimes led to a biopolitical categorization of migrants in terms of skin colour. This manner of engagement categorizes African immigrants as a subordinate social group, resulting in these groups of people being treated as the ‘Other’. The second part of this chapter will examine the work of two immigrant comedians and their attempt at addressing the concerning representations of immigrants, and also to “get back”.

Already since 2008, Mary Gilmartin and Allen White had opined that: “In Ireland today, migration is one of the topics under discussion.”\textsuperscript{9} This accentuates the topicality of issues pertaining to new communities in contemporary Irish society, especially as these issues have since become even more embedded within national discourse. The preponderance of the migrant-centred public debates is anchored on the inclination to blame this group for the country’s social and economic problems. Oftentimes, when migrants are portrayed in the Irish media, there is the tendency to go for the sensationally negative. For example,

\textsuperscript{8} Coakley and Piaras Mac Einri, \textit{The Integration Experiences.}, 2007.
some programmes on Irish radio stations are known to resort to anti-immigrant sentiments ostensibly to improve their ratings. Some discussions on some Irish radio stations are sometimes appalling in the way they essentialize and demonize the immigrant community as desperate, sponging invaders. Steve Loyal articulates this prevalent anti-immigrant thinking as seeming like: “an overly generous and prosperous Ireland, the land of a hundred thousand welcomes, is being systematically abused by unscrupulous asylum seekers.”

For the African immigrants, in particular, the term “asylum seekers” is the nomenclature usually invoked when some indigenous people refer to the group. Through this descriptive language mode, the “place” of the African within the Irish society is determined. This blanket representation can be regarded as probably a deliberate attempt at reminding them of their foreignness and marginal status in the Irish polity. For instance, the historic Citizenship Referendum and the Immigration Act 2004 had emerged from debates that centred on migrants, particularly the pregnant women from Africa, and the then widely touted “dishonest attempt at acquiring Irish citizenship for their offspring” narrative. As Ronit Lentin and Robbie McVeigh argue: “Thus, non-national m/others inevitably become central to the state’s argument for the integrity of Irish nationality and citizenship.” These types of labels create barriers to social inclusion and, for the African immigrant, narrow the individual’s experience of broader Irish society.

Studies suggest that in Ireland, immigrants from Africa experience the most severe forms of discrimination grounded in racism. For example, a study by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), entitled Immigrants at Work: Ethnicity and Nationality in the Irish Labour Market, and the Equality Authority’s The Survey of Migrants’ Experience of Racism and Discrimination in Ireland.

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both present vivid evidence of experiences of racial discrimination against African immigrants in Ireland. In the same instance, from the job market perspective, the ESRI study also confirms that African immigrants are oftentimes not able to avail of the labour market because of discrimination.

Correlatively, the report suggests that black African migrants are seven times more likely to experience discrimination while looking for work, and when they do get work, they are more likely to be vulnerable to exploitative employers who employ immigrants at incomes lower than the legal working minimum wage.\textsuperscript{14} Ebun Joseph’s profound research on the inequality in the Irish labour market uncovers more damning facts about this, as she suggests that in the labour market, despite being highly skilled, some members of the African community in Ireland can only access jobs far below their skills. She argues further that: “the reports of discriminatory labour market experiences which affect people of Black African descent in their career pursuits raise pertinent questions not only for service providers supporting this cohort, but also for the marginalised persons navigating the labour market.”\textsuperscript{15}

Another report from a different study carried out at University College Dublin (UCD) claims that more than half of foreigners living in Ireland have experienced racism. Sixty percent of those surveyed had been subjected to or witnessed racist acts. The 2013 study, commissioned by Doras Luimni, a local charity working with migrants, was conducted by Patricia Kennedy of the School of Applied Social Science at UCD. The report highlighted the culpability of state-owned establishments like hospitals and social welfare offices. According to

\textsuperscript{14} These are probably influenced by factors of Social Policy. For example, revision of the Employment Permit Act 2003 & 2006 declared Irish nationals first preference, EEA nationals were declared second preference and lastly Non-EU Such Policies contribute to the Employer’s reluctance to hire African Immigrants especially when an employee is required to start work on an immediate basis. The Employment Act also has requirements that an Employer will have to consider such as a requirement to advertise for the available position for a certain period of time before they can apply for a work-permit for a non-EEA-national. On application, the employer may have to produce evidence that no Irish or EU citizen has applied for the position within the stated period.

Kennedy, “Racism occurs in public and private locations.” The study further suggests that the places where racism has occurred in the past and is likely to occur again include public schools, retail outlets and public transport. The law enforcement arm of the state known as ‘An Garda Síochána’, public office holders, Judges, and local politicians have also been shown to be culpable in incidences of racism in Irish society.

One of the specific questions asked by the Kennedy study is: “Who are the perpetrators of such racism?” The respondents unanimously agreed that the perpetrators of racism/discrimination are “men and women, adults, teenagers and children and those working in a wide range of public and private services and businesses. These include those who are expected to legislate and implement legislation and law enforcement as well as those providing essential services such as health, education, social welfare, housing and personal social services.” Interestingly, the reports also suggested that victims and witnesses are usually reluctant to report racist incidents to the authorities.

In yet another similar report titled *Afrophobia in Ireland*, published by the Irish branch of the European Network Against Racism, it is claimed that of all ethnic groups within the Irish society, Black people mainly from sub-Saharan Africa are oftentimes the most likely to suffer or most likely to experience racism. In the report authored by Lucy Michael of the University of Ulster, racism against African and black people accounted for about two hundred and twenty-five reports to iReport.ie over the past two years. This accounted for over thirty percent of all reports received. Unfortunately, like the earlier reports from the ESRI and UCD, this particular report from the University of Ulster revealed that victims do not bother to report incidences of racism against them. The reason, according to the report from Kennedy’s study is because: “To many of those who

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16 Patricia Kennedy, *Treated Differently? Evidence of racism and discrimination from a local perspective*, (School of Applied Social Science, University College Dublin), on behalf of Doras Luimní, 2013, 5.

17 Kennedy, *Treated Differently?*, 11

18 i.Report.ie is an internet-based reporting system for the people, communities and organisations of Ireland to document racist incidents that are occurring nationwide.
have experienced racism there is a belief that in Ireland there is a resignation that racism is part of everyday life in Irish society.”\textsuperscript{19}

There are various indicators of what these studies imply for African Immigrants in Ireland. The complicity of some law enforcement agents and the inadequacy in the responses to racism on the part of the criminal justice system means that many victims of racism in Ireland may never get justice. The implications, both now and in the future for the children who have experienced or witnessed discrimination and racism against their parents, is a major concern especially in terms of the psychological scars that may result from such experiences. Racial discrimination can affect an individual’s mental health. Some people may suffer from anxiety, feeling of guilt and emptiness as a result of being discriminated against.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{Africa and Africans in the Irish Media: Distortions and Essentialisms in Representation}

This section of the chapter explores the problem of negative media coverage and representations in the arts on issues pertaining to the immigrants in Ireland, especially African immigrants, and how these portrayals perpetuate stereotypes. It argues that these negative portrayals instigate or ‘stoke up’ Irish people’s apprehensions of the undesirable immigrant “other”, whose presence is viewed as detrimental to the wellbeing of the Irish state, thereby justifying resentment towards them.

As already noted, the Irish media is awash with distorted and essentialist imagery of Africa and African immigrants. In the background of television programmes like the \textit{Paul Connolly Investigates} series on RTE, there are programmes such as \textit{Ireland Bogus Beggars, Ireland Fake brides, Ireland Vice girls}, amongst others, that paint a negative and blighted picture of immigrants’

\textsuperscript{19} Patricia Kennedy, \textit{Treated Differently? Evidence of racism and discrimination from a local perspective}, (School of Applied Social Science, University College Dublin), on behalf of Doras Luimní, 2013. 13.

\textsuperscript{20} Oftentimes, some of these experiences leads to psychological problems such as depression. A study carried out in Netherlands involving about four thousand and seventy-four people has found out that those who felt victimized by discrimination and forms of racism were twice as likely to develop psychotic episodes in the following three years.
involvement. While these programmes claim a dedicated investigation into social problems in contemporary Irish society, some of them tend to present immigrants as potentially culpable or masterminds in the perpetuation of these crimes.

