

Uncovering a Love of Self: Individuality and Coloured Identity in Ntokoza Madlala and Mandisa Haarhoff's *Crush-hopper*¹

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Introduction

South African theatre has undergone a number of important thematic and aesthetic shifts since the nation began its transition to a democratic state, marked by the national election held in April 1994. During this time of change the country's theatre shifted from celebrating the political transition between apartheid and democracy to highlighting and critically engaging the crises the new nation was facing. In *At This Stage: Plays from Post-Apartheid South Africa* Greg Homann identifies three phases that South African theatre moved through in the years leading up to, and succeeding, the 1994 election: "pre-post-apartheid" (1990-1996), "early-post-apartheid" (1996-2002), and "post-apartheid" (2002-2008). Whereas Homann describes the early years as a "period of vacant postulating by local theatre-makers searching for new subject matter beyond that of the protest and agitprop theatre," he argues the middle phase was "dominated by the discourse inculcated by the TRC [Truth and Reconciliation Commission]" and eventually gave way to theatre "rich in affirmation, criticism, celebration and questioning" (3, 7, 14). As this temporal framework attests, social and political context is critical to understanding the purpose and direction of South African drama in the years spanning independence. Homann's research highlights how events of national significance such as Nelson Mandela's release from prison and the unbanning of anti-apartheid political organizations shaped the nation's artistic production (2-3).

Homann's study, published in 2009, informs more recent approaches to this period, including Marcia Blumberg's 2011 "Reconciling Acts: Theatre beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission." For Blumberg, 2001 marks a transition from "an initial period of euphoria, patience and hope," beginning with Mandela's presidential inauguration, to a "second interregnum" marked by a "desperation to break silences" (139). Blumberg's two-part model draws on Grant Farred's argument that the nation was going through an "idiosyncratic interregnum" in the early years of independence, moving "between reconciliation and disaffection" (64). Applying Farred's claim to South African drama, Blumberg posits that theatre from this time highlighted incongruities between national narratives

advocating for reconciliation and the continuing economic oppression of black South Africans or helped to “stage successful acts of reconciliation” by voicing the concerns of minority groups (140). For Blumberg, the second interregnum ran from 2001 to 2010 and was a period defined by instability and social change, a time of transition where drama encouraged a rethinking of communal and individual identity (139-140).

Although Blumberg’s temporal framework concludes in 2010, plays such as Ntokozo Madlala and Mandisa Haarhoff’s *Crush-hopper* (2011) show that South African theatre continued to function as an important tool for marginalized communities to break silences and participate in projects of self-empowerment beyond the second interregnum. Using theatre as an instrument to renegotiate and affirm a positive sense of self, the play foregrounds the legacy of apartheid violence on the psyches and bodies of citizens. Importantly, it also highlights the impact of apartheid’s racial categories on a generation of South Africans raised outside apartheid’s temporal limits. Consequently, *Crush-hopper* combats the legacy of apartheid’s racial binary by using theatre to confront internally held prejudices and voice personal truths. Contingent to this process is an individual renegotiation of self that is exercised through personal choice—particularly in the languages one speaks and the romantic relationships one pursues. In doing so, the play’s protagonist is able to explore the various ethnic identities that inform her sense of self and reconcile the ways she has historically denied or erased portions of her identity, most notably her coloured ancestry.²

Coloured Identity

The ethnicity in South Africa known as “Coloured” has a long history of marginalization and exclusion from dominant society. As a social identity, the term predates apartheid, crystallizing, as Mohamed Adhikari explains, in the Western Cape in the late nineteenth century (“Hope, Fear, Shame” 469). Composed of various groups, including European settler populations, “Cape slaves, the indigenous Khoisan population and other people of African and Asian descent,” this identity has broad ties to many South African ethnic groups (468). However, it also occupies a marginal position in the national imaginary. As Adhikari argues, “coloured people have popularly been regarded as being of ‘mixed race’ and have held an intermediate status in the South African racial hierarchy, distinct from the historically dominant white minority and the numerically preponderant African population” (468-9). The marginalization felt by its members, both historically and within contemporary discourses, stems from this liminal position and the stereotypes and misconceptions that emerged throughout colonization.

Trapped within an ethnic polarity during apartheid, people who identified with, or were forced to adopt, the category of “Coloured” often found themselves defined by their distance from essential ethnic

positions. As Wicomb records, “Coloured” was “defined negatively as ‘not a White person or a Black’” in the 1950 Population Registration Act (101). Notably, this broad definition led many heterogeneous cultural and linguistic groups to be amalgamated under one label. As many opposed this classification, Wicomb records amendments were made to the Act to add additional categories such as “‘Other Coloured’ or ‘Griqua’” (101).³ In addition to people’s opposition to the term “Coloured” when the Population Registration Act was first enacted, there was a resurgence in resistance from “the latter half of the 1970s onwards, starting with the popularization of Black Consciousness ideology” (Adhikari, “Hope, Fear, Shame” 471). This political movement, Adhikari explains, viewed “Coloured” as “an artificial categorisation imposed on society by the ruling minority as part of its divide-and-rule strategies” (471). Black Consciousness rejected “Coloured” on the basis that it was “a concession to apartheid thinking” (472). However, even at the height of such opposition, Adhikari notes, “Coloured rejectionism was never a mass phenomenon” and diminished with independence in the early nineteen-nineties (474).

In addition to the trauma of being identified by their difference in the Population Registration Act, a perpetual reminder of one’s Otherness, South Africa’s coloured community was also shaped by the belief that this ethnicity’s origin is rooted in miscegenation. The violence here stems from Social Darwinist thinking that presumed “coloured people were automatically deficient in those positive qualities derived from racial purity and knee-haltered by those negative ones that emanate from racial mixture” (Adhikari, “Hope, Fear, Shame” 482). Wicomb’s research identifies how female identity is uniquely vulnerable in such discourses, which situate their bodies as sites of degeneracy, concupiscence, but also “shame invested in those (females) who have mated with the colonizer” (91-2). The pervasive feeling of shame that is broadly felt by members of South Africa’s coloured community is reflected in the appearance of the term in the titles of both Adhikari’s and Wicomb’s essays.

Similar to the impact that the 1994 transformation had on theatre production, the transition from apartheid to democracy opened up new opportunities for citizens to explore and renegotiate subjugated identity positions. As Helene Strauss posits, the nation’s new constitution means that “South Africans are now at liberty to explore alternative forms of self-imagining” (25). One of the primary examples of this occurring is in the re-thinking of coloured identity. Michele Ruiters’s study contends that coloured groups have begun refashioning identity through grass-roots community movements (111), political organizations (116), and the media (113). Ruiters sees this process as liberatory, but also challenging, “because it forces people who have denied a part of themselves to come to terms with painful histories” (111). In Ruiters’s opinion, cohesive bonds amongst this ethnic community persist after independence “because of the shared trauma of forced removals” and the spatial marginalization inflicted upon coloureds during colonization (109). While apartheid violence was

“central to the relative stability of Coloured identity because of the limitations it placed on their possibilities for independent action” (Adhikari, *Not White Enough* xiii), the democratic transition has opened up new opportunities for individuals to reassert, redefine, or reject this ethnic identity. Writers and artists are important participants in this process as their work helps to voice the everyday challenges faced by members of this community.⁴

Theatre is an important tool to explore such trauma and rethink definitions of self beyond apartheid categories because it can stage acts of intervention in the public sphere. As a recent example of South African drama that charts the renegotiation of colouredness, Luen Conning’s *A Coloured Place* (1998) draws attention to the way that apartheid categories continue to impact personal understandings of self. In an interview preceding the play text, Conning expresses her own apprehension around identifying as coloured and the challenge of thinking outside the categories imposed on all citizens by the National Party’s 1950 Population Registration Act:

It’s something I’ve avoided – the issue of Coloured people, and even relating myself to the term Coloured has always been a problem for me. Doing this play is a lot like a personal journey. The idea came from having so many strange questions in the new South Africa and South African people asking me what are you, and I would assume they would know the apartheid boxes we came from. (7)

As Conning’s reflection attests, writing about identity can force people to confront past trauma, self-erasure, and the tensions between individual identity and one’s broader society. Conning’s reference to “apartheid boxes” exposes how apartheid race categories, a form of violence inflicted in the public sphere, continue to shape personal definitions of self (7). Additionally, such crises can conflict with national narratives espousing healing and forgiveness. Strauss, for example, notes an increased interest in “the segregationist legacies of apartheid that continue to shape the South African cultural landscape” due, at least in part, to the overemphasis “on unity and reconciliation by the South African media and the ANC government in the years immediately following the transition to democracy” (26). *Crush-hopper*, the play under study, explores how the racial hierarchy imposed on marginal communities during colonization continues to cause trauma and a fractured sense of identity after the nation’s move toward decolonization, initiated by national events such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.⁵

Ntokozo Madlala and Mandisa Haarhoff’s *Crush-hopper*

Crush-hopper is an excellent example of what Blumberg identifies as a tendency in drama from the second interregnum to explore shifting definitions of self, namely works from “previously oppressed and elided minority voices that call attention to their positions to reclaim and validate personal and/or communal identity” (140). This is underscored by reviewers’ responses to the work that highlight its

portrayal of romantic pursuits and the exploration of personal identity as central forces driving the play. For critic and theatre professor Janet van Eeden, *Crush-hopper* is an effort by her former pupil to “express her identity crisis.” This occurs through a collection of love interests that serve as “the vehicle to travel into her search for identity” (Van Eeden). For others such as Estelle Sinkins, the play reflects Haarhoff’s own “complex experience of multilingualism and multiculturalism” (“It’s the Best” 23). In Sinkins’s opinion the play’s love interests help Haarhoff find “a way to cope with her displacement and [constitute] an escape from her numbing reality” (“Home-grown” 19). Overall, most reviews note the autobiographical dimension of the play. For example, Sinkins’s review cites Haarhoff’s description of *Crush-hopper* as “a personal tale of searching for love and identity” (“Tragic-comedy” 11).

In 2011 *Crush-hopper* won both a Musho Festival Audience Award for Best Performance and a Standard Bank Ovation Award at the National Arts Festival. These accolades highlight the critical role it occupied in discussions of individual and national identity during the time of its staging. It debuted at the Musho! International Theatre Festival held at the Catalina Theatre in January 2011. Later that year it also played at the Hexagon Theatre at the University of KwaZulu-Natal on March 22, 2011, and again on March 16, 2012 (Sinkins, “It’s the Best” 23). *Crush-hopper*’s award-winning performance at the National Arts Festival in July 2011 added momentum for an appearance at the Witness Hilton Arts Festival in September of that year (Sinkins, “It’s the Best” 23). In addition to a second staging at the National Arts Festival in 2012, the play also ran at the University of South Florida on January 15, 2012.⁶