In the print media, some Irish newspapers are inclined to invoke stereotypical innuendoes and inflammatory captions in their headlines in representing Africans. Kevin Myers and his constant negative portrayal of Africans and the African continent in his columns in some Irish newspapers are an index to this. Take, for example, Myers’ December 2003 report in The Irish Times in which he claimed that there was an “uncountable number of Nigerians in Ireland whose native country has two main natural resources: oil and fraud.” In another of his diatribes, Myers went as far as to denigrate a whole continent. On the 10th of July 2008, the Irish Independent carried an article by Myers with the headline: “Africa is giving nothing to anyone apart from AIDS”. In the article, his generalized supposition goes further to envisage deleterious consequences for the entire African continent and its people. According to Myers, Africa’s progress is encumbered by its “dysfunctional social and sexual system”, largely because it is “almost an entire continent of sexually hyperactive indigents.”21 His acerbic counsel that millions should be allowed to die of preventable disease is not far removed from eugenicist arguments that underpinned twentieth-century genocides.

Similar to Myers’ portrayal, another journalist, Jim Cusack, also exhibited a prejudicial sentiment about African immigrants in Ireland with his report in the Irish Independent of 19th May 2013, with the following headline: “African gangs

21 Kevin Myers’ 2008 article argues that continuously providing aid to Africa only results in increasing its population, and its problems. Many people and organizations reacted strongly to Mr Myers article especially the insensitivity of the headline "Africa is giving nothing to anyone – apart from AIDS". The Immigrant Council of Ireland made an official complaint to the Garda Síochána alleging incitement to hatred. Some NGOs in Ireland also lodged a complaint with the Irish Press council because Myers breached four principles of the Council’s Code of Practice in terms of Accuracy, Fairness and Honesty, Respect for Rights, and as an Incitement to Hatred. In their submission and judgement of the case, the Irish Press council agreed that the article could likely cause grave offence to people in sub-Saharan Africa and to the many Africans, particularly that now live and work in Ireland. They agreed that Mr Myers’s mode of presentation was marked by rhetorical extravagances and exaggerations that demean, dehumanise, diminish, and offend an entire continent. However, astonishingly, the Press Council finally concluded that Myers’s article was not actually intended to heighten hatred towards anyone or was there any intention for him to do so.
use ‘front’ businesses to sell ‘meth.’ According to Cusack, African gangs are the main suppliers to Dublin’s market for the highly addictive substance methamphetamine, also known as crystal meth. As sensational as the headline was, the main body of the report lacked depth, facts, and substance to support his claim of the group’s culpability. In the said article, apart from the headline besmirching a continent and the blanket criminalizing of its people, Cusack failed to provide further evidence to corroborate his accusation.

This trend of “violent” press about African migrants is not a new phenomenon. Before Myers and Cusack’s reports, some Irish newspapers in the past have used inflammatory headlines to project negative immigrant images. Some of these include: “Floodgates open as new army of poor swamp the country” (Sunday World, 25 May 1997), “Riots will happen in Ireland if we ignore our race problems” (News of the World, 1 June 1997), “Services face overload as refugee flood continues” (Sunday Business Post, 18 May 1997), “Crackdown on 2,000 “sponger” refugees” (Irish Independent, 7 June 1997), “Refugees flooding maternity hospitals” (Irish Times, 16 June 1997).

The damaging reports perpetuate stereotypes, promote prejudice and racial intolerance. The disproportionate emphasis on African immigrants entailed the construction of an immigration discourse that is founded on the assumption that immigrants are not only criminals but also a liability to the state, as, according to the newspaper reports, immigrants (especially from Africa) are “parasites” whose real reason for coming to Ireland is to take advantage of the social welfare system. Such demonizing narratives ostensibly provide a permissive environment for the treatment of African migrants with intolerance and disdain by the wider society.

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall suggests that there is always a link between ideological and linguistic structures of media texts and the politics of communication, in terms of the role of the media and other public institutions in the development and dissemination of representations.22 Caroline Howarth posits that “Hall is particularly interested in the ideological role of the media in

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producing systems of representations that serve to prefer particular interests and identities over others, and so systematically distort particular representations and sustain systems of power and inequality.”

Hall believes that the role of the media in stabilising certain forms of power relations cannot be overemphasized; however Hall emphasizes that the ideological power is never complete but rather an ongoing process of negotiation and contestation.

This is because, according to Hall, media texts are polysemic, and in some cases, these messages can/may be regarded as open.

The African Immigrant as Scapegoat in Irish Politics

In another vein, there are instances of some Irish politicians' portrayal of immigrants that are consistent with the aforementioned negative depictions in the press. Of these, two examples of politicians making unflattering statements and caustic misrepresentations of immigrants stand out. These include the reported cases of Darren Scully and Noel Grealish. On the 21st of November 2011, Mayor Darren Scully of Naas, County Kildare appeared on the Late Show with Niall Boylan on Classic Hits 4FM, where he made disparaging comments against African people in Ireland. In advance of appearing on the show, Mr. Scully sent an email to the producer that contained the following statements in verbatim:

As a public representative I have taken a decision some years back to no longer deal with representations from immigrants coming from african countries, the majority of them I found to be very demanding and very quick to play the race card if you disagreed with their point of view, and one Nigerian lady threatened me to go to the papers accusing me of been a racisit if I did not secure her a Council house.

It pains me to see people born and rared in my town unable to get a council house who are well entitled to it but no houses are currently available and there are many africans now housed because the system states that larger families get jumped up the list.

I have found many africans are well versed on their entitlements are currently on most days in the Council building you see a steady stream


of them coming in looking for housing or grants or whatever is going. A few years back when we opened a new council estate in Sallins and were handing out the keys, a lady from Sierra Leone started to complain to me that the house was not big enough for her and her family and could we knock some walls internally to create more room, a council colleague quickly asked her how big was her house in Sierra Leone, she lived in a hut…. the mind boggles.

The law badly needs to be changed and it is something I have been raising with the present government and will continue to do so, but as usual in this country the PC brigade will be out in force been vocal and accusing me of being a racist and anyone else who dares raise the subject, the reason why I only am addressing Africans here is because under EU law if you are from an EU country you are entitled to benefits as we are in other EU countries, but Irish citizens will get feck all in African countries. Scully later appeared on the radio to speak about his resolution not to represent Black people. On Tuesday 12th November 2019, Independent TD from Galway Noel Grealish caused a stir in the Dáil after alleging that hundreds of millions of euro a year was being sent from Ireland to Nigeria, querying whether this money was the proceeds of crime. He enumerated remittances from Ireland to other countries to the tune over €10bn in the past eight years has left Ireland by way of personal transfers. He claimed that this included €843m to Lithuania, €1bn to France, €1.54bn to Poland, €2.7bn to the UK and €3.54bn to Nigeria. He stated:

Taoiseach, transfers to other EU countries I can understand - for example money being transferred to the United Kingdom, our nearest neighbour. But Taoiseach 3.54bn transferred to one non-EU country is astronomical. "Has Revenue or the Department of Finance any way of tracking this money, or where it is coming from. Can I ask you Taoiseach, are there mechanisms in place to ensure that the money that leaves this country in personal remittances has been fully accounted for within the Irish Revenue or tax system and is not the proceeds of crime or fraud? There were angry reactions in the Dáil following Mr Grealish’s statement. Responding to Mr Grealish’s question, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar said he would

26 Dáil Records: 12 Nov 2019 - Deputy Noel Grealish
Accessed on 16/05/2021
treat Mr Grealish’s question as “a genuine one”. He urged Grealish to pass on any evidence whatsoever that anyone is sending money abroad if he has such: “We will have it looked into. We will get a detailed response on what controls are in place, but I am pretty confident there are already strong rules around money laundering.” Upon Mr Grealish’s insistence, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar replied that he does not know where Mr Grealish was going with his question and that Irish people had always historically sent money home from the US. “For many decades, and many centuries, Irish people went all over the world and sent back their remittances to Ireland.”

Incidentally, this is not the first time that Mr. Grealish made such statements. In September 2019, he made controversial comments about African migrants’ unjustifiable presence in the Republic of Ireland in order to seek asylum. At a meeting in Oughterard, Co Galway, attended by about eight hundred people who were concerned over plans for a direct provision centre in their locality, Grealish controversially suggested that Africans were coming “to sponge off the system here in Ireland”. In an audio recording of the public meeting, Mr Grealish can be heard telling hundreds of people that African migrants arriving in Ireland are “economic migrants” who “sponge” off the system. In the wake of the controversy, Fellow Independent TD Michael Collins defended Grealish in a radio interview, in which he claimed Ireland was “losing its culture” because of immigrants and suggested that Ireland should: “look after...
our own people first and then when that issue is sorted, let’s start looking at people from across the world.”31

Both Grealish and Collins were criticised by some notable Irish politicians for their comments. President Michael D. Higgins, while not directly referencing them, publicly rejected their rhetoric, suggesting it was not factual that Immigrants were replacing people in Ireland, while Labour leader Brendan Howlin referred to the duo as “highly dangerous”. Finance Minister Paschal Donohoe wrote to Mr. Grealish stating in the letter, which was made public, that there are very clear laws in Ireland that look at the issue of remittances, behaviour and flows of money that could be in any way suspicious. He said he was certainly not aware that there are flows of funding from Ireland to any country that is a cause for criminal investigation at the moment. The minister request that Mr Grealish should make clear why he is singling out a particular country out.32

In the wake of the controversy, the Minister for Housing Eoghan Murphy said the question asked by Mr Grealish was: “disgusting and potentially dangerous”. Speaking on RTÉ’s Today with Miriam, Mr Murphy said Deputy Grealish has questions to answer about: “what he was trying to do by asking such a question.” He added that he believes that what Deputy Grealish was trying to do was “bigger than just a single question.”33 A carefully contextualised analysis of both Scully’s, Grealish’s and Collin’s remarks could be considered from the perspectives of these politicians’ ambition to rise to the top of Irish politics on the crest of a biopolitical rhetoric that taps into the politics of the insider/outsider. Their actions are primarily encouraged by the ambition to attain relevance by

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31 Irish Independent report: Noel Grealish claims some asylum seekers come to Ireland to sponge off the system(Video), Accessed on 16/04/2020

32 RTE News - Ministers want Grealish to clarify singling out Nigeria.
Accessed on 14/06/2020

33 Irish Examiner report on Eoghan Murphy query of Mr Grealish’s comment as “disgusting and potentially dangerous question.”
Accessed on 11/3/2021
using their negative pronouncements to gain material and social advantages of being an elected representative of the people.

**Representation of Africans in Irish Works of Art and Culture**

Some of the experiences of African immigrants in Irish artistic landscape closely mirror the situation in the Irish media. In the arts, there was and still is a propensity to cast (African) immigrants only in stereotypical roles, such as asylum seekers, servants, or extras. In television and theatre productions, the African immigrant performers are cast mostly as criminals serving time in prison, or as villains. In his article: “Welcome to the Celtic Tiger: racism, immigration and the state” that appeared in *The End of Irish History? Critical Approaches to the Celtic Tiger* by Colin Coulter and Steve Coleman, Steve Loyal contends that: “Although racism may take the form of a relatively coherent theory, it can also appear in the form of a less coherent assembly of stereotypes, images and attributions, and as an explanation that is constructed and employed by individuals to negotiate their everyday lives.”34

Exploring the connection between nationalism and xenophobia in Ireland, Loyal maintains that negative ideas about a group of people by another group of people within the same society are usually the basis for a stereotype, which in turn (in relation to the focus of this chapter) may be used to examine the biopolitics of the marginalization of African immigrants. Loyal’s assertion that the “Processes of nation-state formation invariably invoke homogeneous narratives of ethnicity and national identity”35 accentuates the argument of “us” and “them” narrative. For example, this type of narrative was originally grounded on the idea of a “white Celtic people”, defined in opposition to British colonisers. Loyal argues further that: “Irishness in this sense leaves no room for non-white, non-Celtic people or for those who cannot participate in its collective historical experience.”36

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36 Loyal, 83.
In this instance, I have taken liberties to apply the quote to reflect on the treatment of African immigrants in Ireland.

Therefore, the narrative/imagery of the “white Celtic people” is in binary opposition to that of the “Black immigrant other”, whose strangeness to the locality is emphasized in order to bolster the idea of unequal humanity, rendering them undeserving of Irish identity membership. Secondly, the tension between the white/black, native/foreigner opposing dichotomy demands an interrogation into the culture of representations accentuated from a biopolitical perspective. This concept offers us a framework for the understanding of how institutions and organizations within a state make use of the human body as a direct object of power.

In *Citizenship and the Biopolitics of Post-nationalist Ireland*, John Harrington contends that nations tend to appropriate the human body as an instrument of control. He further suggests that:

States seek to realize their developmental goals through (…) excluding non-natives and their dependents or determining which families are legitimate and which illegitimate. A particular conjuncture of global and local forces will produce fresh threats and new out-groups along with the specific technologies to define, police and exclude them.37

The African immigrant has thus become the “Other” that must be used to bolster the idea of pure Irish national identity through the machination of the concept of “insider” versus “outsider” using the bodies of the indigenous against those of the “strangers.”

Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889 – 1951)38 regards language as illustrative. In *Postmodern Literary Theory: An Introduction*, Niall Lucy discusses how Wittgenstein posits that language (and “truth”) in human

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38 Ludwig Wittgenstein is usually considered by many academics as one the many great philosophers of the twentieth century. His work on the subject of analytic philosophy is sometime referred to as being controversial. To date, Wittgenstein continues to influence current philosophical thought in topics as diverse as logic and language, perception and intention, ethics and religion, aesthetics and culture.
interactions can be considered as internal properties of a particular language game: “Wittgenstein developed the idea of language as a solution to the philosophical problem of deciding the relationship between any statement and the ‘reality’ to which it allegedly refers.”\textsuperscript{39} Like the aforementioned “asylum seeker” nomenclature, another signifier of difference that has been used to describe African immigrants in Irish society is the term “non-national”. Labels like these reinforce antipodean and antithetical notions of the “us” and “them” deeply entrenched in the supremacist assumptions of the dominating in-group.\textsuperscript{40} The connection between language and prejudicial attitudes within the society thus reflects a worldview that categorizes the indigenous as superior and the non-national “Others” as inferior.

In \textit{Narrative Therapy, Difference and Possibility: Inviting New Becomings}, Sarah Walther and Maggie Carey discuss how Michel Foucault suggests that modernist theories of identity have the tendency of becoming “truths” as well as “power standards” that shape people’s lives and their relationships with others.\textsuperscript{41} In her interesting article that explores some aspects of the works of Foucault in relation to Kantian analysis, Tina Besley explores the ideas surrounding Foucault’s analysis of power in relation to the notion of human freedom and the ways in which we ethically constitute or regulate ourselves.\textsuperscript{42} This theory suggests that power can be constitutive in the shaping of peoples’ lives and ideas.

Therefore, it can be suggested that the language used to describe people can have lasting effects on the perceptions of those people, and because it involves social practices of interpreting and making meanings, it can affect how people and state institutions treat those they consider as the “Other”. The ways we refer to people may suggest our perception of what they are, or what we think

\textsuperscript{39} Lucy Niall, \textit{Post Modern Literary Theory: An Introduction} (USA; Wiley Blackwell, 1997), 57.
\textsuperscript{40} The best-known declaration of linguistic relativism is the Sapir–Whorf Hypothesis which states that concepts do not exist if the words for them do not exist.
\textsuperscript{42} Tina Besley, \textit{Foucault, truth telling and technologies of the self in schools (1)}, Journal of Educational Enquiry, Vol. 6, No. 1, (2005), 77.
they are capable of. Anna Keogh in “Talking about the other: A view of how secondary school pupils construct opinions about refugees and asylum-seekers” explicates on how language can be a reality-creating process.\(^{43}\) Language, she contends, can be used to construct attitudes and opinions. Similarly, the sociological theory of labelling holds that what determines a person's behaviour or self-identity may be attributed to the terms used to describe or pigeon-hole them. The theory suggests that: “deviance, and particularly the forms it takes, is in substantial measure the result of actions of social control agencies.”\(^{44}\)

Therefore, labelling a group of people can be a means of sustaining asymmetrical power relations in society. Thus, it can be argued that because a person's self-image develops through the interplay of their life experiences and cultural ideals in the society in which they live, it is likely and possible that such an individual will tend to believe or accept the way they are represented. For example, in Synge’s *The Playboy of the Western World*, when Christy Mahon appears at the shebeen very tired, thirsty, and frightened, his utterances and actions suggest a feeling of low self-esteem. The way he is harangued clearly indicates that the people he encounters in the shebeen do not think highly of him. Pegeen’s intolerance of Christy is blatant, as she addresses him: “There’s a queer lad! Were you never slapped in school, young fellow, that you don’t know the name of your deed?”\(^{45}\) However, by the end of the first Act, Christy has become so confident in himself that he utters the following remarks: “It's great luck and company I've won me in the end of time - two fine women fighting for the likes of me.”\(^{46}\) This shows how power-relations produce the power hierarchy structure and insider/outside divide.\(^{47}\)

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\(^{46}\) Synge, The Playboy, 43.