The work is about a young girl’s experiences growing up in the Eastern Cape of South Africa. Haarhoff describes the play as “a one-woman ethnographical narrative that reflects my intercultural identity and perspective of race in contemporary South Africa” (*Story4* 1). It uses a “multi-modal performance style” to explore her multicultural and multilingual identity (*Story4* 1). The narrative begins with Mandisa Roeleene Haarhoff – hereafter Mandisa – tracing her family ancestry from her grandfather’s generation to the present. Once we have a sense of her past, replete with childhood dreams of growing blonde hair and marrying a white farmer, the play transitions to her experiences at school and the love interests she fosters through meeting new people. Her first crush is a mixed-race boy named Wendall Paul. A devout Christian, Paul does not acknowledge her as a person, but rather as someone to be converted to Christianity. Later, the death of her grandfather forces Mandisa to move to Port Elizabeth where she lives with an antagonistic aunt. In the city Mandisa falls for Mahlubi Tom, a Xhosa boy who shares her bus route home. This relationship fails to develop due to a language barrier and her invisibility to the boy. Her last crush, Damien, remains unrealized because Mandisa becomes a caring friend rather than a love interest. The play ends with the protagonist confronting difficult personal truths when she identifies her own prejudices and rejection of Xhosa and coloured ancestry in the process of idolizing whiteness.

Mandisa's descriptions of her childhood contain references to movement and mobility as she explores the ties between identity and location. The play introduces its audience to this trope through a childhood game, hopscotch, in which Mandisa jumps around the stage naming various cities: Cape Town, Johannesburg, Grahamstown, etc. While this moment echoes the reference to mobility in the play's title – hopping between relationships – it needs to be interpreted more seriously as a reflection on the feelings of placelessness she experienced growing up. Mandisa's specific use of terminology in the play, such as the description of her hometown Somerset East as "Sandwiched between Graaf-Reinet and Cradock," evoke the kind of geographical—but also psychological—liminality of South Africans caught between essential identity positions (4).

The significance of space and its connection to feelings of belonging in *Crush-hopper* reflect a broad tradition of dramatic works exploring coloured identity through geographical spaces, mobility, and loss.⁷ This is especially the case for District Six, an urban neighborhood in Cape Town that was bulldozed as a result of the 1965 Group Areas Act (Wicomb 94). Using this neighborhood as a case study, Wicomb notes that, during the nineteen-fifties and sixties, the "self-fashioning of a totalizing colouredness" was located "in a mythologized District Six" (95). This self-fashioning of identity through physical space leads Wicomb to argue that District Six's "assumption as an ethnic homeland" illustrates "the fictional nature of identity construction" (94-5). Additionally, her study explores how popular efforts to define colouredness shifted after forced relocation moved the neighborhood's population to the Cape Flats. The impact of this trauma led musicals such as *District Six* to situate coloured ethnicity "within a politics of nostalgia that sentimentalized the loss" of the neighborhood during the nineteen-eighties (95).⁸ As this example epitomizes, not only is identity construction unstable, particularly surrounding a cohesive sense of coloured identity as it relates to the geography of South Africa, but the trauma of forced mobility under apartheid's laws came to characterize coloured identity in dramatic portrayals of this group.⁹

Read in this way, Madlala and Haarhoff's return to a tradition of exploring identity through one's relationship to the landscape is an interesting link between apartheid-era theatrical portrayals of coloured identity and *Crush-hopper*'s contemporary focus on a girl learning to identify with her coloured ancestry. That this experience is performed as a schoolyard game helps to signal a movement away from definitions of self that focus solely on narratives of loss and destruction. Mandisa's position outside of a political system where forced removals were common allows her to explore alternate ways that mobility can be understood. In doing so, *Crush-hopper* presents geographical mobility as a strategy for survival. Embraced by Mandisa as a way to escape her hometown, her move to Port Elizabeth initially heightens her self-erasure by falsely presenting her with "the opportunity to go to a real white school with real white people" (13). The trade off in this exchange is that it weakens ties with her family

and results in her living with Nomilile, an aunt whose sjambok¹⁰, she explains, “darkened my understanding of black” (27). In a broader sense, however, Mandisa’s reliance on mobility correlates with the love interests she pursues. Hopping between crushes helps to limit the emotional pain she experiences when she is overlooked or abandoned by those whom she desires. In this sense, the title of the play is a pun because hopping between crushes is similar to her geographical hopping between spaces and identities.

All three of the identity categories Mandisa explores—white, black, and coloured – need to be understood as ethnic identities, not races.¹¹ The primary reason for this, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues, is that race is not a biological category. His explanation that the “biological criteria used to determine ‘difference’ in sex simply do not hold when applied to ‘race’” leads him to isolate language as the primary mechanism by which difference is produced (5). For Gates, it is a careless use of language by which we “will this sense of *natural* difference into our formulations” (emphasis in original, 5). Gates’s focus on language in this extract highlights the underlying cultural basis for discussions of difference. Even apartheid racial categories, a salient example of how legal processes deployed language in an effort to fix people’s identities according to indelible definitions of “race,” were unstable and capricious constructs. As Desai and Vahed point out, the terminology which the apartheid state used to identify South African Indians was constantly reworked throughout the twentieth century, “constructed, de-constructed and re-made” in response to shifting social and political power structures (9).

What one is talking about when discussing identity as an embodied and socially experienced phenomenon, then, is ethnicity, not race. Frank Salamone’s definition of ethnicity is useful in explaining the socially constructed nature of ethnic categories. He argues: “ethnicity is (1) a combination of social identities, (2) a series of statuses, and, finally (3), a social persona” (481). It is in this mode of thinking that Mandisa relates to categories such as white, black, and coloured throughout *Crush-hopper*. Her ability to move between these positions over the course of the play underscores their existence as socially informed positions that are constructed through elements such as language and gestures, particularly during moments when she imitates whiteness (7).

In this fashion *Crush-hopper* adheres to one of the dominant types of second interregnum drama: the appearance of a single actor playing multiple roles. Blumberg identifies the rise of one-hander performances as an important intervention at this time, describing the genre as “‘flying solo’ since one performer enacts multiple roles in each play” (140). Theatre, in this instance, helped to foreground the performativity of identity through one actor playing many parts. Anton Krueger highlights a similar occurrence in his analysis of Greig Coetzee’s *Happy Natives* (2009), also produced during the second interregnum, wherein two actors perform all of the play’s characters, revealing “the transferability of roles, and the ways in which one can take on different tasks of role construction—how patterns of posture,

gesture and tone can transform the presentation of identity” (46).¹² Interpreted in this way, Haarhoff’s ability to perform all the parts in *Crush-hopper* similarly underscores how the construction of her identity is unstable—relying on behavior and language to signify inclusion or exclusion from specific groups.

Language, in this sense, comprises one of the central strategies Mandisa uses to highlight her marginal position in society. The play opens with a poem directing audiences to the crises of acceptance and understanding that haunt Mandisa from a young age. At school these challenges are configured along the lines of whether or not love interests notice her. Questions such as: “did you only look or did you see did you see did you feel did you? [sic]” explore the painful sense of invisibility Mandisa experiences as someone who does not easily fit within former racial categories (2). The invisibility evoked in the lines “did you only look or did you see” (2) occurs again at a later moment in the play when she wonders whether Tom even sees her: “Did he even see me, did he even hear me” (20)? Questioning whether or not the people she whom engages with acknowledge her, Mandisa’s comments reflect a character struggling to come to terms not only with her own identity, but also with a society unable to relate or identify with her. Paralleling a statement made by a character in Conning’s *A Coloured Place*, “[t]o the majority, Coloured people are just an invisible part of the masses” (11), *Crush-hopper* contains a protagonist who similarly feels invisible to the broader community. However, Madlala and Haarhoff reject this silence by seeking to define and celebrate Haarhoff’s mixed ancestry through drama.

Cultural theorist Charles Taylor’s article “The Politics of Recognition” identifies the significant psychological and social damage that occurs when a society rejects or excludes an individual’s identity. According to Taylor, “a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves” (75). In the instance of South Africa’s ethnic minorities, a “confining or demeaning” understanding occurs when the majority of society fails to accept or acknowledge them (75). The marginal position of coloureds in South Africa, highlighted by Adhikari (“Hope, Fear, Shame” 485) and Strauss (28), means this community is vulnerable to being silenced or misinterpreted. This trend seems to correlate to South African drama in general as Conning asserts: “[v]ery few plays have been written about the Coloured experience” in the late nineteen-nineties (7).¹³

Van Eeden’s interview with Haarhoff further underscores the physical and psychological dangers of non-recognition and the types of misunderstandings that can develop out of such circumstances. Addressing questions about her family’s response to the play, Haarhoff provides details outlining how seriously her crisis of identity affected her:

My father hasn’t seen it, but I was at home when I wrote it and read some of the material to him. He realised the depth of my experiences to the point of understanding why I tried taking my life a year after arriving in Port Elizabeth.

He found it difficult to understand and for him my emotional response to the way I have lived is an influence of 'whiteness.' (qtd. in van Eeden)

This statement exemplifies her isolation from family and friends due to misconceptions related to her heterogeneous ancestry. Significantly, this misunderstanding is one of the factors that alienate Haarhoff from her own father, whom she portrays as an aloof Xhosa taxi driver in the play (14). However, there appears to be more to their estrangement from one another than just her ethnicity because her father also justifies abandoning her on the basis that he was never married to her mother (15). Generally, though, to her Xhosa family members Mandisa's difference is a source of tension and confusion, as indicated by her father's view on her multiethnic identity.

As an act of writing back, Haarhoff's interview with Van Eeden illustrates how *Crush-hopper* raises awareness about the complex, and often conflicting, pressures placed on multiethnic individuals by society at large. This is precisely the role Blumberg sees theatre serving in the second interregnum, working to "expose and challenge divisions and inequities and to continue the reconciling acts beyond the TRC" (155). Haarhoff's argument that writing the play helped her father understand her crisis of identity elucidates how theatre can help to reconcile divisions by voicing the challenges she faces, or has overcome, to members of other groups (Van Eeden). Such a stance suggests drama can support reconciliation by exploring the relationship between marginal groups and national narratives. Haarhoff exemplifies such a position when she references an interview given by South African playwright Lulama Masimini in the play's alternate release: "we might not change the world, as theatre people, but at least we might make people think and consider their actions" (qtd. in Haarhoff, *Story4 2*).¹⁴ Haarhoff's interpretation of Masimini's statement is that drama can help audiences determine "who they are in relation to themselves, each other, and their nation" (2). In this sense, she envisions the individual's story as contributing to the national narrative, understanding her own "story as a South African story" (2). Such an approach can help identify the ongoing divisions—particularly at the level of the individual psyche – which contribute to a fragmented nationhood overall.

Using an autobiographical approach is one of the primary ways Madlala and Haarhoff claim space for individuals caught between a black and white polarity in contemporary society. As Christopher Heywood asserts, autobiography has played an important role in opposing the dehumanization of Indigenous South Africans throughout apartheid (129). For Heywood, "[d]ispossession and displacement have led South Africans into difficulty over recognising themselves in relation to their own and their nation's past. Numerous autobiographical writings, especially where protest formed the underlying motif, overcame guilt and shame in favour of self-recognition" (129). Although Madlala and Haarhoff are producing theatre outside of apartheid's temporal limits, the play still targets the shame, "[d]ispossession and displacement" suffered by communities who historically were, and continue to feel, marginal to dominant

society (129). Haarhoff acknowledges the importance of autobiography to the play's purpose when she states:

The space of autobiography provides a platform for me to be a voice for many other South Africans, who like me have drawn from racial identities outside their own to negotiate their identities. The play becomes an act of intervention on behalf of these marginalised voices in a black/white South Africa (*Story4 2*).