\(^{47}\) Power relations are not just the kinds of coercive and repressive forms of social pressure from state apparatures and other institutions such as the Church in Synge’s The Playboy of the Western World, but they are found in social relations that produce certain conceptions of the self in relation to others.
The idea of power is also intrinsically connected to the formation of group identity, which is anchored on regulating and controlling the process of belonging. In this way, it becomes somewhat less difficult to comprehend how, according to Loyal, “classification schemes engender systematic patterns of discrimination.” Language, skin colour, and religion, amongst other things, can operate as important markers of ‘belonging’ in society. In Ireland, the constant onslaught of negative portrayals of the immigrant, especially the black immigrant, that mainstream media organizations unrelentingly feed the public, may play a part in a supposed identity formation in the immigrant’s sense of belonging in Irish society.

As pointed out earlier and as Hall posits, ideological power is never complete but rather an ongoing process of negotiation and contestation. Michel Foucault also suggests that neither the identifiers of status nor the capacity to ascribe meanings to them is fixed. Stewart Clegg suggests that central to Foucault’s conception of power is its shifting, inherently unstable expression in networks and alliances. By being aware and ready, in addition to having a consciousness to promote and nurture one’s identity rather than having it imposed on oneself or one’s group via external influences, immigrant groups can gain a sense of positive self-esteem from their identity group.

In his essay “Social Cognitive Theory of Personality”, Albert Bandura enumerates how identity formation can function experientially. He opines that, “Identity formation is an ongoing process, not one characterized by fixedness in time. Moreover, the self-view is multifaceted rather than monolithic. There are many aspects to the self. They are not equally salient, valued, or functional in different spheres of life or under different circumstances. In a dynamic, multifaceted model, continuity of personal identity requires neither high

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49 Loyal, Welcome, 86.
consistency among different aspects of self nor invariance across different social environments or domains of functioning.\textsuperscript{51}

What Bandura’s postmodernist idea suggests is that in order to align with a preferred identity, one must be ready and willing to craft tools of resistance by conceptualizing the means to resist objectionable identities imposed. This can be ensured through migrants’ readiness for a collaborative relationship with the indigenous, while also consolidating interactions within their own immediate community. Through this kind of engagement, African immigrants make empowering choices that largely help them individually and collectively, because, as Roland Tormey suggests, “Identity construction needs to be understood as an active process through which actors work to construct their own multiple and overlapping identities.”\textsuperscript{52}

The arts are used in a collaborative way to increase cross-cultural awareness, while also encouraging a stronger cohesion in immigrant communities. Recent years have seen significant progress and achievements in the area of intercultural tolerance in Irish society. Since the year 2000, many Arts/Theatre organizations, some set up by the government, and some individually set up, have ensured the nurturing of the social consciousness, tolerance, mutual respect, and intercultural dialogue within Irish communities. An indigenous theatre organisation known as Calypso productions, founded by Donal O’Kelly and Keneth Glenan, had been very dedicated to social justice by exposing the stories of indigenous people who were left out of Ireland’s good fortune in the Celtic Tiger years. The company has an interest in the plight of new Irish communities, including asylum seekers and refugees.

One of the short stories in Roddy Doyle’s collection, \textit{The Deportees and Other Stories, Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner}, was produced by Calypso theatre company as part of Dublin Theatre Festival of 2001. Doyle’s story is an


adaptation of the 1967 film of the same title, which was one of the earlier attempts at understanding the dangers inherent in racial profiling.\textsuperscript{53} The play examines Ireland's current struggles to come to terms with its changing demographics. It shows the tensions and reactions within one Irish family when a Nigerian immigrant arrives at the family home for dinner. It exposes the false consciousness of Larry Linnane, an Irish man who had hitherto always considered himself a liberal, until his eldest daughter, Stephanie, brings home her Nigerian male friend for dinner.

The works of multicultural newspapers such as \textit{Metro Eireann} and \textit{The African Voice} in Ireland have also contributed to the “appearance” of immigrants in Irish society. Other socio-cultural performances taking place within communities, either in a secular or religious context by the immigrant populations in Ireland, usually involve not only the immigrant communities, but also indigenous Irish people. What these communities of people are achieving through the various functions – whether in churches, mosques, African marriage ceremonies, New Yam festival of the Igbo people from Nigeria, the Ogun State Day celebrations by the Association of Ogun State Indigenes, KINOPOLIS Polish Film Festival that brings the best of Polish Cinema to Dublin, Dublin Chinese New Year Festival, The Bollywood Film Festival by the Indian community, Carlow African Film Festival – are all attempts to fashion an identity focussed on the emergence of vibrant new voices in Irish society. These social gatherings are unifying identity performance spaces for both the indigenous and immigrant communities, because according to Lo and Gilbert, they encompass intercultural experiments of celebration and interrogation of cultural differences “as a source of cultural empowerment and aesthetic richness.”\textsuperscript{54}

Intercultural diversity in Ireland is realistically achievable and is in fact becoming positively rooted firmly within Irish societies, and the arts, of which the theatrical space is a core element, can help to continue promoting dialogue

\textsuperscript{53} This is an adaptation of the 1960s film that starred Sidney Poitier. This version is a comical exploration of racism, as it bedevils familial and social structures in Ireland.

\textsuperscript{54} Jacqueline Lo and Helen Gilbert, “Toward a Topography of Cross-Cultural Theatre Praxis”, \textit{The Drama Review} 46.3 (2002), 38.
amongst the different communities. The way the theatre space affords us the opportunity to experience the world of another person, within the confines of our own consciousness, is a testimony that it can also play a vibrant role in cultural and social understanding in Ireland. As part of a broader cultural conversation, the theatre explores who we are as humans, how the society works and perhaps our personal or collective aspirations in our various communities.

So far, this chapter has explored how the content of contemporary Irish media produce and sustain hegemonic discourses that marginalise and exclude immigrants from the sphere of belonging. It also explicates the role that such media productions play in the constructions of identities. In ‘New Irish’ in the News, Neil O’Boyle, Jim Rogers, Paschal Preston & Franziska Fehr suggest that “The representation of immigrant voices in debates or commentary around mainstream topics is minuscule. Crime and major ‘extraordinary’ events constitute the lion’s share of coverage given to (and representations of) such immigrants across the five media outlets analysed.”

Specifically, in terms of the African immigrant, this is predicated on the way these media frames of representation have been used as descriptive modes in fashioning identity for them by focussing, sometimes, only on (or associating Africans with) criminality and nefarious activities, but also as a derogatory term of reference. Public opinion against the African immigrant in Ireland is, therefore, formed based on dominant frames prescribed and reproduced by the media, especially when such frames depict the African immigrant as a potential threat to the presumed long-established unity, cohesion, and homogeneity of Irish society. Building on this context for representation, the next section examines how comedy can operate to challenge stereotypes and exploring the “insider” versus “outsider” divide, by focussing on this last case study on performance strategy for navigating intercultural interaction as represented in the work of two immigrant comedians in Ireland.

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Stand-up Comedy in a Multicultural Setting: Between a Raw Nerve and a Funny Bone

Perhaps because of the guiding interest of stand-up comedy, which essentially is to make us laugh by talking about everyday life, it can be considered an important site for the exploration of race and race relations, especially here in twenty-first century Ireland. As social commentators, stand-up comedians play a great role in the psychological health of a society. To further explore these claims, I attended some comedy shows in Dublin and documented my experiences. I was curious to discern how stand-up comedy is being used to examine race and ethnic relations, including the strategies and cues used by comedians to blend cultures, demand critical reasoning from their audiences – notably on several occasions – get back at an oppressor.

This is important in order to put into context the intercultural interactive element of laughter in twenty-first-century Dublin. The idea is to examine how these two comedians from a different culture may use their skills, not only to entertain, but to also pass a message along surreptitiously to their audience. This is in relation to one of the social functionalities of comedy; humour being as an important anchor, as a means of challenging and coping with oppression and racism from the dominant group in the society. I also aim to use this experience to establish the multiple ways that humour can serve as an intercultural tool to extend connections across the divide. I was particularly interested in the crowd dynamics and reactions of the audience to each comedian. My ultimate aim was to develop a series of perspectives and points of reference, some of which have been documented in this account.

The first venue was the Ha'penny Bridge Inn, where a comedian known as Tiny James (real name, James J. Akpotor) performed. I went there in the company of a friend of mine who is Irish and, as it happens, white. Apart from myself, there were about six other Black people in the audience. We were definitely in the minority in terms of race composition, as almost all the other people (about fifty in number) that made up the audience that night presented as White.
One by one, each comedian came on and regaled us with their jokes. Tiny James, the only Black comedian performing that night, began his performance by finding humour in his childhood experiences, some of which he claimed were not so appealing. He talked about how he used to be bullied because of his big feet back in his village in Africa, and how all those years of suffering because of his big feet had fortuitously turned around as a blessing for him on moving to Ireland. According to him:

I tell you one thing, Irish women can’t get enough of me because of the one thing I’ve got, my big feet. So, when someone, preferably an Irish woman accosts me on the road, probably looking for directions or whatever, pronto!

I whip out that God-given organ of my body, my big …. big…. hmmm, feet, and they always fall for it anytime.\(^56\)

Recognizing the correlation between the big feet joke by the comedian and situating this as his moment of power in a racially challenging environment like Ireland will not be far-fetched especially if considered alongside the fact that the person that accosted him looking for directions was a woman, and significantly, an ‘Irish woman’. In another vein, the elastic blanket of the joke could be stretched to suggest the anxiety that some white men have about their own sexuality in relation to their assumption of the stereotypical hypersexuality of black men.\(^57\)

As a form of throwing up one of the deepest mythologized fears and anxieties in the racist imagination, that all black men have huge penises, this stereotypical innuendo presumably diminishes the “humanness” of the Black man by just reducing him to a body part. Apparently, the joke epitomizes how some people attribute “foreignness” to people of a particular race, especially when a culture fetishizes the Other because the Other is unfamiliar. This sexual inference might suggest that Tiny James was using this as a retaliatory humour tool in exploring the power negotiation in Irish society. Here, “The Black man” is comically flaunting his superior bargaining chip, his “organ”.

\(^{56}\) Taken from personally recorded transcript of Tiny James’s performance at the Ha’penny Bridge in Dublin in May 2014.

\(^{57}\) There is a less culturally loaded concept in play, which is that foot size correlates to penis size – which may or may not be a scientific fact.
With this notion, the question is whether Tiny James was himself being subjective by playing on the stereotype of the “Black man with big feet being endowed with a big sexual organ”. Nonetheless, there may well be an element that in a society that the comedian experiences as sometimes unforgiving in terms of racial microaggressions and commonplace indignities, that he, Tiny James, has the “trump card” in the sexuality department, aired within the “safe” environment of stand-up comedy. Arguably, this could also be his way of creating an avenue for him to “get back” in some personal way while exposing the implications for the individual of such commonplace racist stereotyping for ethnic minorities living in Ireland.

Tiny James’ joke therefore could be argued as his own way of putting into the public domain his dissatisfaction with the shoddy treatment of the black people in Irish society. He was not the only comedian to use the technique that night, as one of the previous acts before him, a female comedian, virtually based all her jokes that night on the fact that she got into comedy after she broke up with her fiancé of many years, so the need to perform stand-up comedy was a way of drowning her sorrow.

However, the peculiarity of Tiny James’ technique was glaring because of the racial dimension to it. Cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall makes an enlightening point that racial humour depends on the existence of racism in order to be effective. Having analysed the construction of identity, an act of power, based on the exclusion of the “Other”, he points out that humour could be used as one of the crudest indicators of “difference” just as ancillary preconscious processes regulate the flow of information. In another of Tiny James’ routines, he talked about the time that he visited the countryside in Ireland:

From the suspicious looks I got as I walked from the bus stop, I thought something must be strange about the way I walk. That’s why these

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58 I consider racial microaggressions as brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicates hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of colour.

59 Racism as defined by McVeigh and Lentin is “is any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on “race”, colour, descent, as well as national or ethnic origin, which inferioritises or excludes a collectivity using mechanisms of power” (2002), 8.
people are looking at me the way they were all looking at me. I double checked to confirm that my shoes weren’t glued to the palms of my hands and I wasn’t wearing earrings on the big toes of my feet. When I entered a pub in the middle of town, it seemed like the earth itself froze as everything in the pub stopped to stare at me. I went straight for the bar and said to the bar man, “The usual, please”, and it was like hearing the clicking sound of a gun being cocked while you are in the middle of an orgasm. The expression on his face said it all. He opened his mouth, and I could swear that he was actually having a real orgasm. “What usual?” I don’t think he’s even seen a black man in his life. The old man sitting close to the bar mustered enough courage and came up to me. “Young man, how are ya, eh, you added a bit of colour to this place tonight’, to whom I replied, ‘Yes, that was the reason that I came here, to add a bit of colour’”, he looked at me, looked at me again, mouth still wide open, shock and awe or something like that, was the picture on his face.

By now, Tiny James had the whole room in stitches. Although impossible to ascertain with scientific precision, it is always interesting to think about what this laughter meant for the audience as a group and as individuals. For example, no one can say precisely whom the comedian was making fun of, or what his audience were laughing at. Just as Eric Weitz implies in his appraisal of Arambe Productions’ stage adaptation of the Kings of the Kilburn High Road in 2006, we cannot really know what any given person is laughing at: “In most cases, humorous intent could easily be apprehended by the audience as a whole, even if the breakdown of the joking action would be less straightforward for all involved.” The important thing was that the audience were laughing together, especially when considered alongside the “Other” factor, which, according to Weitz, is:

The audience’s awareness of its multicultural makeup. The mutually acknowledged presences of black and white spectators in the theatre transaction, the occasion to laugh “together” despite the divisive nature of the joke’s setup, exert a defamiliarizing effect with implications for the increasingly multiracial Irish society here and now.

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60 Admittedly it is impossible to know precisely what different factions of the audience, or even any given individual, were laughing at.
62 Weitz, 233.
Most importantly, however, is the fact that in that moment was achieved what Richard Schechner describes as “communitas”: an intense community spirit that infers the feeling of great social equality, solidarity, and togetherness notably achieved through play. Schechner centralizes “play”-ful moments as a process that can be used to reinforce social normativity, but also as a process that can be used to contest it. I am taking the liberty here to apply Schechner’s theory and its centrality to performance theory to include stand-up comedy shows. Stand-up comedy/play and “performances” therefore become a veritable avenue for creating social order, and more importantly, exploring the problems of order, the limits to it, and the dispensability or intemperance of it.

During Tiny James’ performance that day, differences seemed jettisoned, even as new alliances ensconced in the relaxed ambience of the environment seemed to have been achieved. As the comedian continued with his varieties of jokes, I could not help but observe the members of the audience as a whole and their individual reactions. One could almost say that skin colour did not matter in that moment, though of course it does. Nonetheless, what happened that night could be seen as a sign of a healthy comedy culture in Ireland, because it means that comedians are “addressing” social boundaries (as opposed to ignoring them). Ironically, in terms of social discussions, it is clear that what could not be uttered in real life without sounding politically incorrect, the comedian has licence to make jokes of.

Stand-up comedy can enable social critique and instigate transformations in many ways. Tiny James’ performance could be argued as his moment of attainment of power status as a black man in Irish society. The humour in his routine is like a rubber sword that allows him to make a point without drawing blood. With the innuendos implanted in his routines, his intention could be to hurt the audience – though not too much. Conversely, one can also claim that the joke also punctures vanity, challenges falsehoods in a seemingly ironic way.

Although not all of Tiny James’s jokes that night had racial innuendoes, but most of his jokes made reference to at least one or two incidents that a Black person living in Ireland would have had to encounter and can relate to. Added to
that is the fact that in most of his routines, one can hear him repeat phrases like, “a big black man”, or, “the big black man”. It can be argued that his reference to him being a big black man was much more than a simple case of a comedian putting himself at a personal (dis)advantage. With his massive frame, he is indeed a big black man; however, his ‘big black man’ reference on this occasion now becomes a way of thrusting a debate into the audience’s consciousness.

In later discussion, Tiny James told me that the story about him being in an Irish town in the countryside was a real experience:

I had this friend that used to live in Dublin and who moved to a town about two and half hours from Dublin and one day, I decided to visit him. Mind you, that was in 1998, and when I got to this town, some of the experiences that I had are not even fit to be in my comedy routine. For example, at the pub, the old man that told me about adding colour to the place and my response, you should have seen his face. In fact, my mind did some talking for him, racing through a checklist of things he would rather not say, things that were probably burning up his mouth due to restraint, lest they defy political correctness in a way that would have been hundred percent immigrant profiling and of course, that’s just my way of expressing what I imagined was going on in the mind of the man, maybe it’s true, maybe it’s not, when people laugh at the jokes, that’s what makes my day. For me, stand-up comedy gives me an opportunity to articulate my outrage at the discrimination in our society.