It is in this way that *Crush-hopper* constitutes an important act of "self-recognition" by inserting new perspectives, especially discussions of colouredness, into this play on identity crises (Heywood 129).¹⁵ Passages where Mandisa positively identifies with her coloured ancestry are powerful acts of self-assertion, or "intervention" to use Haarhoff's terminology, and oppose her own silence and rejection of her coloured ancestry (*Story4 2*). This is especially the case in the play's final paragraph where Mandisa states: "I will embrace the coloured heritage given me by my great-grandfather and celebrate the beauty of the skin that clothes me" (27). Although Heywood's project focuses specifically on literary forms of autobiography during apartheid, *Crush-hopper* exemplifies how this anti-colonial strategy functions effectively in the context of second interregnum drama.

As a work that praises the strength and resilience of colouredness in the face of marginalization, the play reflects a recent trend of South Africans reclaiming an identity that was often forced upon them. Portions of the play detail Haarhoff's heterogeneous ancestry, situating her identity in relation to multiple cultures. She describes her grandfather as coloured (5), and her great-grandmother (5), aunt Nomilile (12), and father as Xhosa (14). These asides are important because they reclaim a past within the present moment. The silence around theatrical portrayals of colouredness discussed earlier also extends to a silence around the community's history. As Conning writes of her own work on this ethnicity, "[t]he aim of the play [*A Coloured Place*] is to feed and stimulate the questioning about identity and the significance of where we come from, and why, as Coloured people, we've never acknowledged our roots" (7). Haarhoff's exploration of her own family history through public performance helps isolate generational differences between first-generation coloureds and her position growing up in a free democracy; such acts create a genealogy that foregrounds changing mores and expressions of identity. One of the most significant changes for Haarhoff's generation is the freedom to choose a partner of any ethnicity, one of the major points of interest driving the play's focus on childhood crushes and social relationships.

Mandisa's love interests, in this regard, form a vital component to the play because they emphasize the complex social adjustments since independence and new tensions emerging since 1994. As younger generations assert new rights to ownership, geographical movement, and relationships, divergent views between older and younger groups are inevitable. Love interests in *Crush-hopper* capture these crises because fond connections between loved ones inevitably inform our understanding of self. Summarizing this tension, Taylor explains: "We

define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us” (79). This remark captures a central challenge of identity formation that Mandisa faces: forming a sense of self is always a negotiated process between an individual and their larger community. Theatre reviewer Kate Feldman quotes Haarhoff stating: “You could take the boys out and we’d still have a story, but this allows me to get into a discussion of not just race but also relationships.” In this instance relationships are not secondary material to the plot, but rather a primary way for Madlala and Haarhoff to show challenges surrounding identity negotiation and her broader society. Not only is Mandisa’s shifting sense of self encapsulated in the types of boys she seeks out, but also the languages she learns to communicate with them.

As a girl Mandisa initially learns Afrikaans with her grandfather, “oupa-grootjie Haarhoff” (5). Using code switching throughout the work as a way to emphasize the contribution Afrikaans has made to her understanding of self, Mandisa adopts the codes of white ethnicity. As she explains, she “wanted to speak suiwer Afrikaans not ‘coloured’” (7). Noting the significance of this line, Sinkins translates “suiwer” as “pure” in her review of the work (“Tragic-comedy” 11). In this regard, the play begins with Mandisa using language as a tool to distance herself from her coloured background. This decision is another example of the ways “misrecognition can inflict harm” because, in doing so, Mandisa violently conceals portions of her own identity in favor of privileging specific aspects of her ancestry (Taylor 75). In her desire to emphasize her ties with whiteness, Mandisa exemplifies the same violent splitting or fracturing of identity that her father enacts when he attributes her self-harming to whiteness.

Mandisa’s terminology in this instance evokes the kind of apartheid-era thinking that emphasized purity, particularly racial purity, as a sign of status. Using the adjective “suiwer” is not only an indicator Mandisa is operating within such a hierarchy, but its appearance in a specific linguistic register, the language of apartheid authority, further reveals the degree to which she has adopted such codes (7).¹⁶ Discussing the politics surrounding language and coloured experiences of marginalization, Adhikari notes that the “Afrikaans vernacular distinctive of the coloured community” has “customarily been stigmatised as a mark of social inferiority” (“Hope, Fear, Shame” 483). It is in this fashion that Mandisa appears to relate to Afrikaans, using a specific accent to distance herself from her coloured ancestry while, at the same moment, highlighting her grandfather’s colouredness. In doing so, her grandfather’s ethnicity is both an important influence on her life because it allows her to emphasize her proximity to whiteness, but his coloured ethnicity also disappears as he stands in for the unavailable whiteness that Mandisa idolizes.

Such moments in the play reveal the oppressive way that whiteness fragments Mandisa’s psyche. In his seminal book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon explores the violence of this oppression on the consciousness of the racialized Other. For Fanon, the hierarchical status of whiteness in colonial discourses denies and

disempowers those outside the category. Fanon articulates this through two statements: “White men consider themselves superior to black men” and “Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect” (12). Fanon’s statements help to identify how Mandisa’s elevation and emulation of whiteness is a violent, and ultimately self-negating, act (12). Furthermore, by constantly attempting to prove her worth through definitions of whiteness, such as dreaming of giving birth to children who have the “sparkling blue eyes and shining blonde hair” of their father, Mandisa’s understanding of self is always defined from outside (7). As Fanon explains, “[t]he colonized is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he renounces his blackness, his jungle” (18). It is precisely this kind of self-erasure that Mandisa undergoes when she identifies learning Afrikaans as a strategy to perform whiteness: “I learnt your language and acquire [sic] your skill of speech swallowing my own with hot cools [sic] of ignorant hate that I may attain the pitching sound that drowns out the noise of X-Q-X in education and backward pronunciation of my people” (11). Such statements identify the burden of whiteness on Mandisa’s life and iterate how her desire to adopt white codes leads her to deny, and ultimately reject, her Xhosa and coloured heritage.