The next comedy show that I attended was that of a young man named Fabu D (real name David Owotade), at the Maldron Hotel in Tallaght. He was the only entertainer that performed. The audience at this event comprised of people from different age groups, demographically ranging roughly from 15 to 60 years, and seemingly split equally in terms of the racial composition. Fabu D’s first routine incorporated a joke that was used to portray the shoddy treatment he once got from Irish immigration officials at the Dublin airport. He urged the audience to watch vividly as he took them through the process of his questioning by the immigration officials, a process which non-indigenous people in the audience with skin tones other than white may have experienced at one time or another. Yet, throughout the enactment, almost everyone in the hall was laughing.

The other day at the Dublin airport, there was this pretty lady. When I say pretty, I mean pretty. She is beautiful. And she was looking at me.
As a guy, I felt like, she’s looking at me, why not. I’m cool, handsome, good looking. Ain’t I (he asked the crowd, to which some people replied him, “Yes you are”). The problem was that this lady looking at me is a Garda. So, I was feeling a little bit emm, emm, (he scratches his head) uncomfortable. Now, don’t get me wrong, Ireland is a great country; oh yes, you can walk freely anywhere unless (and he paused for effect) you don’t have a GNIB card.63

The interesting thing about Fabu D’s brand of comedy is his use of self-deprecating humour. Some of his jokes tend to poke fun at the black personality, the Nigerian father who threatens his son with corporal punishment or the African mother who stares sternly at her child in order to pass a message across to her. Fabu D could be grouped amongst the categories of comedians who engage in self-appraisal of their communities using humour as the quintessential searchlight. Self-deprecating humour or humour directed towards one’s community has the potential to engender discourse within that specific community, because in a way, the searchlight beam is focused on shared experiences, albeit also scrutinizing it by gently poking at its blind spots and assumptions.

In one particular routine, he started by singing and urging the audience to join him in the process. The whole room could almost be mistaken for an African Pentecostal church service with singing and dancing and praise worship. He pulled a couple of people from the audience to join him on stage, cracking one or two jokes in the process and succeeded in working everybody into a frenzy.

One of the jokes goes thus:

Coming back from church one day, a Nigerian boy said to his mother.

*He acts out the role-play for mother and son.*

Boy: Mom, today, I made a decision on what I want to become when I grow up.

Mother: So, tell me.

Boy: I will like to become a pastor when I grow up.

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63 The GNIB card is an immigration certificate of registration issued by the Garda National Immigration Bureau to a non-EEA national upon registering as living in Ireland. The GNIB Card stamp denotes the basis on which permission to remain in the State is granted.
Mother: Awww, my boy, that’s so good of you. You just make my day. I always knew in my heart that there is something special about you.

Boy: *Curious.* How mum?

Mother: When I was pregnant with you, every Sunday when we go to Church, you kick so hard during praise worship; I knew something was special about you.

Boy: Okay, but…

Mother: Tell me, what made you decide to become a pastor when you grow up.

Boy: Because I think it will be fun to command the respect of people, be they younger or older than me, shout at them, and sometimes even scream, all the time calling “in the name of Jesus” while obviously, I was only taking the mickey, fooling them, using their money/tithes for my personal gain.

Fabu D: The look on my mum’s face could light a cigarette. The comedian’s usage of self-deprecating humour, however, runs the risk of dredging up racist stereotypes that may have a negative effect on his community. In one of his recent short videos, Fabu D portrayed an African man who opened the door of his car to let out his children. The total number of children that came out of the car was eighteen. The small size of the car and the number of children that disembark from the car created a humorous effect.

The comicality of the video is instantaneously called into question because it is laden with stereotypical nuances and cadences, especially because of the caption, “If the Irish government increase the Child benefit Niggas will be like…….” With this type of video, he was not only putting members of the African community in an uncomfortable position, but also, inadvertently seeming to perpetuate the same hurtful stereotypical rhetoric one has heard from less enlightened Irish people about those “lazy social welfare dependent Black immigrants, sponging off our social welfare system.”

In some of his other short videos, he is usually accompanied by two indigenous sidekicks by the name of Anto and Damo, whom he himself

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64 This passage is taken from a personally recorded transcript of Fabu D’s performance at the Maldron Hotel Tallaght on 29th March 2014.
impersonates with a Northside Dublin accent, albeit in a slurred/drawled manner of talking. These two characters personify drug addicts high on drugs, seen wandering the streets of Dublin on an average day. His portrayal of these two in his comedy videos is however both humorous and also somehow tragic. For example, with his portrayal of their emaciated bodies ravaged by drug use, and the mode of dressing, and most importantly, the exploits of the two characters, his interpretation attempts to depict in a comic light life in the disadvantaged communities, which for some people may be seen to stereotype and vilify a social “underclass” of Irish society.

Take for example the “Bring the Pain” video on YouTube by Chris Rock, in which he continuously makes use of the words “Niggers and Blacks”. His joke tends to give the opinion that most of his utterances were undoubtedly true of the “Niggers” that he berates so much, albeit without due regard to the personal circumstances of individuals and, of course, the anecdotes elide the historical and contemporary social conditions that contributed to the sociological circumstances of the groups of people being depicted: “You can’t have anything valuable in your house. Niggers will break in and take it all! Everything white people don’t like about black people; black people really don’t like about black people. It’s like our own personal civil war.”

Statements like this, though seeming hilarious to the audience, tend to perpetuate negative stereotypes towards the groups of people being depicted. In the context of intercultural and social inclusivity in Ireland, by playing on the stereotypes of the African social welfare “sponger” or the drug-addicted Northside Dubliner from Ballymun, the question is, does the comedian not run the risk of trivializing racism, entrenching stereotypes and belittling the tough social issues being experienced by the underprivileged in Irish society?

It might be the comedian’s contention that the human soul sometimes relies on the ability of the imagination to mock the tragic. This position becomes

65 ‘Bring the Pain’ 1996, by Chris Rock 1996 – The utterances of Chris in this video gives weight to the claim that routines like his are sometime damaging as these same seemingly harmless jokes can be hijacked by a racist person to express his or her misgivings about others within our society. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b-opn0Lz8R8 (From 29:28)
valid especially considering the point that trauma tends to lose its bite in relation to the liberating essence of the self-deprecating joke. Stuart Hall pointedly observes that: “You can no longer conduct black politics through the strategy of a simple set of reversals, putting in the place of the bad old essential white subject, the new essentially good black subject.”

If done the right way, self-deprecating humour can transcend differences. This reasoning substantiates that aspect of human culture that shows the importance of amusement and humour to peculiar sensibilities and identities and the concomitant tensions around their limits. The question to bear in mind when audiences are laughing at a self-deprecating joke is whether they are laughing at the comedian or laughing with the comedian. Just like it would have been valuable to know what the audience at Tiny James’ show were laughing at, so also would it be interesting to know what viewers of Fabu D’s self-deprecating videos or live shows are laughing at.

One of his jokes drew so much raucous laughter that a passer-by might have wondered at the commotion inside the Maldron Tallaght venue. Laying the preamble for the joke, he started off by saying:

This story took place in a city somewhere in Nigeria. Here it goes: One day, a policeman arrested a man urinating at a place clearly marked DO NOT URINATE HERE, PENALTY - FIVE HUNDRED NAIRA ONLY. The man gives the policeman a one-thousand naira note. The Policeman looks at the money, looks at the man and says “I don't have change, now urinate again.”

This punchline, deftly delivered by Fabu D, drove most of the audience wild. While hands were flapping and people around me were collapsing in laughter, it was interesting that my Irish friend (different from the one that attended the Tiny James’ show with me) did not get the joke. I am aware that cultural differences can create substantial obstacles to effective appreciation of original humorous intent since jokes are composed of linguistic and cultural elements. To understand the joke, my friend must be willing to jettison the moral virtue of holding back urine until one can find a well-maintained Western styled toilet. This

is not likely, especially from the particular area being depicted in the joke enactment. I pondered how to describe the act of peeing by the roadside and some of the justification by the locals of it being a good deed in the long run because, to them, by peeing on the grasses, they were actually watering it and as such, sustaining life.