Mandisa’s thinking here exemplifies what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o describes as “colonial alienation” (17). He defines the term as a “disassociation of the sensibility of that child from his [or her] natural and social environment” (17). Watching the play, I found the moment of greatest discomfort arose when Mandisa donned a yellow shirt in order to pretend she had blonde hair. This act of self-deracination evoked a kind of ridiculing or self-deprecating humor in performance as she imitated whiteness while subverting the notions of purity and beauty that caused her to fragment her identity. For Van Eeden the yellow wig exemplifies imitation for comic effect: “Her gift for mimicking the various influences on her life turns this piece into a brilliant comedy. The pathos behind her trying so hard to be white, even to the extent of wearing a long-sleeved T-shirt on her head when she is small to pretend she has long hair, cuts deep into our race-conscious society.” As Van Eeden’s quotation indicates, there is a tension between humor and sadness here. The action of wearing a yellow wig expresses the violence caused by splitting her identity and denying her mixed ancestry, while also providing comic relief. Although reviewers such as Van Eeden note the brilliance of the comic moment, they also record the pain it evokes by pointing out that witnessing such an act “cuts deep.” In this particular instance Haarhoff’s performance is both comic—due to its use of imitation and the incongruity raised by the spectacle of a young girl attempting to pass as white with a blonde wig—but also tragic because it reveals how deeply she rejected her own body.

Madlala and Haarhoff’s use of self-deprecating humor functions both as a coping mechanism through comic relief, but also as a warning against maintaining apartheid-era notions of beauty and

purity. The object of ridicule throughout the play is Mandisa's own prejudices and desires. In this sense one of the potential targets of laughter is her dream to pass as white. Interestingly, this instance is similar to other ethnic groups that historically deployed self-deprecating humor as a means of self-regulation. Writing on Jewish humor in Berlin during the imperial and republican periods Peter Jelavich notes that some Jewish comedians "[made] fun of Jews who were over-eager to assimilate" (28). For Jelavich, such examples of self-deprecating humor represent one of its many functions, namely "self-regulation" of the Jewish community (28). Reading Mandisa's appearance wearing a yellow shirt in a similar sense—denigrating a child who wishes to assimilate by having blonde hair—Madlala and Haarhoff's use of comic imitation to produce self-deprecating humor is a powerful act of self-regulation.

In addition to laughing back at her split identity, a fissure most apparent in the two names she alternates between throughout the play, "Mandisa and Roeleene," the performance also critiques the desire to pass as white (20). It does so because the self-deprecating humor regulates the boundaries of her identity by directing laughter at her own efforts to try and shift ethnic positions. Importantly, Mandisa's imitation of whiteness helps to illustrate both the young age at which she began to hate aspects of her own body, but also the strategies used to cope with this hatred. Instead of loving herself, she escapes into a fantasy of being white by imagining herself marrying a white farmer and eating caviar (6-7).

Significantly, the damage that whiteness inflicts on her psyche is reversed when Mandisa falls for Tom. Although she remains invisible to the young man, her discovery of his language marks a critical turning point. This is because language becomes one of the ways in which Mandisa shatters her fears of blackness. In learning his language, she reconnects with her Xhosa ancestry. As she identifies, "I had found a new love, Xhosaness" (20). Mandisa's acceptance of a culture and ethnic background that she previously rejected suggests that language is capable of subverting her othering of blackness. This constitutes an important shift away from her deployment of language early in the play to hide her black ancestry, for instance when she introduces herself as Roeleene in order to "sound closest to white and farthest from black" (9). In so doing, multilingualism becomes a marker of her intercultural identity. This reconfigures language from a mechanism of oppression to a tool that can liberate her mind from static identity categories. Haarhoff identifies this strategy in an interview with Sinkins by claiming fluency in Afrikaans as a sign of personal freedom: "I now feel that it's okay to have crushes, that it's okay to be more fluent in Afrikaans than in Xhosa, that it's okay to be loud and not poised" ("The Ties" 18). Haarhoff's multilingualism—evident in the trilingual play—breaks down stable notions of identity organized around language.¹⁷ It also subverts the cultural hierarchy she adopts early in the play when she learns "suiwer" Afrikaans (7).

In the play's denouement Mandisa acknowledges the important contribution that white, black, and coloured ethnicities have on her

sense of self. Acknowledging how popular media “influenced my perceived supremacy of white,” how her aunt Nomilile “darkened my understanding of black,” and how she previously rejected her coloured ancestry, Mandisa’s final statements evoke a character who embodies multiple positions that were historically divided under apartheid (27). Such an ending advances the purpose of the play, which is “to show that contemporary South Africa is made up of hybrid identities who are not limited to the specifics of race and traditional cultures” (Haarhoff, *Story4* 1). Individual choice over one’s primary language and personal relationships, in this sense, are two strategies that Madlala and Haarhoff present as useful to uncovering a new understanding of self.¹⁸ For Mandisa this includes fostering a love of difference, envisioning herself as “the woman who walks away knowing I like you, whether you be black, coloured or white” at the play’s conclusion (26). Hopping, in this example, is resituated from a defensive strategy that prevents Mandisa from suffering social rejection to a position where she sees a plurality of love and desire as necessary to undoing apartheid’s legacy. And while none of the love interests in the play materialize into substantial relationships—Mandisa attributes the failure of her last crush to the many roles she played in Damien’s life: “cling-friend, counsellor and mother” (26)—they help to illustrate the extent of her resourcefulness and adaptability to confront her own jaundiced thinking.¹⁹ The play concludes with Mandisa asserting that she “will Love!” in order to overcome both her feelings of isolation, but also the Otherness she has ascribed to fellow South Africans (27).