Nonetheless, calmly, I tried to explain the scenario to this friend that, at any location where notices like, ‘DO NOT URINATE HERE’, or ‘WE MAY NOT HAVE SIGNS HERE, BUT YOU CAN GET ARRESTED, FINED OR IMPRISONED OR BOTH FOR PEEING IN PUBLIC ON SATURDAY NIGHTS”, are seen, such places are sure to attract people who have come to urinate there because that is the logical place they could go in the absence of infrastructures that would have been used to cater for their needs. In this case, it can be suggested that having abundant knowledge about a target society is essential for an adequate comprehension of any joke.

The above joke as humorous as it seems is the type of humour relating to an ethnic, racial or cultural group that often focuses on the stereotype of a people or place by locating the humorous aspects in the social irregularities and anecdotal situations within that society/community. My attempt at explaining the joke thereafter created another problem for my friend. He could not understand how a government shirking its duty could be invested with the power of control, as the policeman is the representative of the inept government that did not provide the infrastructure in the first place.

At this point, all I could muster was a frustratingly muffled, “You don’t understand, it’s a Nigerian thing’ to which he replied, ‘I may or may not understand, and come to think of it, what’s there to understand, or not to understand when laughter fills the room like that?” And the spontaneous laughter by both of us accentuates the geniality of the topic under discussion, even as I pondered on how the episode proves that there is the need for more participation of immigrant stand-up comedians in engendering conversations about issues that we sometimes shy away from. What is germane is that, from the many topics that the comedians examined, stand-up comedy has been proven as a channel
for the unspeakable to be spoken in a way that is acceptable, especially in terms of how minorities are able to challenge assumptions and undermine the potency of the prejudices they encounter. Through their work, these comedians have proven that their brand of stand-up comedy is a welcome development in the Irish comedy scene, because apart from its entertainment purpose, it also can be renewing and uniting.

From the onset of the chapter, different instances of the negative representations of issues pertaining to the immigrants in Ireland, especially African immigrants, and how these portrayals perpetuate stereotypes, were examined. The focus in the first part of the chapter demonstrated how particular configurations are linked to the crucial social problem of misrepresentation that constructs negativity around the immigrant identity in Irish society. It argued that these negative portrayals can be considered as a strategy aimed at justifying resentment towards them, especially because of the way it instigates or stoke up Irish people’s apprehensions of the undesirable immigrant “other.” This scapegoating of African Immigrants in Ireland in the press, artistic landscape, and by some politicians generates and sustains hegemonic discourses, which in turn encourages and supports the asymmetrical power hierarchical structure in Irish society.

The second part of the chapter explored the strategies and cues used by comedians to “get-even” or “get-back” as a strategy to demand critical reasoning of issues concerning race, ethnicity, and identity. Both comedians tapped into the ability of humour as a device for facilitating the questioning of imagined intercultural values of insider versus the outsider, and also to explore serious subjects like racism and discrimination. This allows for the reported inimical representation examined in the first part of the chapter, now counterbalanced by the two comedians’ utilization of stand-up comedy, as an important site for the exploration of race and race relations Ireland. The inclusion of the “new voices” in the public sphere thus help the discourse around immigration in Ireland to grow beyond the aforementioned stereotypes.
Specifically, the focus on the two comedians’ work involves looking at how comedy uses the element of the “Other” of migrant identity in order to interrogate serious issues about privilege, agency and oppression in an intercultural setting. While the self-deprecating joke by the comedian focuses the probing beam of their performances’ searchlight within the immigrant community, they nonetheless contribute to a sense that these portrayals are created in order to probe some of the stereotypes foisted on the group by the hierarchically superior group. This is done in the context of ethnic stereotyping to address their need for recognition and inclusion by the centre or dominant group in relation to what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls “strategic essentialism.”

The work of both comedians therefore attains the capacity of what Spivak refers to as “a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest.” Elisabeth Eide refers to Strategic Essentialism as a “a path that has been and continues to be explored as a minority strategy for influencing mainstream society.” Strategic essentialism in this sense entails that members of groups, while being highly differentiated internally, may engage in an essentializing and to some extent a standardizing of their public image, thus advancing their group identity in a simplified, collectivized way to achieve certain objectives. Sangeeta Ray suggests that “Spivak argues here for a ‘transactional reading’ that sees the collective as ‘strategically adhering to an essentialist notion of consciousness’ in order to write the ‘subaltern as the subjects of history.’”

Nonetheless, Eide warning of the risk of “playing into the hands of those whose essentialism is more powerful than their own — whether they are researchers, editors, politicians or empire-builders.” This rings true in the context of the self-deprecating humour strategy by the two comedians.

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71 Eide, “Strategic Essentialism”, 76.
Nevertheless, the advantage of strategic essentialism as a means of “negotiating” and as the “basis of serious ontological commitment” through the reshaping of signifiers and their relations, especially in terms of “provisionally choos[ing] a name that will not keep [one] in (the representation of) a margin so thick with context.”72 This is used in terms of invoking an identity into a collective in which a supposedly oppressed an oppressed group intentionally taking on stereotypes about itself in order to disrupt or subvert the dominance that oppresses or marginalizes it.

In the context of the current discussion, this is a process whereby a culture, especially a minority one, exaggerates its own social or cultural traits or the widely recognised aspects of their given ethnic identity as a means of establishing a clearly defined identity that appeals to wider audiences outside that culture. These dynamics often play out in post-colonial politics, where Spivak claims that we must carefully consider the political function of strategic essentialism. Here, for a given minority population to gain recognition or draw attention to serious issues like exclusion or racial prejudice, their only way of voicing these concerns often comes about through playing up certain characteristics associated with their cultural identity for the benefit of dominant and typically white audiences.

The analysis shows the significance of comedy as a vehicle for analysing shifting social and cultural relations and the dynamic role that humour plays in making and remaking identity and power relations in culture and society. The “restorative” qualities of the intercultural encounter and the Other’s role exemplify and engender the liberalism of the country. The stand-up comedy interceding message here seems to be that beyond the negative stereotyping reported, there exists a significant capacity for embracing Otherness in Ireland.

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Conclusion

It is imperative to recapitulate some of the main ideas in this thesis, in order to pull together the themes and trajectories of the arguments that have emerged from the project as a whole. The thesis was set out in seven chapters composed of two sections titled “The origin, meaning and function of comedy” and “The intercultural dynamics of representations and humour in contemporary societies”. The discussion began with an examination of the diverse attributes of the comedy genre across time and culture with renewed awareness of the decidedly Western orientation of the comedy concept. The argument continued with a highlight of the emergence of the comic from the Dionysian festival and the ancient Greek foundation of the comedy genre. The discussions then moved into an intercultural theory of comedy that draws on the comic spirit and theories of laughter, humour, and the indicative social implications of the cross-cultural interactions of the “insider” and the “outsider”. The comic spirit in this instance is understood as that which may facilitate social interaction or decline, especially as it provides a safe approach to visualize an enormous range of social, psychoanalytic, corporeal, and cultural tensions.

These attributes of comedy have been explored in the following texts as case studies comprising of *The Acharnians* (425 BCE) by Aristophanes, *Death and the King’s Horseman* (1975) by Nigerian playwright Wole Soyinka, *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* (1972) by South African playwright Athol Fugard and devised with John Kani and Wiston Ntshona, *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907) by Irish playwright John Millington Synge, and *The Playboy of the Western World* (2007) by Bisi Adigun and Roddy Doyle. These five case studies have been analyzed based on the range of cultural elements and the different identities that the characters present, particularly how each character has attempted an equitable transcendence in order to benefit themselves or benefit their world. The case studies have also been used to further engage with the intercultural elements within the social and cultural context of their respective societies, in accordance with comedy’s attribute that both encourages connection and also engenders divergence and dichotomies.
This is not to suggest that the five case studies should be regarded as representing the totality of the materials on comedy and intercultural academic resources, however, what they offer us is an interculturally driven engagement that explores laughter’s functionality regarding social and spatial distance, and how joking behaviours, socially defined categories and structures serve to establish ties, create solidarity, and also serves as a means of hierarchy-building. This has allowed critical engagements with the case studies using different theoretical concepts to examine the power dynamics between different cultures and the opportunity to examine the structural inequalities that exists between them. The deductive interactivity of ideas has also been functional in suggesting the strategies to dismantle those inequalities by focussing on interculturalism. The thesis suggests that perhaps interculturalism should be about creating an enabling environment for positive cultural interactions.