Importantly, while Mandisa’s assertion that love can help to overcome apartheid divisions echoes Jamal’s assertion that love can counteract apartheid’s “lack of love, a lack so profound, so damaging that no retrospective project of healing can easily—if ever—remedy it” (24), the play suggests that a love of self is paramount to any process of reconciliation or healing in the decolonizing moment. Her final remark “I will Love!” stands as a testament that, first and foremost, she will love herself for who and what she is (27). Such an assertion resonates with Taylor’s belief that we “need relationships to fulfill, but not to define, ourselves” (79). Structurally, the play reaffirms the individualism of rethinking identity because the one-woman show emphasizes personal experiences within a larger context and set of challenges. And while some might see individualism as a threat to nation-building, and not a solution, Krueger reminds us that individuality also has positive connotations, such as “originality, courage, and responsibility” (55). These attributes reflect the creative way that Madlala and Haarhoff use theatre to transform Haarhoff’s childhood experiences into a performance about the damage apartheid violence inflicted on her sense of self and her relationship with her multiethnic ancestry.

Notes

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Research Fund. I would also like to thank Dr. Mariam Pirbhai, Dr. Maria DiCenzo, Dr. Lynn Shakinovsky, and my peer reviewers for their insightful feedback on earlier drafts of this article.

2. In her essay “Shame and identity: the case of the coloured in South Africa,” Zoë Wicomb notes the shifting spelling of the term coloured; as she explains, there has been a recent resurgence “of the term *Coloured*, once more capitalized, without its old prefix of *so-called* and without the disavowing scare quotes earned during the period of revolutionary struggle when it was replaced by the word *black*, indicating both a rejection of apartheid nomenclature as well as inclusion in the national liberation movement” (93). For Wicomb, the instability of this term and the tension around whether or not to capitalize it shows the challenges that “‘coloured’ has in taking on a fixed meaning” (93). Similar to *Crush-hopper*, this article does not capitalize coloured unless referring to the apartheid category or quoting from scholarship. This is done out of respect for artists like Madlala and Haarhoff who use the term with a lower-case spelling, a move that can help to differentiate the ethnic identity from the apartheid label.

3. Adhikari also identifies “Malays, Griquas, Namas and Basters” as sub-groups of coloured (469).

4. For Strauss, autobiographical texts like Chris van Wyk’s *Shirley, Goodness and Marcy* (2004), about a young coloured man growing up between apartheid and independence, foreground “the corollary of the continued cultural circulation of deeply problematic discourses of racial inbetweenness in South Africa” that negatively shape understandings of colouredness in the post-apartheid state (43).

5. The TRC began on July 19, 1995, initiated by President Mandela’s signing of the Truth Commission Bill (Krog 15). For Catherine Cole, the “TRC was a product of a negotiated settlement by which South Africa transitioned from apartheid to nonracial democracy” (172). In this respect, efforts to promote reconciliation helped stabilize the nation overall. The TRC became a visual representation in the media of both the horrors of the past as well as an idealized future where victims forgave assailants, and the latter repented transgressions. This process was limited in its overall scope, which in turn left gaps in TRC records surrounding marginal groups. Strauss records that *Bitter Fruit*, a novel by Achmat Dangor, “exposes some of the silences related to apartheid-era gross human rights violations that were left unaddressed by the South African TRC, especially for those inhabiting colouredness as a social identity” (30). This marks one of the other ways that coloured identity has occupied a liminal position within South Africa’s emerging post-apartheid nationalism.

6. Currently, no official publication for the work exists. However, it is available in two digital editions—one attributed to Madlala and Haarhoff, the other solely to Haarhoff. Unless otherwise stated, this article refers to the 2011 version credited to both women. While it is not clear why Madlala is not identified as a contributor in the *Story4 Conference* edition (2015), Van Eeden notes in a published interview with Haarhoff that Madlala is similarly absent from the play's credits in the Hilton Festival programme. Van Eeden's enquiry reveals that Madlala, a faculty member at the University of Kwazulu-Natal during the time Haarhoff was developing the play, served as supervisor and director for the project. So, while both women share artistic credit in the 2011 edition and in this article, the work's autobiographical elements are solely attributed to Haarhoff. Unfortunately, at the time this paper was published the 2015 digital edition was no longer available online for download.

7. Historic portrayals of coloured identity such as Athol Fugard's *Boesman and Lena* (1973) emphasized geographical mobility as one of the defining characteristics of South Africa's coloured community. The play opens with two characters, a couple, who have recently been evicted by white authorities. It is this movement—being chased or escaping—that seems to define the pair's existence throughout the play. Fugard's early notes on his work, recorded in his *Notebooks*, distill the characters down to only two words: love and desertion (xx). Tracing his inspiration for the play back to an earlier moment in his life, Fugard writes: "the genesis of this play lies possibly in an image from over ten years ago—Coloured man and woman, burdened with all their belongings, whom I passed somewhere on the road near Laingsburg" (xxi). It is in this example that mobility and the trauma of forced relocation, particularly under the Group Areas Act, intersects with *Boesman and Lena*'s identity crises. Their geographical placelessness correlates to an ethnic placelessness within the nation's landscape. It is also worth noting, particularly in relation to Wicomb's discussion of District Six, that Fugard's text debuted only four years after the destruction of the prominent neighborhood.

8. Wicomb's essay also emphasizes the problematic nature of such narratives by pointing out that the "contradiction of forging an 'authentic' culture, ironically also the overt theme of 'District Six', through North American cultural conventions and musical forms seemed to escape the mainly coloured audiences enraptured by the process of being constructed in the tepid, amniotic fluid of pastiche" (95).

9. For example, in *Boesman and Lena* the links between ethnic identity and geographical belonging collide through laws like the Group Areas Act. As their crisis makes clear, while the coloured community is quickly identified by white authorities as not belonging to the land they occupy, a problem that is resolved by razing the settlement with bulldozers, the landscape in which the characters can

safely exist remains absent throughout the play. Instead, they move between geographical spaces, physically occupying the remaining gaps left by apartheid spatial configurations that, in a similar fashion to Wicomb's earlier point about the 1950 Population Registration Act, labelled coloured South Africans by where they do not belong (101).

10. A cattle prod or riding whip used to ensure self-protection.

11. As Haarhoff identifies in her introduction to the alternate version of *Crush-hopper*, throughout the play Mandisa "moves between white and black identity, exploring the extremities of both identities as understood in her formative years" (*Story4* 1). Such polarized thinking operates within the same binary that Pallavi Rastogi notes many South African Indians feel marginalised within, even "though Mandela promised a 'rainbow nation' that would evolve along nonracial lines" (550).

12. Notably, Krueger's essay highlights the limits of presenting identities as unstable or fluid. Although the play's two actors perform a range of class, gender, and age positions, they tend not to cross racial boundaries: "the fact that the black actor plays all the black roles (Mto, Xaba, Prudence, policeman) while the white actor plays the white roles (Kenneth Chenaye Jimmy), perhaps shows that skin colour is still very much tied to perceptions of identity" (46). The one exception in the play is a South African Indian character, Patel, which the stage directions indicate should be played by the white actor (Coetzee 245).

13. Recent performances from emerging artists like Haarhoff suggest new voices are drawing attention to historical silences. A number of performances at the 2018 National Arts Festival in Grahamstown similarly brought attention to elided histories around heterogeneous ancestry in order to renegotiate identity positions through drama. Performances such as Maude Sandham and Nikola Pilkington's *Tracks* and Jade Bower's direction of *Black*, Penelope Youngleson's adaptation of C.A. Davids's *The Blacks of Cape Town*, are examples of such trends.

14. This quotation is an excerpt from an interview conducted in 2002 that originally appears in playwright Judith Rudakoff's article "Somewhere, Over the Rainbow: White-Female-Canadian Dramaturge in Cape Town" (154).

15. The role autobiography serves in helping mixed-race South Africans articulate the everyday contradictions in their lives is an important attribute here. Strauss notes that Van Wyk's *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy* also uses autobiography and, like *Crush-hopper*, employs a multimodal structure that shifts between poetry and prose to give expression to the various traumas experienced by individuals caught between essential identity categories. For Strauss, *Shirley, Goodness and Mercy*'s opening poem "forcefully draws the reader into

Van Wyk's travels through the social and political absurdities of apartheid South Africa" and serves as "a prelude to the autobiographical journey that follows" (32). *Crush-hopper* similarly uses poetry to introduce audiences to the feelings of invisibility and silence that define Mandisa's childhood experiences.

16. In his iconic article "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom: Culture and the ANC Constitutional Guidelines," Albie Sachs notes that Afrikaans itself "was [once] the popular Creole language of the Western Cape, referred to in the derogatory way as 'Kitchen Dutch,' spoken by slaves and indigenous peoples who taught it to their masters and mistresses. Later it was the language of resistance to British imperialism" (191). Mandisa's relationship to Afrikaans in this particular example ignores the complex history of this language and instead relates to it as a symbol of cultural purity. This is another use of Afrikaans that Sachs reflects upon, arguing it "has been hijacked by proponents of racial domination to support systems of white supremacy, and as such, projected as the language of the *baas* [the Afrikaans word for 'boss']" (191).

17. Haarhoff explains that she consciously wrote *Crush-hopper* as a trilingual play in order to raise attention to "the role of language in shaping identity in South Africa" (*Story4* 1). Shifting between languages frequently throughout the performance suggests an effort to move away from reading language as a static marker of identity or, alternatively, indicates an acceptance of her multiethnic identity through celebrating multilingualism. This being the case, Madlala and Haarhoff's use of language in the play text appears to concede to the linguistic limits of the larger community, Haarhoff acknowledging that she consciously decided to "emphasize the English in her performances," presumably to reach the widest audience possible at theatre festivals (Feldman).

18. Multilingualism, in this sense, also helps to reverse feelings of isolation through sustaining ties with family who still largely operate in languages associated with their ethnicities. Speaking from personal experience, Haarhoff explains: "I mix my languages when I'm at home and everyone else either responds in Xhosa or Afrikaans, depending on which side of the family I'm visiting" (Van Eeden). As Haarhoff also points out in an interview, even her name embodies two cultures simultaneously - Xhosa and Afrikaans (Solomon).

19. My use of the term "jaundiced" is a reference to Ashraf Jamal's *Predicaments of Culture in South Africa*, published in 2005. In this text Jamal argues that "it is vital to develop a critical and cultural practice that would bypass and surmount a continued entrapment within the 'ghetto' (Sachs) or 'gulag' (Coetzee) of the South African imaginary" (19). In this passage Jamal describes South Africa as experiencing a "jaundiced present moment" because the country has not been able to move beyond the racist, sexist, and classist thinking

that apartheid entrenched (19). It is this experience of psychological entrapment that *Crush-hopper* confronts through autobiography and humor.

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