On the intercultural interactions within specific communities, the stage productions of The Playboy of the Western World at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, Death and the King’s Horseman at the National Theatre in London, and Sizwe Bansi Is Dead at the Projects Arts Centre in Dublin that were examined in this thesis were actively engaged with issues pertinent to this argument. These intercultural projects are examples of culturally engaged ethics from different perspectives. The analysis of the Norris production examines the encounter between two different cultures with distinctive ideologies and the misunderstanding that ensued from the encounter, an aspect which the London production failed to express coherently, especially the production’s blatant disregard of the historical cultural factors that contributed to the conflict in the play. This exemplifies the concern by Lo and Gilbert regarding Intercultural theatre projects in terms of either the rights of representation or the modalities of content and ethics, because as they argued: “Even when intercultural exchanges take place within the “non-West,” they are often mediated through Western culture and/or economics”\(^1\) in order to suit Western agendas.

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The analysis of the Abbey Theatre production of the Adigun and Doyle version of *The Playboy of the Western World* in this thesis, positioned the latency of an intercultural theatre tradition in Ireland which, although not fully manifested within the Irish theatre landscape, highlights the importance of cross-cultural collaboration geared towards fostering diversity within communities, which incidentally is the ultimate goal of interculturalism. The production exemplifies the experiences of African immigrants in Dublin, underscoring the different forms of discrimination encountered by them in contemporary Irish society including media attacks, political hate speeches, racist crimes, microaggressions, and persistent and repeated racial harassment.

Christopher’s redemption in the Adigun/Doyle version of *The Playboy*, could be read as transformative signifier connotatively beseeching the African immigrants to negotiate their existence in Irish society. The Abbey production can be construed as an immigrant having a voice, and this is transformative, not only at the individual level but also in terms of group dynamics. Christopher’s entry into a Dublin pub avails him the ideal platform for his transformation in a carnivalistic sense. At the heart of this carnivalesque element of the laughter in the Adigun and Doyle’s *The Playboy of the Western World* is the celebration of the individual body and the collective, especially considering that during carnival time life is subject only to the laws of freedom. Considering that Bakhtin conceives of carnival as a form of resistance, and because the carnival undermines political control, the implication of an immigrant having a sense of being free in contemporary Dublin is encouraging and speaks to the burgeoning interculturalism in a once mono-racial society. This and many other positives from this production notwithstanding, the lack of an in-depth discussion of the racial tensions of the insider versus outsider dichotomy in Ireland leaves a question mark on the truly intercultural intention of the project.

The evident demeaning of the Nigerian characters in the play on the epochal Irish stage of the Abbey Theatre stage, whether intentionally or inadvertently, portrays a “them” and “us” narrative that supposedly implies a “better us” versus a “backward them”. One of the instances where this is unmistakable in the performance is the stereotypical statement of fraud being a
subject in the curriculum in primary schools in Nigeria. The auditorium composed of mainly indigenous Irish people bursts into raucous laughter whenever this statement is uttered or implied in different areas of the production. The biopolitical implications of this scenario implies that a country of almost two hundred million people are all exposed to the immoral action of fraud from a young age. Considering that one of the basic requirements of healthy interculturalism is the basic respect for people from other cultures, the implication is that this assumption that totally negates the acknowledgement of equal humanity is unambiguous clear.

The production of *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* at the Projects Arts Centre in Dublin illustrates the importance of immigrant self-representation in Ireland as a way of promoting understanding across ethnic and racial groups. Although Fugard’s play is basically about the inequities of the apartheid system and its legacy in South Africa, however, the misery experienced by the characters in the play is similar to the experiences of some immigrants in Dublin, especially in the years before and around 2008 when the play was produced by Camino Productions. The production also illustrates concerns about the poor and the underprivileged people, who despite being indigenous to Ireland have been left behind from the economic prosperity that was associated with the abundance of the Celtic Tiger era.

In the interculturalism-from-below spirit of the production, the participants for the three-day seminar, drawn from different racial and economic backgrounds in Ireland, were invited in order to have a broader perspective of the issues, and a reflection of the realities of the lives of some people in contemporary Ireland. These realities included the demonization of refuges and asylum seekers as “invaders” by the media, the economic inequalities affecting the lives of the indigenous poor and underprivileged in Irish society, the issue of incessant deportations and the case of the unjust judge of the Refugee Application Commissioner’s Office. Also considered was the issue of a court case about powers given to the Garda during this period, which empowered them to stop and demand identity cards from immigrants on the street of Ireland during the time. These true-life events inspired the notion of the ‘Spectagonist’ that became the
foundational concept for the production. The ‘Spectagonist’ idea encourages the audience/spectator to become the protagonist in the production, encouraging the active participation of audience members at particular moments in the production.

Theatrical production processes and eventual presentation on stage are products of the harmonious coalescence of several factors capable of yielding and communicating meaning, because artistic performances, whether of the theatre or stand-up comedies, are influenced by contexts outside of the performance arena. In some cases, the performance is also influenced by the audience, especially when the implicit message in that performance is understood in the form of codes and messages, and this understanding and reaction can extend beyond the walls of the theatre. Bearing this in mind, the production used the tools of the theatre to cast the audience as witnesses to people’s life experiences, as presented on stage.

Interculturalism is about the authentic human capacity and societal integral development, and the production set out to inculcate this as much as possible. The idea was to have people of different cultural orientation meet and share stories that speak to each other’s humanity. The intercultural implication is that this form of meeting, encounter, and mixing of cultural traditions must always be considered from the perspective of an intent to construct a new theatrical paradigm in order to build a conscious cultural diversity, in which conflict and pluralism is reflected, especially in the collective experiences of a specific time and place.

Although the difficult realities of people were contextualised and presented on stage through humour, however, the hope was for the production to encourage a new understanding of social issues in our communities while also promoting social alternatives. The idea was that as ‘Spectagonists’ they will become a voice for change within their respective communities. However, just like in the case of the production of *The Playboy of the Western world* on the Abbey stage, and its seeming abandoning of the entrenched racialised conflicts in Ireland, looking back now with a benefit of hindsight, it is my belief that the Camino Production’s *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead* could have exhibited more of the racial
discriminations being faced by black African immigrants, especially in terms of the obvious discriminations in the work places and everyday life experiences as discussed in Chapter Seven.

Pertinently, the competency for examining difficult social issues like racism, unencumbered by the awkwardness of political correctness which may have inhibited on some levels, both the productions of *The Playboy of the Western World* and *Sizwe Bansi Is Dead*, is basically where stand-up comedy finds its mandate. As a site for the exploration of race and race relations in contemporary Irish society, stand-up comedy can be considered as a humour-based form of protest, because of its success in awakening collective sentiments through laughter. The ability to talk about sensitive issues of race and racism in direct but humorous ways is the driving principle of the work of the two comedians that were focussed on in this thesis. The revolutionary power of their identity-based form of stand-up comedy as a means of resistance is explicitly conveyed in their routines as analysed in the latter part of Chapter Seven.

The decision to attend and observe each comedian’s performance was basically heuristic. The aim was to enable me to discern the prevailing potentiality of stand-up comedy that is able to facilitate intercultural interactions, engender discussions on issues of identity, belonging, providing relief for oppressed communities, and to be deployed as survival mechanism. These elements are the bedrock of the work of the two comedians. Their work exemplifies how stand-up comedy can be used by marginalized people to respond directly to social and/or political subjugation on an individual or group basis, especially in tackling in-group and out-group divisions. Their self-deprecating routines illustrate stand-up comedy’s ability for self-reflection and critique of community with the same identity.

This is in the background of the reality of racism as a legitimate fear for many African immigrants in Ireland. The laudable thing is that when inimical incidences of racial impunity rear their ugly heads, the outcry from different strata of the Irish society gives one hope. Therefore, it is very important to emphasize this fact, and that of the many opportunities for cultural integration in Irish society,
and the valuable benefit of cultural diversity. My new intercultural theory of comedy/comic spirit has amongst many other findings theorised that the case studies are to be considered from a comedic prism away from the tragedy that some of them have been positioned in the past. My new intercultural theory of comedy has also recognized a critical understanding of the interculturalism from below concept with the caveat of the added significance of also recognizing the immigrant perspectives.

The findings from this work have enabled a re-evaluation of the intercultural interactions within communities using humour as a pedestal for such integrational aspirations. It is imperative to chart new ways of inculcating genuine intercultural cooperation that respect every individual in the process. I am glad that this work has played a part in the reconsideration of the values, intent and the ultimate aim of the comedy genre, especially in terms of the reappraisal of the case studies away from their usual conception that inordinately focuses on their assumed tragic motif. I cannot claim that the submissions from this study give a definitive account of comedy or a universal theory of how humour works in an intercultural atmosphere; however, I think it is a valuable starting point and one that I shall continue to explore in both theory and practice.
Bibliography


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